

# Being an Effective Ward Councillor

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# Reflections of a ward councillor !

- Importance of good links to your community
- Do not assume you are already known
- You are now the ‘somebody’ to do the doing !
- Community supporter and champion of their aspirations
- The representative on other bodies – volunteer, community, parish groups
- Relationship management

# Councillor roles – Local Leadership



**Understanding the ward**

**Representing local voices**



**Communicating and influencing**

**Managing casework**



## Councillor roles continued...

A range of other key roles inside and outside of the Council offices will include:

- Strategic planning/developing council policy
- Scrutiny and challenge
- Planning and regulation

## Key questions to reflect on

- How much do you really know about your ward?
- Who are the movers and shakers?
- How do you best represent local voices?
- How best can you make yourself known?
- How do you keep people informed?

# The 'ideal' councillor



- Visible, accessible and accountable
- Someone who understands the local community and stands up for it
- Someone who is pro-active, listens and is available to people

# Tensions and challenges

- Ward interests versus wider council interests
- Getting things done versus consulting widely
- Strategic needs versus local objections
- Balanced views versus single interest politics
- Asking for views versus avoiding tokenism

# Handling the media

- Vital mechanism for ensuring transparency of decision making
- Local journalists can be desperate for stories – you get a better press if you call them than they call you!
- Check the protocols which exist for your council for dealing with the media – but don't be trapped by them!



# Dealing with casework

- Identifying the problem
- Referring the problem to the appropriate council department
- Providing feedback
- Considering the wider issues
- Tip: think about how you'll track replies and chase answers
- Are you giving residents an expectation of reply?
- Grab an email!

# Monitoring casework

- How many people contacted you with problems in the last year?
- Who were these people – gender, ethnicity, age, class, employment status?
- How did people contact you?
- How many cases were you able to resolve satisfactorily and how does this compare with previous years?
- What was the profile of the problem, e.g. housing, planning, benefits etc.?
- How does your casework load and type compare to that of other members?
- Do your answers to the questions above suggest any improvements you could make?

# To surgery or not surgery?

- Being super-visible at local meetings
- “Rolling surgeries”
- Encourage telephone calls (or even skype!)
- Liaison with local agencies such as schools, children’s centres, advice agencies
- Social media
- Are you seen as the “go to” person?

## Final tips

- Save your home, use email files
- Beware “outside bodies”!
- Challenge the “we have always done it this way here’ people”
- Always ask advice, be willing to escalate
- Enjoy it – should be about the best thing you ever do!



# Being a good local councillor

*“The primary role of a local councillor is to represent their ward or division and the people who live in it.”*

*“Councillors provide a bridge between the community and the council.”*

(LGA Councillors' Guide 2019/20)

## **Group discussion:**

**What do you as members need to do to ensure you are effective ward councillors**

**What support do you need to make you effective?**