

Barrow Borough Council



A guide to becoming a Councillor



www.barrowbc.gov.uk



This booklet contains information about the Council and how it operates, the role and duties of a Councillor and how to stand for an Election.

For further information and clarification please contact:-

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Barrow Borough Council
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Duke Street
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Cumbria
LA14 2LD

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1. Introduction

This guide explains how to become a Councillor. We hope it will encourage you and people from all walks of life to take an interest in local democracy and to think about putting yourself forward for election.

More detailed and specific information can be obtained from the Democratic Services Manager as well as the various contacts listed in Section 15.

2. What do Councils do?

Councils provide local services to people living or working in their areas. They are made up of smaller areas known as Wards. There are different types of Councils, i.e. Unitary, Metropolitan and London Boroughs, which are responsible for all local Services; and Borough and County Councils, where the responsibilities are shared between them. In addition, there are also Parish and Town Councillors who are important consultees for their local communities.

In general terms, Elected Councillors make decisions that guide the Council and paid Council Officers (Staff) carry out these decisions, in accordance with the law and guidelines.

Councils work in partnership with other local organisations such as Health, Fire and Rescue and Police Authorities. Councillors make sure that these organisations work together to meet the needs of local people.



3. The Borough of Barrow-in-Furness

Barrow-in-Furness has a resident population of approximately 67,000. It is located at the tip of the Furness peninsula, close to the Lake District and is bordered by Morecambe Bay, the Duddon Estuary and the Irish Sea.

The Borough of Barrow-in-Furness comprises of several small towns and villages including:- Walney, Dalton, Newton, Askam, Ireleth, Lindal and Marton.

As a District Council, Barrow Borough Council is part of two-tier system, with Cumbria County Council which means that Local Government services are divided between to two Councils.

Cumbria County Council is responsible for:-

- Education;
- Highways and Street Lighting;
- Libraries;
- On Street Parking;
- Public Transport;
- Social Care; and
- Trading Standards.

Barrow Borough Council is responsible for:-

- Building and Development Control;
- Council Tax and Housing Benefits;
- Flood and Sea Defences;
- Housing and Homelessness;
- Licensing and Food Safety;
- Off Street Parking;
- Planning Applications;
- Recreation and Tourism;
- Street Cleaning; and
- Waste Collection and Recycling.

In rural areas there is a further tier of Parish Councils including Askam & Ireleth and Lindal and Marton Parish Councils, as well as Dalton with Newton Town Council. Parish/Town Councils have relatively limited functions and responsibilities in their areas.

4. Barrow Borough Council

The Council has 36 Elected Members (Borough Councillors) and employs over 200 full and part-time staff.

The Council is a fourth option Council and operates a modified Committee system. We do not have a Cabinet or Portfolio Holders, nor do we operate under executive arrangements.

5. Why become a Councillor

People become a Councillor for a variety of reasons ranging from:-

- Being interested in their local area and its residents and caring about the community as a whole;
- Making sure that the views of the community are taken into account by the Council when it makes decisions;
- Wanting to be part of the process of shaping the future of their local community;
- Concerns about a particular issue in the community; or
- Wanting to pursue their political beliefs or being politically active and wanting to pursue this to the next stage.



6. How to become a Councillor

The majority of people who become Councillors do so through a Political Party with which they may feel a natural affinity. However, some people choose to be independent of any formal Political Party.

Barrow Borough Council Elections are held once every four years; on the first Thursday in May when all of the Councillors are up for re-election. Each term of Office is for a four year term, unless you are elected into Office as a result of a By-Election.

Occasionally, when a Councillor resigns or dies, By-Elections are held in between the scheduled Borough Elections. If you are elected at a By-Election you will serve until the next scheduled Borough Election.

When an Election is called, a notice is published. Prospective Candidates can apply to the Returning Officer at the Town Hall for a nomination pack.

You do not have to belong to a Political Party to stand for election but you will need to be a member of the Party's local organisation if you are thinking of standing as a candidate for a particular Party.

You don't have to pay a deposit before standing for election.

It is important to bear in mind that you may or may not get time off work for your Council duties. This will depend on your Employer, although by law your Employer must allow you a reasonable amount of time off to perform your duties. If you are thinking of standing for election it would be advisable to discuss your intentions with your Employer before you submit your nomination paper.

Nomination Packs

Two people are required to propose and second you and you need a further eight people to act as assenters to your nomination. Full details of the electoral processes including the nomination procedure are available upon request from:-

Electoral Services
Town Hall
Duke Street
Barrow-in-Furness
Cumbria
LA14 2LD

Tel:- 01229 876318

E-mail:- elecereg@barrowbc.gov.uk

Election Agents

You can act as your own Election Agent but many Candidates find it is helpful to have an Agent. If you are in a Political Party, it may be that one person takes on the role of agent for several Candidates.

The role of the Agent is to make sure that you have completed all of the paperwork correctly and that it has been submitted by the given deadlines. They will also ensure that you keep clear and accurate financial records of expenditure and make sure they are submitted within the deadline period to the Returning Officer. The Agent will also help to organise your election campaign.

Election Expenses

These cover things such as publicity material, property, services or items used for the campaign. Some assistance to cover these costs may be available if you are a member of a Political Party but you should check this with your Political Party or Group before entering into any expense.

Receipts of all expenditure on your campaign should be kept in order for you to complete your Declaration and Return of Expenses. This needs to be submitted to the Returning Officer within 35 days of the count.

It is important for you to bear in mind that there is a set limit of £740, with an additional 6p for every entry in the Ward Register of Electors for which you are seeking to be elected. Please note that the spending limits for joint candidates standing in the same Ward are reduced according to the number of joint candidates. Further information can be obtained from the Democratic Services Manager.



7. Requirements for Standing as a Borough Councillor

Age

You must be 18 years old on the day of nomination but there is no upper age limit.

Nationality

You need to be a UK, EU or Commonwealth Citizen.

Other Requirements

In addition you must also meet at least one of the following criteria:-

- Be registered as an Elector in the Borough; or
- Have lived in the Borough for the past 12 months; or
- Have occupied as owner or tenant any premises or land in the Borough for the past 12 months;
- Have had your main or only place of work in the Borough for the past 12 months.

You may not be able to stand for Election if:

- You work for Barrow Borough Council;
- You hold a politically restricted post for another Local Authority;
- You are bankrupt;
- You have served a prison sentence (including suspended sentences) of three months or more within five years prior to the Election;
- You have been disqualified under any legislation relating to corrupt or illegal practices.

Equality

The Council is committed to equal opportunities. Training will be provided to help develop and support those Members who have specific requirements.

If you are considering becoming a Councillor and are in receipt of benefits; it is advisable to check that your benefits will not be affected.

Information Technology

A significant amount of Council business relies on the use of Information Technology (IT).

The Council encourages Councillors to embrace IT. Using IT enables Councillors to considerably reduce the amount of paperwork sent to them. Councillors are issued with iPads to bring to Council meetings, viewing the necessary documents electronically. This enables the Council to make considerable savings on its printing and postage costs as well as being environmentally friendly.

Formal Qualifications and Training

There are no formal qualifications needed to stand as a Councillor. However, to help you in your new role, you will be invited to take part in a personal development planning interview where your aspirations will be discussed, together with any skills you may wish to acquire to achieve them.

The Council is proud to have been awarded the

North West Charter Award for Member Development which is a public acknowledgement of the commitment that its Members have towards continuous self improvement. This is achieved through an active Member Development Programme of development opportunities which are carried out throughout the year on a variety of skills and knowledge areas. All Councillors are encouraged to attend as many events as possible to broaden their knowledge of the work of the Council. The training covers essential training, such as Planning, Licensing and Audit Committees, as well as covering skills and knowledge areas.

All new Councillors are invited to attend a series of induction sessions to familiarise themselves with the workings of the Council and the basic information they need to make the decision making process meaningful.

8. The Role of a Councillor

Councillors (Members) are elected by the public to represent them both inside the council and outside the Council in the community. Councillors are democratically accountable to residents in their Ward. The overriding duty of Councillors is to the whole community, but they have a special duty to their constituents, including those who did not vote for them.

It is reasonable to expect that, while a Councillor may specialise in certain aspects of the role, all Councillors perform a broad spectrum of duties. A high performing Member would undertake the majority of, if not all, the duties listed below:-

- Contribute actively in formulating the Council's policies, budget strategies and service delivery by attending and participating at meetings where those decisions are being taken;
- Represent the interests of their Ward, deal with constituents' enquiries and representations and hold Ward surgeries on a regular basis where appropriate. Councillors should be visible in and be recognisable to their Community;

- Act as community advocate and champion causes for constituents, both within and outside the Council, with particular emphasis on those that will improve the quality of life of the Community;
- Represent the Council on any outside bodies and governing bodies, as appointed, providing two-way communications between the organisation and the Council;
- Attend and participate in any Committee, Panel, Group or Board to which they are appointed and for any related responsibilities associated with them, including being available to participate as a member of any Committees which are drawn from a pool of Members and which can be time consuming;
- Chair any ad-hoc Committees, Panels or Boards, where appointed;
- Attend and participate in any planning site visits, tender openings or other statutory or non-statutory visits or tasks, as required;
- Seek out membership or involvement in community based initiatives/groups in own Ward and, where necessary, provide guidance and leadership;
- Develop and maintain a good working knowledge of the Council's services, Constitution, management arrangements, powers/duties and constraints sufficient to be able to answer and deal with queries from within the community;
- Develop and maintain good working relations with relevant Officers of the Council, in accordance with the Code of conduct and Council Protocols;
- Develop and maintain a working knowledge of the organisations, services, activities and other factors that impact upon the community's well-being and identity; and, to this end, work with and encourage the community to tackle local problems and exploit local opportunities;
- Attend and participate in any training courses, workshops and other sessions either internally or externally provided, to enable him/her to fulfil their role as a Councillor;
- Contribute constructively to open government and democratic renewal by actively encouraging the community to participate in the government of the area; and seek to

involve the community in decisions that affect them by ensuring they have full information and then by helping them make their views known; and

- Fulfil the statutory and locally determined requirements of an Elected Member of the Authority, including compliance with all relevant Codes of Conduct.



9. How the Council Operates

All Council meetings are open to the press and public unless they are excluded on the grounds that confidential or exempt information would be disclosed.

All Councillors meet together as the Council. Meetings of the Full Council decide the Council's overall policies and set the budget each year.

Most day-to-day decisions are made by Committees. Barrow Borough Council has the following Committees:-

Executive Committee - The main terms of reference for this Committee are:-

- To recommend policy and changes to policy and thereafter to oversee its implementation;
- To consult on, recommend and monitor the annual budgets;
- To consider and make recommendations regarding fees and charges;
- To take any necessary decisions regarding the delivery of Council services and the discharge of Council functions, within the agreed policy and budgetary framework set by the Council;
- To establish a Housing Management Forum to advise on all matters pertaining to the management of Council housing.

Planning Committee - Deals with planning applications and building control matters.

Licensing Committee - Deals with all functions relating to licensing and registration set out in the Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2005.

Licensing Regulatory Committee - Deals with licensing functions in respect of hackney carriage and private hire licensing as well as miscellaneous licensing e.g. animal welfare.

Audit Committee - The purpose of the Audit Committee is to provide independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the associated control environment, independent scrutiny of the Authority's financial and non-financial performance to the extent that it affects the Authority's exposure to risk and weakens the control environment, and to oversee the financial reporting process.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee - The Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the work of the Executive Committee and the Council as a whole. It allows Citizens to have a greater say in Council matters by holding public inquiries into matters of local concern. These can lead to reports and recommendations which advise the Executive Committee and the Council as a whole on its policies, budget and service delivery.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also monitors the decisions of the Executive Committee. It can 'call-in' a decision which has been made by the Executive Committee but not yet implemented. It enables the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider whether the decision is appropriate. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee may recommend that the Executive Committee or Full Council reconsider the decision. They may also be consulted by the Executive Committee on forthcoming decisions and the development of policy.

In addition to formal meetings there are also other less formal meetings such as advisory groups and panels, which you may be invited to sit on. More information on the decision making process is available upon request. Copies of agendas, reports and minutes can be viewed on the Council's website www.barrowbc.gov.uk

10. Standards of Conduct

All Councillors must agree to abide by the Council's Code of Conduct which sets out standards of behaviour which Councillors are required to follow and includes the requirement for them to register details of their pecuniary (anything to do with money) interests within 28 days of their election date. A copy of the Code can found at Part 5 of the Council's Constitution which is available to view on the Council's website:- www.barrowbc.gov.uk

The Register of Interests requires you to declare details of your pecuniary and other interests and, if you have a spouse or partner, you must include theirs as well. Details will be published on the Council's website.

Councillors are also required to declare, at the start of each meeting, if they have an interest which should be declared in any item which is to be discussed. If so, the nature of the interest must be declared and, they may be required to leave the meeting room while the matter is determined.

11. How much time will I need to give to my Council duties?

The role of a Councillor has demands in terms of time commitment and a willingness and ability to make what are often difficult decisions. The time commitment varies depending on which Committees, Working Groups, etc. a Councillor has been appointed to.

Normally, the main Committees meet between four to eight times a year with the exception of Planning Committee which meets every three or four weeks. Occasionally there is a need to hold additional meetings e.g. Licensing Sub-Committees. There are also other Working Groups and Panels which meet as and when required.

The basic allowance paid to a Councillor is a reflection of the time commitment required. The majority of meetings and training sessions are held during normal office hours. However, the meetings of the Full Council are held at 5:30pm.

12. Allowances

An Independent Panel makes recommendations to Council concerning the rates of allowances payable to Councillors.

Basic Allowances

The current basic allowance payable is £2,522.04. The allowance is automatically paid to each Councillor on a monthly basis and covers such things as time spent working in the Wards, attending meetings and stationery. However, Councillors can elect not to receive the allowance.

Special Responsibility Allowances

Councillors who hold particular positions of responsibility within the Council may receive a Special Responsibility Allowance as well e.g. Leaders or, Chairs/Vice Chairs of Committees.

Travelling and Meal Allowances

Councillors may claim travelling and meal allowances for certain approved duties, such as attending Conferences/Seminars, Council meetings or attendance at meetings of Outside Bodies.

Childcare and Dependent Care

Barrow Borough Council also pays a dependency allowance for approved duties. This covers things like contributing towards the cost of a Childminder, or a Carer for a dependent relative, whilst a Councillor is attending Council or Committee meetings.

For further details on allowances, a copy of the current allowance scheme can be found at Part 6 of the Council's Constitution which can be viewed on the Council's website:- www.barrowbc.gov.uk

13. Induction Day and Ongoing Training & Development

Local Government has undergone a massive period of change. Councillors need to take on a broad range of new skills, networks and knowledge; often in a short space of time. Some of these skills are inherent in a Politician, some may need to be learned, and others just developed.

The Council's Member Development Vision is '*To ensure that all Members have access to adequate training and development opportunities to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities*'. The Council's comprehensive programme of Member training and development opportunities has been awarded the North West Charter Award for Member Development since 2006.

Induction Day

As Part of the Council's Induction Programme, you will be invited to attend a half-day briefing at the Town Hall hosted by the Democratic Services Manager and the Council's Management Board.

Committee Training

If you are appointed to the Planning or Licensing/Licensing Regulatory Committee, you need to take part in appropriate briefings before you can participate in the decision making process. This is because decisions could be subject to a legal challenge if adequate training has not been provided or received.

Personal Development Plan

A few months after your election, you will be requested to complete a skills audit questionnaire which will allow us to identify and address any skills gaps that you may have and provide appropriate, relevant training.

14. Comments from new Councillors

Comments for people thinking of standing for election from previous new Councillors:-

"Are you clear about what you hope to get out of this—both for yourself and others?"

"Have clear objectives, be realistic, be prepared to learn and make sure you can say no!"

"Only take on Committees and other commitments that you are happy with."

"Start with a small number of commitments and do them well. More can come later."

"Remember to support your residents."

"A Councillor needs to represent everyone fairly—not just supporters."

15. More specific information on Local Government

Local Government Association

www.lga.gov.uk

National Association of Local Councils

www.nalc.gov.uk

Department of Communities and Local Government

www.communities.gov.uk

Directgov

www.direct.gov.uk

Electoral Commission

www.electoralcommission.org.uk





If you have any queries or require any assistance, please contact:

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