

# Local Democracy Education Setting resources: Councillor Adaptation Guide

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## 1. About this pack

This guide sits across all seven documents in the Local Democracy Resources Pack. Read it first.

The pack is designed for councillors visiting primary and secondary schools. It gives you the content, structure and background to run a session. This guide tells you which documents to use, in what order, and how to adapt them for your school, your council type and your nation.

The seven documents are:

Document	What it is for
<b>Primary slide pack</b>	Presentation slides for sessions with pupils aged 7 to 11. Presented directly to the class.
<b>Primary speaking notes</b>	Background and guidance for each slide in the primary pack. Read this before your session.
<b>Primary exercises</b>	Activities for use during or after the primary presentation. Includes facilitation guidance and printed scenario cards for small groups.
<b>Secondary slide pack</b>	Presentation slides for sessions with pupils aged 11 to 16.
<b>Secondary speaking notes</b>	Background and guidance for each slide in the secondary pack. Read this before your session.
<b>Secondary exercises</b>	Three structured exercises: budget priorities for ages 11 to 13 and council decision-making and scrutiny challenges for ages 14 to 16. Includes facilitation guidance and printed activity sheets.
<b>Councillor adaptation guide (this document)</b>	How to choose, prepare and adapt the materials for your school, council type and nation.

You do not need to read every document before your first visit. Read this guide, then the speaking notes for the age group you are visiting. You can review the slide packs and exercises once you know which school you are going to and what the teacher needs.

## **2. Choosing your materials**

### **Primary or secondary?**

The primary pack is designed for pupils aged 7 to 11. The secondary pack is designed for pupils aged 11 to 16.

If you are visiting a middle school, choose based on the year group you will be working with. Years 5 and 6 suit the primary pack. Year 7 upwards suits the secondary pack.

### **Which exercises?**

The primary exercises use a scenario card format. Small groups of pupils are given a local spending decision and asked to make a choice. There are five scenarios. You or the teacher picks one and the class works through it together. You will not use all five in a single session.

The secondary exercises are split by age group. Budget priorities is designed for years 7 to 8 (ages 11 to 13). Scrutiny challenge is designed for years 10 to 11 (ages 14 to 16). Check with the teacher in advance which exercise fits the group.

### **How long is the session?**

The primary pack is designed for 30 to 45 minutes. The secondary pack is designed for 45 to 60 minutes, though a shorter 30-minute version can be delivered using the core slides only and leaving the activity as a follow-up. If the teacher has given you a full hour, you have time to run both the presentation and an exercise.

If the session is running long, cut the exercise rather than the presentation. The presentation covers the core content. The exercise deepens it. If you have to choose, keep the core presentation. The teacher may prefer to run the exercise as a follow-up - agree this before you arrive.

### 3. Adapting for your nation

The core content works across all four nations. The slide packs and speaking notes include optional modules covering nation-specific differences. Select the module that matches where you are. Information about councils in each nation is set out below.

#### England

England has over 300 councils, with over 16,000 councillors. Types of councils in England vary significantly. District councils, county councils, metropolitan boroughs, unitary authorities and London boroughs. Different council types have different responsibilities and may use different governance structures, including the committee system, the leader/cabinet system and the directly-elected mayor/cabinet system. The speaking notes include guidance on how to describe your council type accurately. Councils in England usually have a civic head called the civic mayor, lord mayor or chairperson.

Councils across England provide services including adult and children's social care, planning, housing and homelessness services, licensing and trading standards, leisure and parks, libraries and other cultural offerings, business support and economic development, youth services and early years support, and education and special educational needs support, environment and waste services, local transport to a degree to name a few.

Voting age for local elections in England is 18. Legislation to lower this to 16 was laid before Parliament in February 2026, which should take effect by May 2028. Voter identification is required at polling stations. Local elections use first-past-the-post voting system.

The national government in England is the UK Parliament in Westminster; England also has regional government consisting of combined authorities, including the Greater London Authority and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

#### Scotland

Scotland has 32 unitary councils with around 1200 councillors. Scottish councils use the committee system exclusively. The term "provost" or "lord provost" is used in many Scottish councils and is the civic head of the authority.

Councils across Scotland deliver services including education up to 16, early years support, adults and children's social care, environment and waste services, housing, homelessness and planning services, highways and transport, libraries, leisure and parks services, licensing and trading standards and economic development.

Voting age for local elections in Scotland is 16. Voter identification is not required. Elections use the single transferable voting system.

Refer to the Scottish Parliament as the relevant devolved legislature and to members as MSPs.

## **Wales**

Wales has 22 unitary councils (county and county borough councils) with around 1200 councillors. Welsh councils use the cabinet and leader governance system exclusively. The term mayor or chair is used for the civic head of the council in Wales.

Councils across Wales deliver services including education and school transport, adults and children's social care, planning, housing and homelessness services, highways and transport services, waste management, environmental health and trading standards, and libraries, leisure and culture services.

Voting age for local elections in Wales is 16. Voter identification is not required. Elections use first past the post.

The Welsh Government and the Senedd are the relevant devolved institutions. Members of the Senedd are referred to as MSs. The Welsh language has equal legal status with English in Wales. If you are visiting a Welsh-medium school, check with the teacher whether any materials are available in Welsh.

## **Northern Ireland**

Northern Ireland has 11 councils with around 460 councillors.

Council responsibilities are narrower than in the rest of the UK, but no less important. NI councils are responsible for services including planning, waste and recycling, parks and leisure, community planning, and supporting local jobs and businesses. Services such as education, social care, housing and roads are delivered by other bodies rather than the council. When describing what your council does, stay close

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to its actual functions and use the speaking notes guidance on which slide icons to keep or replace.

Voting age for local elections in Northern Ireland is 18. Legislation to lower this to 16 was laid before Parliament in February 2026, which should take effect by May 2028. Voter identification has been required since 2002. Elections use the single transferable vote system.

The relevant devolved legislature is the Northern Ireland Assembly. Members are referred to as MLAs.

## 4. Adapting for your council type

The pack uses "council" and "councillor" throughout. Most pupils will not know the difference between a district council and a metropolitan borough. You do not need to explain the full structure. You do need to be accurate about what your council does.

Before your visit, check which services the speaking notes describe and confirm that your council is responsible for them. If your council does not provide a service mentioned in the slides, either skip that example or replace it with one that applies.

Both the primary and secondary slide packs include an icon bank as a hidden final slide at the end of the pack. To use it, right-click the icon bank slide in the panel and show it, copy the icon you need, then paste it onto the services slide to replace the one that does not apply. Right-click the icon bank slide and select Hide slide before presenting so it does not appear during your session.

If you are a parish or town councillor, the materials will need more adaptation. Parish and town councils have a narrower range of functions. The slides and speaking notes provide a helpful structure that you can adapt - the core content about what a councillor does and how decisions are made still applies. Your examples should reflect what your council actually does.

## 5. Preparing for your visit

### Contacting the school

Make contact with the teacher or visit coordinator at least two weeks before the session. Find out:

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- which year group you will be with and approximately how many pupils
- how long you have
- whether the school has any requirements around external visitors and political neutrality
- whether there are pupils with additional needs that would affect how you run the session.

You do not need to submit materials in advance unless the school asks for them.

### Political neutrality

The session works best and protects you when it stays focused on how local democracy works. This means generally keeping party politics out of it, particularly in relation to criticising other parties or councillors. However, it may be appropriate to share some of your own views on non-contentious issues.

If a pupil asks which party you belong to, you can acknowledge it briefly and continue. If a pupil raises a contentious political topic, explain the process rather than defending or criticising a particular outcome.

### Safeguarding

Check your council's safeguarding requirements before any school visit. Many councils require DBS checks for regular school visitors. A single visit as a public figure in a supervised classroom is generally treated differently, but confirm the requirements with your council's safeguarding lead or democratic services team.

During the session you will be in a classroom with a teacher present. Do not meet pupils without a teacher in the room. If a pupil discloses something concerning during the session, do not probe. Listen, acknowledge, and let the teacher know after the session.

If you are unsure about safeguarding requirements, the LGA publishes guidance on the safeguarding responsibilities of councillors. Search for '[LGA must-know guide: Safeguarding children](#)' to find it. Your democratic services team or safeguarding lead can also advise.

## Preparing your examples

The speaking notes include example talking points. Where you can, replace generic examples with ones from your own council. A recent planning decision, a parks project or a change to a local service will mean more to pupils in your area than a fictional example.

Where possible, choose examples that are relevant to young people. Parks, buses, libraries, routes to school, youth services, support for families, or a local planning issue pupils might recognise will land better than an abstract council function.

For younger secondary groups, explain what a ward is in plain language: it is the part of the local area you represent - broadly your neighbourhood or local community. Do not assume pupils will know the term.

## 6. Running the session

### Arriving

Allow time to set up. Schools are busy. You may be directed to reception, asked to sign in and wait. A few minutes to load the slides and check the screen before pupils arrive will help.

### Using the slides

The slide packs are editable PowerPoint files. Before your visit, open the file and swap in examples, place names and services that match your council. The speaking notes for each slide tell you what to adapt and how. On the day, use the slides as your guide and the speaking notes as your preparation - not as a script to read from. Keep the slides short and use them as prompts for discussion rather than reading them out directly.

The secondary pack includes three optional slides: slides 11, 12 and 13. If you do not need them, right-click the slide in the slide panel before your session and select Hide slide. It will stay in the file but will not appear during your presentation. Both packs also include an icon bank in the final slide, which should be hidden before presenting.

## Questions

The speaking notes cover the most common questions and suggest ways to answer them. If a question goes beyond what you know, say so: "That is a good question and I do not know the answer off the top of my head. I can find out and the teacher can let you know." That is a straightforward response and pupils accept it.

## 7. If things go wrong

Situation	What to do
<b>A pupil asks which party you are in and presses for your political views</b>	Acknowledge the question. You can share your view if you feel it is appropriate, but be clear that other councillors and residents will see it differently. Bring the conversation back to how the council works and how decisions get made.
<b>A pupil makes a comment that sounds like a disclosure</b>	Do not probe. Do not ask follow-up questions. Note what was said and speak to the teacher privately after the session.
<b>The teacher leaves the room</b>	Continue the session. Do not be alone with a pupil. If the teacher has not returned by the time pupils need to move, pause and wait in a group setting.
<b>The technology fails</b>	The slide pack has speaking notes. You can run the session without the slides. The primary exercises use printed cards and the secondary exercises use printed sheets. Neither depends on technology.
<b>A pupil is disruptive</b>	That is the teacher's responsibility. Continue your session and let the teacher manage the behaviour.

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Situation	What to do
<b>The session finishes early</b>	Ask whether pupils have questions. If there are none, wrap up. A short, clear session is better than one that runs on without purpose.
<b>A parent or journalist contacts you after the visit</b>	Discuss with the school how to respond. A brief factual description of what the session covered is a reasonable basis for any response to parents. For media enquiries, the school's communications lead is the right first point of contact.

## 8. Feeding back to the LGA

The LGA is gathering feedback from councillors who use this pack. If you run a session, please let them know what worked, what did not, and whether there is anything in the materials that needs changing. You can contact the LGA at [info@local.gov.uk](mailto:info@local.gov.uk).