



## STAND FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN BE A LIBERAL DEMOCRAT DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

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Cover images – top: South Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrat Group

Bottom: Mayor Peter Taylor, Watford Borough Council

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# Could I be a Liberal Democrat councillor?

## YES!

Welcome to our 'Be a Councillor' guide.

Lib Dem councillors have long been an important democratic voice for the party. Our well-worn mottos of 'working hard all year round' and 'success you can see' really mean something to the communities we represent.

This guide contains information about how councils work, the role of a councillor and most importantly, what being a Lib Dem councillor looks like.

Inside the guide, you will hear from four Lib Dem councillors from different district councils. They have shared why they are Lib Dem councillors and why it is important to them to represent their communities.

The guide is a great starting point if you have ever looked at other councillors and thought 'I could do this'. There is also information about where to go to find out more.

In local government the Lib Dems are working hard for local people, standing up for our communities and making sure everyone knows the difference the Lib Dems can make.

As Lib Dem councillors we are proud to serve our communities and set high standards for ourselves. We are part of shaping the future of our communities, villages, towns and cities. We also are hugely important in supporting and upholding the principles of liberal democracy in action. Local government is undergoing huge changes and challenges. It is more important than ever that Lib Dems are there to remind everyone that local government is there for local people. Representing local people and campaigning with them is what we do best.

You may already be a campaigner, community activist, involved in your local church or mosque, or a local school governor. You might help delivering leaflets or organising events. If so, you already have a great basis for taking up public office and becoming a Lib Dem councillor. But ultimately, if you really care about your area, and want work to make it the best place it can be, becoming a Lib Dem councillor could be for you.

We hope you find this guide useful, and if you decide to stand for election, we look forward to welcoming you into the Lib Dem local government family.

# What is a councillor and what do they do?

Councillors are elected by communities to represent them and to run their local authority. Councillors represent wards or divisions which vary greatly in size across the country.

Councillors are expected to be active in the life of their local community and act as the voice of their constituents, raising any concerns with the local council on a range of matters related to the work of the council. From waste collection to street lights, housing to environmental health, district councillors talk to people about everything and anything.

Liberal Democrat councillors represent the party and its policies, and are an important part of their local party, feeding back to members about what is happening at the council.

Councillors may also work with politicians at a regional, national and European level on issues of local importance which have national implications.

Councillors are elected for a four-year term unless they are elected at a by-election, in which case they must stand again at the next normal election for the seat. They are often referred to as 'members' of the council.

The council is controlled by either the political party which has a majority of councillors or, if no one party has a majority, there may be a coalition of parties or a minority administration.

The councillor's role will vary depending on whether the Lib Dem is in control or in opposition, but generally speaking will include some or all of the following broad responsibilities:

- dealing with individual pieces of casework for local residents and helping them resolve issues
- leading on local campaigns on behalf of the local communities
- serving on council committees which look at decisions being made or have specific legal or 'regulatory' duties
- if Lib Dems run the council, potentially making decisions which decide how local services are delivered
- acting as community leaders and helping local people get involved in the decisions made by the council.

**Action point:** Go online and explore your council's website. Find out what services they provide and how many wards and councillors there are.

## Councillor Steve Holt

### Eastbourne Borough Council, Devonshire Ward

I was first elected in May 2015. I had previously stood unsuccessfully in two previous elections. I wanted to stand, as I wanted to be able to make a positive difference in my town. Historically speaking, my ward has a high number of transitional residents, and being based largely within the town centre, means that there are unique challenges which do not affect other wards locally. Recently, there has been more investment into the ward, and it's really exciting to be part of a dynamic project looking at improving the area.



I work full time and this means I have to balance my work-life-council duties. Which actually, it's not that difficult once you get your head around it! That trip to the gym for example, can take place between work ending and the start of council meetings. The truth is, like most things, you get out what you put in. And the outcomes are incredibly rewarding. Not just for my ward or the whole town, but for myself. Our council not only continues to make a difference but I believe I have become a better person as a result of being a councillor. Not only is it incredibly stimulating, but I feel more confident and assured as a councillor.

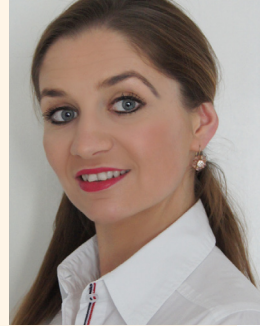
Ultimately, it's fantastic to feel that you are part of something, that is greater than yourself.

- Under 30 (one of two on the council!)  Works full time
- Likes to have a drink with fellow Lib Dem councillors after meetings

## Councillor Aga Dychton

### Watford Borough Council, Central Ward

From a very early age, I've been community orientated. From growing up in Poland to moving to the UK with my family, I've always cared about being involved in and supporting people where I live. Since I've moved to Watford, I've been passionate about getting involved with local activities and wanted to help improve the town that my family and I call home.



When my son was three, I decided to set up a Polish school in Watford for Polish families to educate their children about Polish culture and traditions and also to bring the Polish community in Watford together. Along with other mums we opened the school doors in September 2010. It has proven hugely successful and I am now delighted to be its chair.

I've always liked to break stereotypes. I think people have an idea that Eastern European citizens living in the UK are somehow disengaged from the place they live and not interested in becoming a part of that community. I've never felt like that and I wanted to prove the opposite. After some thinking, in 2016, I decided to run as a borough councillor and it is an enormous honour to be the first ever Polish councillor in Watford. It is an even greater honour to have been re-elected to the role in 2018.

I've always enjoyed promoting the idea of community, helping people and being a councillor is a great way of doing just that. It's fantastic to be able to represent the Eastern European community and be their voice on the council. Being a councillor also gives me a chance to change people's lives for the better, whoever they are and wherever they're from. I love the casework part of my job. A typical day could be helping to clear a bit of fly-tipping, to getting funding for a community project or helping someone get better quality local housing. No two days are the same. What I'd say to anyone in the same position as me in 2016 is to go for it! Whoever you are, wherever you're from, you need to believe in yourself. If you love your town and want to make it a better place to live, this is really the job for you.

- Repaired first car at 18
- Love to have own car garage
- EU Citizen
- Set up local Polish school
- Local councillor

## What is involved in being a councillor?

Being a Liberal Democrat councillor is a rewarding experience and many councillors will tell you that they have obtained new skills and experiences whilst working with their communities.

Together with Lib Dem MPs, Assembly Member, MEPs, and town and parish councillors, Lib Dem councillors are also important in making sure there is a good reputation for the Lib Dems in the area.

Here are some things to think about before deciding to stand for election.

### What's the time commitment?

Think about how you would balance the responsibilities of being a councillor alongside family, friends and employment.

Talk to the people around you before you stand, their support will be really important. If you have Lib Dem councillors or former councillors in your area, have a chat with them about what is involved.

If you also work, talk to your employer. You are entitled to time off for being a councillor and many employers see the benefit of an employee gaining such great experience outside the workplace.

If you have caring responsibilities, think about how to manage those. Many people looking after children or dependent adults make excellent local councillors as they have direct personal knowledge of the services that affect people just like them.

**Action point:** Make a list of all the things you currently do and think about how you could manage your activities and commitments. Talk to people with experience of being a councillor and who have similar time commitments to you.

### Can I afford to do it?

Most councillors receive an 'allowance' for their duties which is taxable. Being a councillor is a job and the allowance is to ensure that if elected you are not left out of pocket. If you are on benefits these allowances can affect your entitlement, so get advice before agreeing to stand.

There is also a childcare and dependents' carers' allowance for attendance at meetings payable on production of receipts, up to an agreed maximum cost per hour.

The council also provides a special responsibility allowance to those who undertake additional duties such as the leader of the council, portfolio holders, scrutiny chairs and opposition leaders.

Most Lib Dem groups also agree to give part of their allowances to their local party to help get more Lib Dems elected.

**Action Point:** Find out more about the allowances scheme run by your local council, this can be found on their web site and think about your own financial situation.

## What training do I need?

You don't have to be highly educated or have a profession. Skills gained through work, education, bringing up a family, caring for a sick or disabled relative, volunteering or being active in faith or community groups are really valuable.

In addition, the Liberal Democrats and its councillors' association (ALDC) offers training for people thinking of standing for election, as well as for candidates, and all councils provide training for both new and experienced councillors.

Although you don't need any particular training to stand for election, think about what skills and attributes you do have and how they might help.

For instance, councillors are expected to be available to enable constituents to come to them with problems. This means that councillors need to have good listening skills, the ability to represent someone, to keep confidences, and to resolve conflict.

**Action Point:** Make a list of the skills and experience you think you have. Ask friends and relatives what they think. Be honest, but don't underplay yourself – most people have a much wider range of skills than they think. Consider how these skills would make you a great councillor.

## How can I find out more?

There is more information below in the section called 'Once you're elected', as well as on the ALDC website. The Local Government Association (LGA) has also produced a workbook to help you to go through some of the things you need to consider.



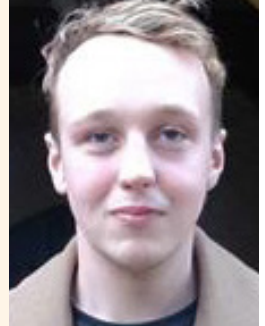
## Councillor Adam Dance

### South Somerset District Council, South Petherton Ward

My interest in politics started from a very young age. I was fed up with all the cuts to youth services by the county council, so when I was 13 I joined the youth parish council in my village in South Somerset. I was awarded the Chairmanship Award at 15 for my youth work and was also a finalist in the Western Gazette 2012 Pride Awards for my campaigning against the cuts.

I am now 26 and on the parish council, district council and am also a county councillor here in Somerset! I see my age as an advantage, not a drawback, as I am in touch with young people, but mature enough to be able to represent all ages. I am the only councillor in South Somerset in my twenties, but feel that more people my age should get involved as so many decisions are made by people much older than me. It is hard work, but I fit it in around my horticultural business. My day job helps my political role as it puts me in contact with loads of people. Lots of them put my stake boards in their gardens and farms when I am campaigning, even Tory members.

Looking ahead, I am hoping to be a cabinet member on the district council by this time next year and I have been considering getting my approval to be a parliamentary candidate.



Horse riding  LGBT community member  Local councillor

## Councillor Helen Ladhams

### South Lakeland District Council, Kendal East Ward

Why did I stand for council? 'If you want something doing ask a busy person.' People used to say that to me just before they asked me to do something... now I am saying it to others. I like being busy or to put it another way, I'm not shy of hard work. Of course, I want to help people and providing a better society for all has always been my goal. You could say I started in politics at a very young age, delivering Lib Dem leaflets with my mother in Stockport. After much walking and a few years, we managed to oust the sitting Conservative MP Tom Arnold, and elect Andrew Stunnell. So that, and my parents both being teachers, meant I learnt that winning is possible with work.



I've always done voluntary work, alongside my paid work. When I eventually studied law I was a single parent and during my law finals I had five paid jobs to pay for the course fees and child care. I wanted a better life for my daughter than I had had, a better life for all and a better world. As a councillor you need to understand life and your voters so you can understand their worries, complaints and needs and hopefully do a better job for them. A previous councillor said I would be a good councillor as I had a lot of experience of life issues.

I now have three children and I am a 14 plus years qualified solicitor. It was while I was Constituency Campaign Team Secretary for Tim Farron that he asked if I would stand for council... I agreed to stand for town and district. My reluctance was that I had only lived at my present address for 11 months. However the great team I have in fellow councillors, family and the office, plus the footwork we put in delivering, residents surveys and canvassing paid off, not to mention getting involved again in the community where I live.

Finally, just to say that I am not proficient at time management or work/life balance either; I don't think anyone is, but luck plays a big part. Some call it forward planning. Building a team around you, including your family, is important and being nice (or at least civil) to everyone – you may need their help again and why not anyway.

- Former school governor
- Single parent
- Solicitor for over 14 years
- Local councillor

# How do I become a Liberal Democrat councillor?

Before you can be a councillor you must get elected. The Liberal Democrats aim to stand candidates in every ward, and are always looking for good new people to get involved. There is a procedure to go through, but it is not complicated and there are lots of points at which you are offered help and support.

## Getting approved as a candidate

There are two main reasons to have a candidate approval system. The first is to ensure that potential candidates know what is expected of them, but it is also to ensure that anyone who has the Lib Dem name and logo associated with them does the party credit.

The form the approval process takes can be adapted to suit your local area, and so whether you are in control of the council or if you are struggling to get a full slate of candidates, there is a process that can work for you.

Most approval processes involve completing a simple application form and an interview. The questions for both of these need to be agreed by the approval panel, although templates and crib sheets are available.

If you're in a smaller local party or have a large number of wards where you will struggle to find candidates, you may decide not to include the interview part of the process, although getting potential candidates to complete a form is always useful as it gives you written 'evidence' in case there are problems at a later stage.

The interview should be professional but not be too formal. It shouldn't be a harsh grilling and all efforts should be made to put the potential candidate at ease. Before the panel meets it is a worthwhile exercise to discuss and write down the qualities that make a good a Lib Dem councillor. These are not always skills that you can learn or develop through training but their absence can later cause problems for the reputation of the party or group unity.

Councillors often have to make difficult choices in public about the services their councils are responsible for. This is a considerable responsibility. Top of most lists would come: Lib Dem values, team player, and loyalty to the group and the party.

**Action point:** Start making notes for your application form and identifying your strengths and weaknesses – for instance, if you don't know much about party policy do some research to find out.

## Getting selected as a candidate

As a democratic party it is important that we have a fair, open and transparent process for choosing the people who stand for us in elections. The procedure is not designed to be complicated or onerous, but is intended to ensure we get the best candidates and that everyone who put themselves forward is given an equal opportunity of being selected.

Even if you are in an area where council candidates often get selected unopposed or where your existing councillors are hoping to re-stand, you still need a fair selection process to make sure that others have the opportunity of standing and to put you in good stead for when selections become more competitive.

There is a lot of freedom in how candidate selections can be organised, however, there are a few principles that are important:

- where there is an election for a candidate, this must be done through a secret ballot using the Single Transferable Vote system
- no one should be automatically re-selected, including sitting councillors

- in England, only those people who are members at the time where the position is advertised can vote in the selection
- all candidates must have been approved as a candidate within four years before they can put their name forward for selection.

The initial stage is for local parties to advertise the wards in which they are selecting candidates to all of the party membership within the council area.

Potential candidates will be asked to submit a simple application form or slip or send an expression of interest through an email to the Returning Officer.

As a campaigning party we should encourage potential candidates to speak to members if they want to be selected. All applicants should be given a list of the members eligible to vote, (which should be returned after the selection), with encouragement to get in touch with them. The Returning Officer may also wish to allow each candidate to produce their own canvass leaflet.

The Returning Officer should also write to all of the eligible voters explaining that a selection is underway, that they may be contacted by candidates and including a one-side of A4 artwork from each candidate.

They should also outline details of a hustings meeting when members can come along and listen to speeches from candidates and ask questions.

Most selections allow members to have a postal ballot if they cannot attend the hustings meeting, but usually these are only available on request to the Returning Officer. In most cases, the votes are counted at the end of the hustings meeting, but in some places they run a full postal ballot. This is for you to decide.

**Action point:** If you're not used to making speeches find someone who can help you to practice. Think, too, about the kind of questions you might be asked; what are the important issues in the area, and what kind of challenges is the council facing? You don't need to know all the answers, but you should be able to demonstrate that you understand the question, and that you have an opinion on key issues.

## Getting elected as a councillor

Unless you are a candidate in a by-election, the election will most likely happen on the first Thursday in May. Between your selection and election day you will be expected to help lead Lib Dem campaigning in your ward, and, in particular, to talk to voters and listen to their concerns.

This can be done on the doorstep and/or by phone, and there are various kinds of events you can hold as well as leaflets and letters you can distribute.

You will have an agent (and/or campaign manager), and that person will be responsible for organising the detail of the campaign. As polling day approaches things will get busier, and more will be expected of you, so remember to be proactive in making sure that you still have time for family and work.

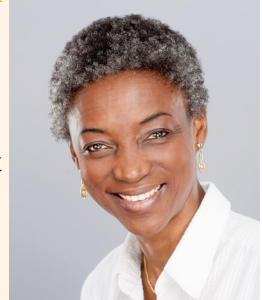
If you are elected you will be expected to start immediately, so make sure in advance that people such as your family and employers know this.

**Action point:** Find out about elections in your area and contact your local Lib Dem team. Ask about how elections are run locally and how you might get involved.

## Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins

### South Cambridgeshire District Council, Caldecote Ward

In 2009, I was approached by a Lib Dem councillor friend to ask if I would consider standing for the next district council elections to replace the retiring councillor. Up until then, I had not considered a career in politics, nor was I a party member, though I was enjoying doing my bit as a parish councillor. After about three months, I agreed to stand because I felt it was the right opportunity at the right time and I could put my skills and experience to good use for the benefit of my community.



The local team worked hard and I won the closely fought 2010 election to become the first black female councillor in this rural district council. I was subsequently re-elected in 2014, being one of the few Lib Dem councillors to retain their seat with an increased majority at a very difficult time for the party. This year, I was re-elected with a good majority in the enlarged ward resulting from the recent ward boundary changes. I am now the Planning portfolio holder in the new Lib Dem administration.

I came to the UK from Nigeria as a Commonwealth Scholar, and obtained my PhD in Radio Communications. I achieved Chartered Engineer status, and had a successful career in the mobile radio industry, both as an employee and also running my own consultancy company together with my husband, providing expertise to mobile radio network operators round the world. Starting a family resulted in a career change that enabled me to work from home as a small business owner. This has given me the flexibility to fit council work into and around my family and businesses.

As a wife and mother of two, balancing work, business, family and personal interests is challenging but very rewarding, and has been made possible by the full support of my husband and children. I hope that more women and especially those from ethnic minority backgrounds will be encouraged to get involved in local politics. If I can do it, you can too.

- Recent jazzercise enthusiast
- Countryside rambler
- Sing in church choir
- Local councillor

## Costs, legal issues and probity

The main cost of getting elected is the cost of the campaign itself. Items such as leaflets, canvass cards and posters. Local parties should have a fundraising plan to cover the cost of the campaign.

Candidates do not receive expenses or payments, but once elected councillors normally do receive allowances.

There are some legal constraints on who can and can't be a local councillor, for example you have to live or work in the council area where you want to stand. There are other reasons such as bankruptcy which prevent an individual from standing and most local authorities publish the reasons why a person couldn't stand in the election section on their websites.

Elected representatives at every level are required to complete a Register of Interests which declares your financial and property interests and membership of any organisation that may influence you – such as a political party. The main thing to remember is, if in doubt, declare it and take advice from the chief legal officer if you are elected.

Every council also has a 'Members' Code of Conduct' which sets out rules for how its councillors are expected to conduct themselves in office such as the need to declare any pecuniary interests at a meeting before items are discussed. Following election, all newly-elected councillors sign a written undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct. Council officers provide advice on all of these matters to councillors.

Liberal Democrat groups also have Standing Orders to ensure that group business is conducted fairly and professionally. Make sure you are given a copy of the Standing Orders during your approval and selection process. If you are elected they will be your Standing Orders too.

**Action point:** Check what the legal requirements for being a councillor are and that you meet them.

## Being a Liberal Democrat councillor

If you are elected you will take up office immediately, and although it may seem a little intimidating at first there will be training and support to help you settle in. The council will run an induction for new councillors, and, in terms of the work in the ward, you will find that much of it will follow on from the work you were doing before the election as a local campaigner.

Liberal Democrat campaigners believe that councillors and indeed the whole structure of local government should engage with people and work with them rather than simply take decisions on their behalf.

Lib Dem councillors are expected to keep their residents up-to-date with what they have been up to. With regular newsletters in many places called FOCUS, emails and Facebook postings.

They may also hold advice surgeries for constituents, attend regular Liberal Democrat group meetings and play a full part in the life of the party locally in their area. Lib Dem campaigners and councillors will often be the people leading the charge on issues of great importance to a local community.

A significant part of all these responsibilities is the work that councillors do at a neighbourhood level, representing the people of their electoral ward or area. There is good evidence that councillors who develop and nurture a good reputation in their ward earn the respect of the electorate, who in turn repay them at the ballot box. In itself, this is a compelling reason for taking the role of the ward councillor seriously.

But the need to be effective as a ward councillor is about much more than this. Representing people in your area, understanding the issues and concerns they face and being equipped with the skills, confidence and ability to take action and make a difference is the most important task that any councillor undertakes. Significantly, it is also often the role that local people value most.

Lib Dem campaigners and councillors can act as the leaders and organisers for real change. As a result we may win council seats but the real victories will be in the community groups built and the control taken by people over the decisions which effect their own lives.



There are a number of key roles that councillors are involved in:

- serving the community
- representing the community
- representing the Lib Dems.

## Serving the community

Providing public services is the main function of the council. Local councils provide around 800 different services, from highways and adult social services to education and refuse collection. Councillors have a key role as:

- policy-makers
- decision takers
- ‘scrutineers’ of the effectiveness of the council in delivering services.

You need to be the voice of your community at the Town Hall, representing its wishes and a link between your community and the council.

The surest way of finding out what really matters to local residents is by asking them – whether on the door or on the telephone. Use time in queues, coffee shops, the launderette, on the bus, the hairdressers to listen to what people are talking about. Conversations are vital to getting more information, beyond voting intention and is vital to maximising your vote at election time.

## Representing the community

Councillors represent all of the people within your communities (including those who did not vote for them).

The task of representing a group of several thousand local people can be complex. The way that councillors carry out their ward duties can vary enormously, but as a Lib Dem councillor it is expected you will be very involved in every aspect of your community – from attending functions to supporting local events and regularly being in contact with residents through a variety of mediums.

You should:

- **Understand the ward** – the key issues facing local people, by talking directly with voters.
- **Represent local voices** – by being a channel of communication between your local community and the council and ensure you are listening and representing the views of those you represent.
- **Manage casework** – listen to and respond to requests from individuals and groups in the community, resolving problems.
- **Represent the Liberal Democrats.**

## Councillor Sarah Butikofer

### North Norfolk District Council, The Runtons Ward Norfolk County Council, Holt Division



Ever had a job where Sunday evening brings the dread of Monday morning, where you hate what you do but you do it for the money? If so, make a change and do something that you love. When you love your job you never work.

As a caseworker I got a taste for making a difference; being able to help someone move forwards or improve their daily life gave me a real thrill, a sense of accomplishment and achievement like no other. Some might say that's corny but it's the truth.

So when I was offered the chance to stand as a Liberal Democrat candidate in the county council elections of 2013 I decided it was time to step up to the plate, and take my involvement to the next level. Trouble was that with a standing start of just five weeks to the elections I had left things hopelessly late! Together with the rise of UKIP in a fiercely leave area it was too big a challenge, and I lost. Boy did that hurt.

But deep in my genes is a fighter. My great, great grandmother was a part of the suffrage movement and proud to stand up for women's rights, and she didn't stop when the going got tough. I'm proud to follow her example. I regrouped and put together a real campaign to get elected as a district councillor for my local community in 2015. By autumn 2016 I was the group leader, working with a team of 14 councillors, and starting to get our voices heard. In May 2017 I won the county council seat I lost in 2013.

I believe women bring a different perspective to the challenges society throws at us all. Women instinctively seem to search for an equitable solution; they will negotiate and work inclusively. I would like to see more young women involved in politics particularly at a local level. I believe they can provide another level of insight we are still missing.

My message is if you want to make a difference, you can. You have to stand up for yourself and others when the going gets tough but the rewards can be huge not just for you, but for your community.

- Veteran arctic explorer – has visited the North Pole
- Weaves
- Cooked for A-list celebrities
- Local councillor

## Understanding the ward

If you are a new councillor, it is essential that you get to know the area you represent. You need to know and understand your ward. What are the issues that concern people most? What issues are coming down the pipeline?

A great place to start is with local community groups and 'community players'. You don't need to attend every meeting of every community group, but you do need to know they are happening and have good links with the key people. Good links with local vicars or religious leaders, the Police community support officer, the corner shopkeeper or the local branch of the Citizens Advice are great contacts.

**Action point:** Look at the internet and search for groups using key local area names. You'll probably discover a multitude of groups you were unaware of – and were unaware of you. Set yourself a challenge to meet up with one contact and group every month.

Issues will come up in your ward that require campaigning. A good local campaign is a brilliant way to cement the relationship between you and local people. You don't have to run the campaign, we're much more interested in 'empowering' other people to campaign themselves, but you will need to be involved, and perhaps help get things going.

Sometimes issues are difficult.

If we run the council it may be that we are the 'baddies' that people want to campaign against. There are still ways you can stand up for your ward and you need to discuss how best to do this with your Lib Dem colleagues. Sometimes an issue divides a community and there is no 'winning answer' – you need to stick to your Lib Dem good senses – most people who disagree with you will appreciate you standing up for the area.

## Representing local voices

The task of representing a diverse and mobile mix of communities, groups and individuals can be tricky.

While representing individual voters, councillors often try to keep in touch with as wide a range of people in the ward as possible. This will involve going to meetings and events, meeting people on a one-to-one basis, and listening to different views about what is needed or what should be happening. Your role as a representative includes lobbying to get a fair share of investment and service improvements in your area, dealing with casework and getting things 'sorted', and championing your area at the council.

Many authorities have an area or neighbourhood board structure bringing together councillors from a local area. Lib Dem have long been advocates of more local decision making and it is important we make the local structures work.

Because councillors are often one of the main link points between local people and the council, you will also need to be able to provide information as clearly as possible to help them to understand local government services and processes. This becomes easier once you are a councillor and understand them better yourself.

The biggest challenge for ward members is often in getting the council or an outside body to take local views into account when making decisions. There are various ways of doing this, but the first requirement is to understand what those views are yourself.

We as Lib Dems pride ourselves on asking voters what they think is important in their area, getting their feedback on local issues, reporting back to them what we have been up to and sharing information

People are much more inclined to listen and pay attention if they feel that the person speaking to them knows what they are talking about, is committed to getting the best outcome, and has credibility as an elected representative.

## Managing casework

Some councillors find casework the best part of their role – the opportunity to sort out problems for people who are experiencing difficulties engaging with the council.

Customer service studies always show that it is the speed and style of the initial response that is remembered by the resident. Respond quickly to all enquiries – email makes this very easy nowadays.

You need to set up a system for managing your casework that works for you. A book, a system using your email, a spreadsheet – whatever works for you. Bits of paper and your memory will not work. All ALDC members get access to the online CONNECT Casework module for free (£3 a month for others), an online casework management tool that will allow you to keep track of all the casework that you do in your ward.

**Action point:** Speak to current councillors about their casework, the issues and problems as well as how they handle an issue.

However, make sure you do not raise false expectations about what you can achieve. Help individuals achieve things themselves. Remember we are here to empower not act as an alternative social worker or benefits advisor.

It is a good idea to build up a network of good contacts to help you solve casework. Good relations with a small number of officers will work wonders – always say thank you to officers when something is done!

## Representing the Liberal Democrats

You are also importantly a representative of the party. We want our local community and our local council to be a more liberal and democratic place. If we are not any different from the Labour or Tory councillors who went before us, then there was no point getting elected.

It's our real chance to put Lib Dem policies into practice. We can use scrutiny, questions, FOCUS and the media to hold the ruling group to account. We can use council motions, proposals, amendments and campaigns and lobbying to put our ideas across.

You are the face of the Lib Dems locally. Stand up for what we believe in, stand by your colleagues.

For the best solutions for local residents you will also have to work with others, identifying a common agenda to address the needs of the community but these still need to be in line with the party.

## Further information and support

### Publications

Learning and Development Workbook for Potential Electoral Candidates, 2015, LGA

Councillors' Guide 2018/19, LGA, 2018

Councillor Briefing Pack: Sustainable Communities, LGA, 2015

Councillor Briefing Pack: Healthier Communities, LGA, 2015

Councillor Briefing Pack: Resilient Communities, LGA, 2015

Councillor Briefing Pack: Growth, LGA, 2015

### Useful organisations and websites

#### **Local Government Association Liberal Democrat Group**

18 Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

020 7664 3235

[www.local.gov.uk/web/lga-libdem-group](http://www.local.gov.uk/web/lga-libdem-group)

#### **Your council's website**

#### **Liberal Democrats**

[www.libdems.org.uk](http://www.libdems.org.uk)

#### **Local Government Association (LGA)**

An invaluable source of help and advice for all those in local government.

[www.local.gov.uk](http://www.local.gov.uk)

#### **The Electoral Commission**

Independent elections watchdog and regulator of party and election finance.

[www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

#### **Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC)**

[www.aldc.org](http://www.aldc.org)

#### **Lib Dem Women**

[www.libdemwomen.org.uk](http://www.libdemwomen.org.uk)

#### **Campaign for Gender Balance**

[www.facebook.com/CGB-The-Lib-Dem-Campaign-for-Gender-Balance](https://www.facebook.com/CGB-The-Lib-Dem-Campaign-for-Gender-Balance)

## Sign up

Whether you are a councillor, candidate or campaigner, ALDC have all of the resources to help local campaign teams win.

We have nearly 1,000 EXCLUSIVE templates available for members to download for free and we add more every week.

You can join ALDC at half price if you choose to join us by direct debit – just £3.41 per month.

To find out more about becoming a Liberal Democrat Councillor please fill in the form below.

Name

Address

Postcode

Email

Phone

- I am interested in standing for the Lib Dems at the next election
- I am interested in finding out more about ALDC

Send it back to:

ALDC

Liberal Democrat Campaigner and Councillors

23 New Mount Street

Manchester M4 4DE

or email [contact@aldc.org](mailto:contact@aldc.org)

## Acknowledgements

This guide has been produced by the Local Government Association (LGA) Liberal Democrat Group in partnership with the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors as part of the LGA funded 'Be a Councillor' campaign.

In the course of writing this we have drawn on earlier work, and particularly on guidance produced the LGA. This Guide also incorporates elements of the Learning and Development Workbook for Potential Electoral Candidates produced by the LGA.



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