This booklet contains information about the council and how it works, the role and duties of a councillor and how to stand for election.

March 2019

www.southlakeland.gov.uk
Further information

For enquires related to the election process:

Electoral Services
South Lakeland District Council
South Lakeland House
Lowther Street
Kendal
Cumbria LA9 4UQ

Telephone: 01539 793197
Email: elections@southlakeland.gov.uk

For enquires related to the role and duties of a councillor:

Member Services
South Lakeland District Council
South Lakeland House
Lowther Street
Kendal
Cumbria LA9 4UQ

Telephone: 01539 793441
Email: members@southlakeland.gov.uk

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If you would like a copy of this document in another format such as large print, Braille, audio or in a different language, please call 01539 733333 or email customer.services@southlakeland.gov.uk
1. Introduction
This guide explains how to become a councillor. More detailed and specific information can be obtained from Electoral Services (the elections process) or Member Services (the role of the councillor) as well as the various contacts listed at the end of this publication.

2. What do councils do?
Councils provide local services to people living or working in their areas and are divided into wards. There are different types of council: unitary, metropolitan and London boroughs, which are responsible for all local services; and county councils and district councils – where the responsibilities are shared between them. In addition, there are also parish councillors who are important consultees for their local communities.

Elected councillors make decisions that guide the council and paid council staff carry these decisions out, in accordance with the law and guidelines. Councils work in partnership with other local organisations such as health, fire and rescue and police authorities.

3. The district of South Lakeland
South Lakeland is the fourth largest district in the UK, covering an area of some 600 square miles – including parts of the world heritage site. Large parts of the district fall within two National Parks, the Lake District National Park, and the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

The resident population is about 103,700, but this is increased considerably by visitors to the area. Whilst the main season runs from about Easter to October there is also a steady flow of visitors throughout the winter months. Whilst tourism is an important industry, agriculture still dominates the landscape. The principal centres of population are Kendal, which houses the main offices of all departments of the council, Ambleside, Ulverston, Kirkby Lonsdale, Windermere and Grange-over-Sands. There are also numerous specialist industries based on the developing industrial estates of Kendal and Ulverston and on the edge of junction 36 of the M6.

4. South Lakeland District Council
The council has 51 elected members (district councillors), employs approximately 400 full and part-time staff (officers) and has offices and depots in Kendal, Ulverston and Windermere.

From the May elections in 2018 there will be 18 wards covering the following areas:
- Kendal East (three member ward)
- Kendal North (two member ward)
- Kendal South and Natland (three member ward)
- Kendal Town (three member ward)
- Kendal West (three member ward)
- Arnside and Milnthorpe (three member ward)
- Bowness and Levens (three member ward)
- Burton and Crooklands (three member ward)
- Kendal Rural (three member ward)
- Sedbergh and Kirkby Lonsdale (three member ward)
- Ambleside and Grasmere (two member ward)
- Broughton and Coniston (three member ward)
- Cartmel (two member ward)
- Furness Peninsula (three member ward)
- Grange (three member ward)
- Ulverston East (three member ward)
- Ulverston West (three member ward)
- Windermere (three member ward)

This is a change to the previous ward boundaries with the majority seeing some change to reflect the Local Government Boundary Commission for England’s recommendations. Previously there were 51 members representing 45 smaller geographic wards.

This new plan will fundamentally change how members need to engage with the community and their fellow councillors. The council is encouraging members to think about how the use of IT and communications can support this changed role. Further information may be found at: https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/node/6168
5. Why become a councillor?

People become a councillor because they are interested in their local area and its residents and care 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.

6. How to become a councillor

District elections are normally held on the first Thursday in May with a third of the district wards up for election. In 2018 there will be an “all-out” election with all seats being made available for election – this will then be followed by a third of elected members being up for election in 2019, 2020 and 2022. County Council elections will take place in 2021 and every fourth year thereafter; consequently, one year in every four there are no district council elections. Each term of office is potentially four years. Of those councillors elected in 2018 – the councillor with the smallest number of votes in each ward retires in 2019, the councillor with the second smallest number of votes retires in 2020 and the councillor with the highest number of votes serves the full four years, retiring in 2022. If there is an equality of votes, this order is determined by lot.

You may be selected for election by a political party, or you may wish to stand independently. You will need to be authorised by a registered political party if you are thinking of standing as a candidate.

The election process begins with the publication of a Notice of Election. This will be published on
our website and in our offices. Prospective candidates can apply to the Returning Officer, at the council offices, for a nomination pack. You don’t have to pay a deposit to stand in local elections.

The Notice of Election also marks the beginning of the “pre-election” period, sometimes known as purdah. Pre-election guidance will be issued which applies to all sitting council members and SLDC employees. During the pre-election period it is important that the council, and its officers, remain impartial and council resources or facilities are not used for election campaigning. The council will continue to undertake its normal business.

By-elections are held in between the scheduled district elections if a seat becomes vacant. If you are elected at a by-election you will serve until the next scheduled district election for that ward for the seat you have replaced. A by-election does not alter the schedule of retirement for sitting councillors.

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 (note: time off granted does not have to be paid by your employer). 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.

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.

Nomination packs

Two local electors from the ward in which you are standing are required to propose and second you and you need a further eight electors to act as assenters to your nomination. The Returning Officer will hold briefings for prospective candidates to provide information and answer any questions about the process.

Full details of the electoral processes including the nomination papers procedures are available upon request from Electoral Services (details on page 2 of this guide).

Election agents

You can act as your own election agent but many candidates find it is helpful to have an agent. If you are standing for 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 it is submitted by the given deadlines; keep clear and accurate financial records of expenditure and make sure they are sent in within the deadline period to the Returning Officer. The agent will also help to organise your election campaign.

Election expenses

These cover 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 before entering into any expense. The Returning Officer does not reimburse any elections expenses. These costs must be met by you, as candidate, or by the political party for which you are standing. Receipts for 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 declaration of result.

It is important for you to bear in mind that there is a set limit of £740, during campaigning, with an additional 6p for every entry in the relevant register of electors for the ward in which you are seeking to be elected. Further information can be obtained from the Electoral Services Manager.

7. Requirements for standing as a district councillor

Age

You must be at least 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 district; or
• Have lived in the district for the past 12 months; or
• Have occupied as owner or tenant any premises or land in the district for the past 12 months; or
• Have had your main or only place of work in the district for the past 12 months.

You may not be able to stand for election if:
• You work for South Lakeland District 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; or
• You have been disqualified under any legislation relating to corrupt or illegal practices.

Equality

The council is committed to equal opportunities. Training is provided on this key legislation to support councillors performing their roles effectively and to ensure they act within the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Information Technology

A majority of council business relies on the effective use of Information Technology (IT) and the council requires councillors to embrace IT. Using IT effectively enables councillors to receive online agendas, attend some non-formal meetings remotely using video-conferencing and to receive training and information or request payment of expenses. Councillors are issued with a laptop or a tablet to use at council meetings, to allow 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).

It would be advantageous for newly elected members to have some IT skills, however training in IT skills (Skype for Business video-conferencing, navigation of the intranet and use of the ModGov application to access and annotate council meeting papers for discussion/clarification) will be available for all who require it and for those who wish to increase their existing skills.

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 or need to achieve them.

The council is proud to have been awarded the North West Charter for Member Development in 2017 which is a public acknowledgement of the commitment that its members have towards ongoing development. This is achieved through an active member development programme which is 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 required training, such as chairing skills, becoming an effective member as well as training for those members who are appointed to certain committees including Overview and Scrutiny, Planning, Licensing, Audit and Standards Committees, as well as covering skills and knowledge areas. Required training must be completed before a councillor can participate in decision making for certain committees and sub-committees so it is important that you complete this training as soon as possible at the start of your appointment.

All new councillors are invited to attend a series of induction sessions to familiarise themselves with the working of the council and the key information needed 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. They are accountable to their communities. Communities should be able to judge their performance. A copy of the role profile for members can be found in the constitution on our website: www.southlakeland.gov.uk—please take time to familiarise yourself with this so you are fully aware of the scope and range of the role, as well as the time commitment to undertake the role effectively.

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;
- Use technology effectively to undertake the role, taking advantage of IT for meetings, and other ways of communicating with fellow councillors and officers;
- 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 you are appointed and for any related responsibilities associated with them, including taking the time to read the papers that are published in advance of any meeting, attending planning site visits and being available to participate as a member of any sub-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 tender opening 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 and to allow the council to conduct its business;
- 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 makes decisions

The full council is responsible for setting the budget and the overall policy framework.

The Cabinet is responsible for most of the day-to-day decisions and it has to make these decisions in line with the council’s overall policies and budget. If it wishes to make a decision which is outside the budget or policy framework this must be referred to the council as a whole to decide.

Members are appointed by the Leader to serve in the Cabinet and each of them has their own specific portfolio of work. Current portfolios cover:

- Finance;
- Housing and Innovation;
- Environment;
- Public Health and Wellbeing;
- Economy and Assets;
- Council Organisation and People;
- Culture, Media and Leisure

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.

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.southlakeland.gov.uk

Committees

You must complete required training before you are allowed to undertake committee and sub-committee decision making activities. South Lakeland District Council has the following committees:

- 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.

  • Human Resources Committee - This Committee deals with employee policies and practices, terms and conditions.

  • Lake Administration - This Committee deals with the functions of the Council in relation to the management of Lake Windermere.

  • Licensing and Licensing Regulatory Committees - This includes responsibility for licensing functions in respect of hackney carriage and private hire licensing, the Licensing Act 2003 and the Gambling Act 2005. It deals with miscellaneous licences e.g. animal welfare.

  • Overview and Scrutiny Committee which supports the work of the Cabinet and the council as a whole. The purpose of the committee is to review/scrutinise decisions which have been taken; and to encourage and enhance community participation in the development of policies. A large part of its work includes setting up Task and Finish Groups to look at individual areas in detail and report back to the relevant committee with recommendations. All eligible councillors are encouraged to take part in the work of the Task and Finish Groups.

  • Planning Committee - This deals with planning applications and building control matters.

  • Standards Committee - This is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors and co-opted members (including the council’s Code of Conduct); and holding hearings in relation to allegations of breaching the code.

10. Standards of conduct

All councillors must agree to abide by the council’s Code of Conduct. This code sets out standards of behaviour which councillors are required to follow and includes the requirement for them to register details of their disclosable pecuniary interests (including those of any spouse/partner) and other interests within
28 days of their becoming a member, which are 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. A copy of the Code of Conduct can be found at Part 5 of the Council’s Constitution which is available to view on the council’s website: www.southlakeland.gov.uk.

There is also a Member / Officer Protocol which must be adhered to, as this ensures that the professional relationship is not open to criticism or comment by others.

There is a gifts and hospitality policy which governs what you must do to declare an interest or gift you have been offered by a third party which may compromise your ability to engage on a matter as part of your role.

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

The time commitment varies depending on which committees, task and advisory groups, etc. a councillor has been appointed to. A calendar of the main committee meetings is approved by council each year at its annual meeting (normally in May). However, this can be subject to change throughout the year.

Normally, the main committees meet between four to six times a year. The present exception is Planning Committee which meets every month and also holds site visits on a monthly basis too. Sometimes there is a need for a committee or sub-committee to hold additional meetings e.g. Licensing Sub-Committees. Other task and finish groups and advisory groups meet when required, and this can sometimes be several times over a short period.

The basic allowance paid to a councillor is a reflection of the time commitment required. The majority of meetings are held during normal office hours although this can change if necessary. Some meetings, including Full Council are typically held in the evening. Training sessions are typically held prior to or after the relevant committee for which the training relates or before full council meetings (especially training for all councillors such as statutory responsibilities etc.). Occasionally, training sessions are held during the working day but where possible, these times are avoided to allow for maximum attendance at training events. Meetings of the Full Council are held on weekday evenings.

12. Allowances

Each year, an Independent Remuneration Panel makes recommendations to council concerning the rates of allowances payable to councillors.

Basic allowances

The basic annual allowance payable from 1 April 2019 will be £4,118. The Independent Remuneration Panel normally reviews allowances on an annual basis. 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 and telephone costs. 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 in addition to the basic allowance e.g. a Chairman of a committee or members of the Cabinet.

Travelling and meal allowances

Councillors may claim travelling and meal allowances for certain approved duties, such as attending council meetings or attendance at meetings of outside bodies. The full list of approved duties is set out in the Members’ Allowance Scheme.

Childcare and dependent care

South Lakeland District Council also pays a dependent 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.southlakeland.gov.uk

13. More specific information on local government

**Local Government Association**
www.lga.gov.uk
The LGA exists to promote better local government

**National Association of Local Councils**
www.nalc.gov.uk
The national body for parish and town councils

**Department of Communities and Local Government**
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government

**Directgov**
www.gov.uk/

**Electoral Commission**
www.electoralcommission.org.uk/