

people like **you**...
stand for election



your community needs you!



Have **you** ever thought about becoming a councillor?

If you enjoy being involved and are ready to speak up and help make a difference on the issues that matter to your community – then you should consider being a councillor.

Councillors are the spokesmen and women champions of their areas, helping to resolve local issues and problems, listening to residents' views and making sure that people's opinions are heard at the highest levels.

The next elections for all 32 London boroughs are scheduled to take place in May 2010 and right now might just be the very best time to decide where you stand.

Voters in London will have the chance to elect a new tranche of local councillors to look after the needs and interests of the city's 7.5 million citizens over the next four years.

London's boroughs play a key role in their communities, delivering vital services such as education and social care to the capital's diverse and rapidly growing population. Being a councillor will give you a say in how well run and efficient our councils are and how effectively they meet local needs.



"We are surrounded by talented and successful people who would make great councillors. I would like to see more people come forward and take on the challenge."

Cllr Merrick Cockell, *Leader of the Royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Chairman of London Councils*

London and its councils

It is easy to understand just why the work of London's councils is so important. The capital is the powerhouse of the national economy, by far the UK's largest and most ethnically and culturally diverse city.

Yet alongside its great wealth and prosperity, London also has high levels of poverty and unemployment, with deprivation and social exclusion posing major challenges for its communities and local councils.

Between them London boroughs spend more than £13 billion a year on local services, with almost £8 billion a year supporting children's services, including schools and education, and a further £2.3 billion a year on social care for adults.

London's councils own and look after some half a million homes, repair and maintain 95 per cent of the city's roads and are responsible for the collection of household waste, cleaning the city's streets and a range of key environmental services, from the licensing of restaurants and consumer protection to processing planning applications and running libraries and museums. It is also London's local councils that pay £270 million a year to fund the popular Freedom Pass scheme, which enables more than a million older and disabled Londoners to travel free on buses, tubes and trains.

More than 300 languages are spoken in the capital, and almost a third of the population comes from black and minority ethnic groups. London is a young, vibrant city with more than a million pupils attending maintained primary and secondary schools and more residents aged between 20 and 40 than anywhere else in the UK.

London has a two-tier system of government with local borough councils in charge of delivering the important everyday services that keep the capital working, while at the regional level the Greater London Authority and Mayor of London have a more strategic role overseeing city-wide initiatives. The City of London has its own slightly different electoral system that reflects its role as a business and financial centre.

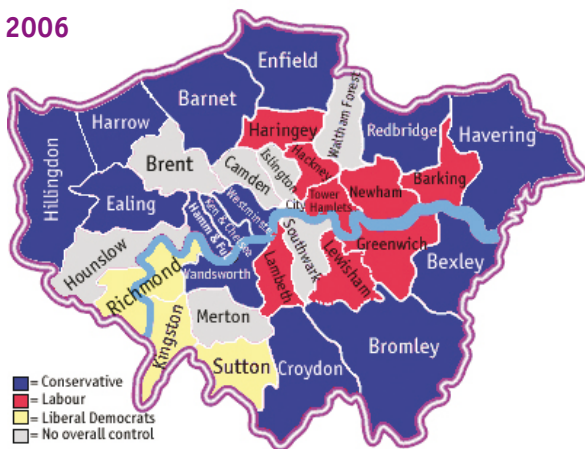
London boroughs are among the very best performing in the country – five out of England’s top 10 local authorities are in London and the overwhelming majority of its councils are described as excellent or good by the local government watchdog the Audit Commission.

The boroughs also enjoy higher levels of public satisfaction than other local authorities of the country with more than 70 per cent of Londoners describing them as ‘friendly’ and helpful and more than two thirds saying their councils ‘do a good job’.

Every four years Londoners elect a grand total of 1,861 councillors in the 32 borough councils that cover the capital.

The number of councillors in each borough varies slightly from a high level of 70 in Croydon and 69 in Ealing, to just 46 in Hammersmith and Fulham and 48 in Islington, though most councils have around 60 members.

Election map 2006



www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/londonlocalgovernment/londonelections/2006elections.htm

Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors make up the majority of elected members, though there are Green Party and other Independent councillors who represent residents.

Three London councils – Hackney, Lewisham and Newham - also have directly elected mayors and voters here have the opportunity of voting for them at the same time as their local ward councillors.



Bassam Mahfouz

“I was motivated to get involved in local politics by the idea that I could change things for local people. I still live in the area where I grew up; community is very important to me.

“There have been lots of small things that make the work as a councillor rewarding I have learnt so much and get to meet so many different people; being a councillor is so rewarding.”

Labour councillor, Northolt West End ward, Ealing

What councillors do

Councillors are elected to represent their communities and to make sure that residents’ opinions are heard on issues that matter to them.

Each borough is divided into wards and councillors are elected within their local ward, which is usually made up of three members.

Every council is responsible for the delivery of a wide range of services and a large part of their work is determined by central government, though the organisation of many services may depend very much on local spending decisions and priorities.

Local democracy is about people having a say on issues in their area and councillors are expected to act in the best interests of all their community. They are accountable to all their constituents, not just those who vote for them.

There are two main systems of political management within the boroughs with either the council leader or directly elected mayor working closely with a cabinet or executive made up of a small team of councillors who are responsible for overseeing the delivery of key services such as regeneration or children’s services.

The main role for the majority of councillors is to ‘oversee or scrutinise’ the work of the executive or cabinet members, to investigate issues of local concern, ask questions on how spending decisions are made and make recommendations on future improvements.

Across London there are many excellent examples of how effective scrutiny by councillors helps improve services and the quality of life for residents. If you want to learn more, this Capital Ambition weblink will help you find details.

www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/capitalambition/resourcesandperformance/bpcasestudies

Councillors should expect to be involved with the full range of decisions that affect residents, from planning and licensing applications to the organisation of schools, transport schemes and running of libraries and leisure facilities.

They also work closely with police, health and fire services through local strategic partnerships and with a number of different local organisations and voluntary groups.

Councillors meet on a regular basis as members of the council to debate and decide strategic policies and a member's precise role may well depend on their personal expertise and experience as well as special areas of interest.

Overall, however, the central purpose of being a councillor is to represent your neighbourhood in the decision-making of the council and to communicate council policy and decisions back to local people.



Abigail Lock

"Young people and women are under-represented - this was something I wanted to see changed. So I thought, instead of expecting others to take the lead I should start by putting myself forward.

"At 28 I'm the youngest councillor in Sutton. I think I add a valuable perspective and definitely feel I've had an impact. But there's no magic wand to wave; it's about changing people's attitudes, which takes time. I really want to encourage people to become councillors. It's challenging but definitely worth it. People need know that it's not an easy job but it's so rewarding."

Liberal Democrat councillor, Stonecot ward, Sutton

Holding local surgeries for your constituents is an important part of a councillor's work and members of political parties are also likely to be expected to attend group and ward meetings.

Local people have a number of ways in which they raise problems and concerns with their ward councillors – either at local surgeries or through letters, phone calls, emails, responses to leaflets and door knocking.

Some councillors may find they have relatively little casework while others find it very demanding, but casework is an important part of a councillor's work and can often inform new council initiatives or policy.

The amount of time taken up by work as a councillor may vary from just a few hours a week to several hours a day and will depend on the role you take and on the way in which your council has organised its management.

Your local council website is usually a good starting point to find out just how its business is arranged, the calendar of meetings it holds and the reports that inform its decision making.

Can I become a councillor?

All across London the search is on for the best and brightest people who have that special motivation and drive to come forward, stand as councillors and represent their communities. Women and men, young and older people, from different ethnic groups and all walks of life can all be – should all be - councillors.

There are no specific qualifications or experience that you need to become a councillor and almost anyone can take on the role.

The main requirement is that you want to be involved and help represent the interests of your local area. Whether it's the environment or local schools, or street lighting and speed humps, there are many local issues you may feel passionate about.

Being interested and concerned is clearly important, and it might just be that you have particular concerns about important issues and that you feel you have special skills or perhaps business expertise to contribute.

Many people already take on roles within their communities as school governors, or in neighbourhood or voluntary groups and many are already active members of local political parties or trade unions. Becoming a councillor may be just a logical next step for you to take.

You can become a councillor if:

- you are aged 18 or over
- you have property in or work connections within your local borough
- you are a UK, Commonwealth or European Union citizen or a citizen of the Irish Republic
- you are on the electoral roll in the council area.

Some people are disqualified from being councillors – for instance you should not work for the local authority you wish to be elected to, be subject to bankruptcy restriction orders or have served a prison sentence of three months or more within the last five years.

More detailed information on how to stand for election as a councillor is available from The Electoral Commission.

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/home



Krystal Miller

"I became involved in local politics initially because of problems with my refuse collections in my area.

"It's not really the big things that give the greatest satisfaction. Someone might come to me with what seems like a minor problem but for them it's a big issue and might be causing distress. There's an immense sense of satisfaction from helping people, doing what I can to make their lives a little better."

Conservative councillor, Trinity ward, Merton

Standards and behaviour

Once you are elected as a councillor and hold office you are in the public eye and accountable to the people who elect you.

Public confidence in the ethical conduct and probity of elected members is essential if local government and local democracy are to function effectively, but it may also mean that some details of your private life may also be subject to public and media attention.

All councillors must sign-up to a statutory Code of Conduct that sets out guidelines on the standards of behaviour that are expected of them and for all newly elected members this is an important part of their formal acceptance of office.

Every council has its own local standards committee to monitor behaviour and deal with complaints, while Standards for England is charged with overseeing the national effectiveness of these measures and, in exceptional cases, dealing with the more serious complaints.

The Code of Conduct makes a number of very general points, stressing for instance that all councillors should treat others with respect and:

- not do anything that seriously prejudices their authority's ability to comply with any of its statutory duties under equality laws
- not bully any person including other members, council staff or members of the public
- not intimidate or attempt to intimidate any person who may be a complainant or witness to any investigation or proceedings
- not compromise the impartiality of anyone who works for the local authority
- not disclose confidential information and not prevent others from receiving information they are entitled to.

It also stresses that councillors should not abuse their public position and should make proper use of their council's resources.

They are also expected to record all financial and other interests and the Code of Conduct also sets out rules governing disclosures of interest and withdrawal from meetings where the interests of members, such as in planning applications, may be discussed.

www.standardsforengland.gov.uk/CodeofConduct



Anjana Patel

"I got involved because I wanted the system to work better - for me and the many that would come after me. I wanted to make a difference for the local community. During the course of my career as a banker I realised that

a lot of good things can be done if committed professionals play an active role in public life. Every time I help someone it makes me feel good. I find it very rewarding."

Conservative councillor, Harrow West ward, Harrow

Allowances and expenses

London's councillors take on important and demanding tasks in representing their communities and they are entitled to a realistic level of financial support to help them in this work.

Each borough decides its own local scheme of allowances and expenses and these will vary to reflect the role and position of councillors.

There is an Independent Panel on the Remuneration of Councillors in London that oversees allowance schemes in all the boroughs and sets out a series of recommendations to help councils to make the final decisions on their local schemes.

Elected mayors and council leaders take on full-time highly demanding roles which the panel recognise are equivalent to that of Members of Parliament.

Many councillors spend more than 100 hours a month on council business, addressing concerns and issues raised by local constituents. While for the chairs of committees and senior cabinet or executive members it is not unusual to work around 150 hours a month on council business.

A majority of local councillors also have a full-time job and will need great skill to juggle the demands on their time to meet the demands of their work on the council and family commitments.

The Panel recognises that decent allowances and help with childcare or dependent care costs are important to encourage a wider range of people to stand for election.

It also stresses the importance of having different levels of support for councillors depending on the role they take, with job descriptions for different responsibilities from executive members to scrutiny committees and backbench members.

"People become councillors to serve the public. They do not do so for the money. But a reasonable level of allowances does enable people to serve as councillors who would otherwise be unable to do so."

Sir Rodney Brooke, Chair of the Independent Panel on the Remuneration of Councillors in London

www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/londonlocalgovernment/publications/remunerationofcouncillorsinlondon.htm

Training and support

As has already been stressed, London's borough councillors are responsible for multi-million pound budgets providing a range of vital services from social services and education to refuse collection and recycling.

Most people will already have a range of skills to help them take on the role of councillors, but London's boroughs all offer access to good quality training and technical expertise and recognise that this is an important support for good community leadership.

Information technology offers councillors a fast and efficient means of keeping in touch with the local community. It also gives access to the key information councillors need to influence or make decisions.

Secretarial and administrative support, computers and internet access both at home and in the town halls, help with publicity material for surgeries and other meetings can all help make a councillor's work more effective.

Like other organisations, local government has its own specialist language or jargon and if you are not absolutely confident about the difference between an LAA or an LSP or between a CPA and a CAA – help will be on hand, to translate into plain English.



Clarence Barrett

"I believe local communities are best served by people who know that community best and are able to take their decision-making directly from the people. Being a councillor is a great privilege and having the opportunity to shape, influence and respond to the needs of our community makes it a very worthwhile and rewarding experience."

Independent councillor, Cranham ward, Havering

Next steps and how to get elected

The next London borough elections are scheduled for Thursday, 6 May 2010

It may seem a long time away but if you are interested in standing for election now is a really good time to get started and find out exactly what you need to do.

If you are already a member of a political party there will be a timetable for shortlisting and selecting local candidates. In some areas this process may be underway, but you should check with your local constituency or ward organisers and make sure you get involved.

London Councils has political advisers for the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Party and you can contact them for help if you need advice or contact details (see page 15).

All the main parties are interested in attracting motivated people as election candidates - especially if you are from those groups that are often under-represented on local councils - maybe you are under 45, a woman or come from one of London's many ethnic communities.

But whether you stand for a political party or with a special interest or independent group there are precise rules governing elections that need your attention.

Every prospective candidate must complete the formal nomination papers, which are available from the local Returning Officer who is the person responsible for organising the elections in each borough.

The formal timetable for the elections begins 25 days before 6 May when nomination papers become available.

These must be signed by 10 people who are registered to vote in the ward where you intend to stand. No candidate can stand in more than one ward within the same council area.

Nomination papers must be returned 19 working days before polling day but you can check beforehand with returning officers.

Candidates representing a registered political party can use the party name and emblem but those not standing on behalf of a party can either say they are 'Independent' or use no description and cannot use an emblem.

Nomination papers can be rejected if details do not meet legal requirements but local election services will advise you on the appointment of agents, campaign literature and all other aspects of the process.



Mark Harrison

"It's been a great experience and I would recommend it to anyone. I was already interested and involved in my community and in local activities – so it seemed just the logical next step to put my name forward and stand for election."

Labour councillor, Prince's ward, Lambeth

Finance and expenses

No deposits are required for local council elections but there are guidelines on how much you can spend on a local election campaign.

An election expenses return detailing all money spent on the campaign must be returned within 35 days after the day the result of the election is declared.

These returns will be available for public inspection. Candidates must fund their election expenses from permissible sources.

Detailed guidance and advice is available from your local council's democratic or electoral services team as well as from The Electoral Commission's website at:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk

If you want to speak to somebody, you can contact one of the following:

London Councils contacts

Labour Party:

Sam Elliot, political adviser at London Councils.

Tel **020 7934 9521**, email sam.elliott@londoncouncils.gov.uk

For more information online visit:

www.labouronline.org/councillors

Conservative Party:

Barry MacLeod-Cullinane, political adviser at London Councils.

Tel **020 7934 9502**, email barry.mc@londoncouncils.gov.uk

For more information online visit:

www.conservativecouncillors.com

Liberal Democrat Party:

Laura Willoughby, political adviser at London Councils.

Tel **020 7934 9503**, email laura.willoughby@londoncouncils.gov.uk

For more information online visit:

www.bealibdemcouncillor.org.uk

Independent:

If you want to stand as a politically independent councillor, contact the Local Government Association's group for politically independent councillors

independent.group@lga.gov.uk, telephone **020 7664 3224**

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