

Becoming a District Councillor

representing your local community





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Councillors play a key role in the life of Hambleton - the 44 members serving on the District Council are a vital cog in making life better for its residents.

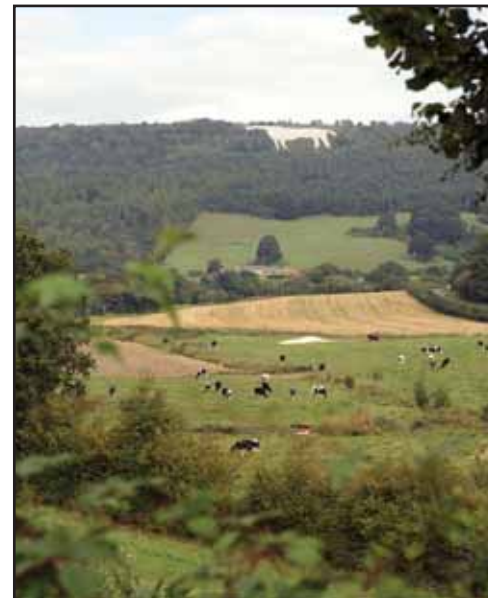
They are:

- the voice of the community representing local people
- the champions of the users of local services
- helping to shape future services for the benefit of local communities and people
- the lynchpin to partnership work with other authorities including the police, voluntary sector and health bodies
- looking after services which employ 480 staff and have a budget of £10.3 million a year

All the seats on Hambleton District Council are up for election in May 2011 giving you the perfect opportunity to get involved by standing as a representative of your community.

The process for election begins in March that year when a 'Notice of Election' will be published in public places across the district. It is at that point that anyone interested must formally submit nomination papers.

We hope that this booklet will help you make up your mind as to whether you would like to become a councillor - and if your answer is yes then it tells you what steps to take to make that become a reality.



Why become a councillor

People become councillors for all manner of reasons - for some it's a completely new direction to take. For others it is the next step after being a member of a parish council, school governing body, political party or trade union.

But most want to:

- make a difference to their local community and be involved in its future shape
- ensure that their area gets the services it deserves
- represent the views of local people and ensure that they are taken into consideration

No specific qualifications are needed to become a councillor - life experience is the best thing to bring to the role.

Its vital that members represent all sections of the community - we want to attract people from a broad range of backgrounds to stand as candidates.



Do I have to belong to a political party?

Membership of a political party is not necessary although many councillors are members of a political party. However some people stand for election as independents.

Hambleton has 44 councillors with the Conservative group currently in overall

control. The leader of the group is also leader of the Council.

In order to stand as a candidate for a political party you will need to be a member of that party's local branch - contact details are at the end of this booklet.

Who can become a councillor

To stand for election, on the day of nomination you must be:

- 18 or over
- a UK, EU or commonwealth citizen
- registered to vote in Hambleton or for the whole of the 12 preceding months have occupied - as owner or tenant - land or premises in the district
- working (principal employment) in Hambleton
- living in Hambleton

You cannot stand if you:

- work for Hambleton District Council
- hold a politically restricted post for another authority - such as North Yorkshire County Council
- are bankrupt
- have served a prison sentence (including suspended sentences) for three months or more within five years of the election
- have been disqualified under any legislation relating to corrupt or illegal practices
- are an alien - a person who is not a British Subject
- are of unsound mind
- have been surcharged in excess of £2000 by the auditor or court

Hambleton District Council

aims to... make the district a more attractive place for people to live, work and visit.

It is rated as an 'excellent' authority by the Audit Commission and through its Corporate Plan - the directions and priorities it will take are clearly defined.

Council priorities have been determined by theme - prosperity; health; safety; places; people and sustainable communities; and an excellent council. Each has a range of targets which will be measured and reported on on a regular basis.

The district has an excellent track record in achieving Beacon status for some of its services. Beacons are awarded by central government to recognise areas of good practice. Hambleton has been recognised for its community safety and sustainable planning work.

Finances

Hambleton operates a ten year financial strategy to give stability and direction to financial planning. The budget - which underpins the Corporate Plan and sets out the financial policies - is reviewed annually.



How decisions are made

Hambleton's 44 councillors are elected every four years and they meet together regularly as 'full' Council. These meetings are open to the public and are led by the Chairman of the Authority. He or she is appointed at the annual council meeting in May and serves one year.

The Council decides overall policies and sets the budget each year. It also appoints the Leader. The Leader appoints the Cabinet which develops and implements policies on behalf of the authority.

Cabinet members make decisions which are in line with overall policies and budgets. If it wishes to make a decision outside this framework that must be sent to full Council for ratification. Key decisions due to be taken are published in the forward plan.

Cabinet meetings are monthly - they are open to the public except where personal or confidential matters are being debated.

The Council's Scrutiny Committees monitor the decisions of Cabinet and the implementation of policies. They can also recommend policies to Cabinet and Council and are consulted

on developing policies. And they can also 'call - in' a decision made by Cabinet but not yet implemented - enabling them to consider whether it is the right decision to take.

The Council also has a Development Management Committee which deals with planning matters and a Licensing Committee which looks after liquor and taxi licensing. The Standards Committee advises on the adoption and implementation of a code of conduct for elected and co-opted members. All councillors agree to follow this code to ensure high standards are followed and maintained. The Audit and Governance Committee monitor financial matters and risks.

Area Forums

One of the main ways to engage with local residents and work with partners is through the Council's new Area Forums. Based around the five market towns - Northallerton, Easingwold, Bedale, Stokesley and Thirsk – the forums meet every three months. Chaired by councillors they encourage local people to take part and ask questions. They are open to everyone to attend.



What do councillors do?

Hambleton is split into 30 wards with each councillor elected to represent one of them. Roles can be very varied and to a great degree depend on the amount of time individuals give to the role.

A good deal of time will be taken up dealing with local people - this could be complaints or enquiries about Council work. Councillors represent their views on issues associated with the Council. Every councillor is a member of full Council and will also sit on some of the committees and working parties to debate and approve Council business. Most meetings are open to the press and public but all are governed by written 'procedure' rules.

Councillors have responsibilities to their wards, to the Council and to the community.

To the Council:

- Help form policy
- Help develop the budget and set Council tax levels
- Make and scrutinise decisions

To the ward:

- Represent the views of the community
- Ensure services are provided in the ward
- Try to secure resources for their patch
- Help out individual residents on specific issues

To the community:

Councillors are local leaders able to listen to their communities and bring

partners together to implement a shared vision of how they can improve their areas. Councillors have a key role to play in leading communities and working to resolve local issues through Hambleton's new system of Area Forums. The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) suggests there are two key elements to the role - leaders and advocates:

As leaders.....

- Stimulating local organisations and individuals to take up opportunities to express views
- Representing local concerns
- Maintaining a link between the users and providers of services
- Encouraging the community to organise services for themselves
- Working with other community leaders in the voluntary, community and business sectors
- Offering vision and direction to local groups and building support for that vision
- Brokering agreements between different interests and partners

As advocates...

- Speaking up for and on behalf of residents and groups
- Encouraging residents to engage and participate
- Taking part in plan making and planning decisions
- Communicating residents concerns to the Council and other providers

How much time is involved?

Each councillor will decide their own level of commitment to the role - and how much time they can devote to the job. It can be a matter of a few hours a day or a few hours a week - but it will depend on which committees they sit on.

Some of the issues to consider before committing to the role are:

- How being a councillor will impact on family and personal relationships - you will need their support as some of your free time will be occupied with Council business
 - The people you represent will look to you for help so expect more post, e mails and telephone calls - at all times of the day
 - You may need to spend some time visiting your constituents in their homes or at council offices. You may also need to meet Council officers to discuss key issues
 - There are six full Council meetings a year which you are expected to attend - meetings start at 2pm and last for up to two hours
 - You will be a member of at least one Committee or be on Cabinet - most meetings are held during the day and last around two hours. These meetings may not be spread evenly over a month so some weeks may need more time than others. For more information on the current year's meetings call Committee and Member Support Services on 01609 767015 or 767016
- Many councillors also represent the authority on outside bodies so there will be other meetings to attend
 - For most meetings background reading is essential before attending
 - If you are elected as chairman of a committee more work and time will follow
 - Many councillors attend meetings of their local Parish Councils on a regular basis
 - If you are a member of a political party there will be political group meetings to attend - usually in advance of council meetings
 - You may hold regular 'ward surgeries' with constituents



Allowances

There is no salary for being a councillor but there are allowances paid to reimburse time and expenses incurred while on council business.

Every Hambleton councillor is entitled to a basic allowance paid monthly along with additional payments to cover travelling and subsistence within the district. Some councillors also get additional allowances to cover special

responsibilities such as Cabinet members and scrutiny chairman. Childcare costs are also addressed.

For more information on members allowances check out www.hambleton.gov.uk - information on the new allowances will be available during the induction period after the 2011 elections.

Support

A range of support is offered to councillors:

- Information to help deal with ward matters and all other work done as a councillor will be provided by Council officers. Senior officers and the chief executive will also provide guidance
- The Committee and Member Support Services team provides full time dedicated support
- You will be supplied with council IT equipment for use at home as you will be expected to communicate electronically with the Council and the community
- You will be provided with your own website pages to publish information about your work as a councillor - you will be given training on how to edit these pages
- You will have access to fully equipped members rooms and meeting rooms based at the Council offices

Training

As a newly elected councillor you will go through an induction training period where you can attend several courses.

The training programme is decided by the Members and will include:

- An opportunity to meet senior officers
- Training courses on members allowances and support from committee services; local government finance; probity and integrity; ethical conduct; IT training; and website editing
- Information on the elected members mentoring scheme - link with an experienced councillor
- Links with a personal development plan to identify individual training needs
- Opportunities to attend seminars, workshops and training by other public bodies and local government organisations and authorities
- Scrutiny training

Members of political groups may also find there is support and training provided by the group.

Working around being a councillor

By law, if you are working your employer must allow you to take a reasonable amount of time off during working hours to perform your duties as a councillor. The amount of time depends upon your responsibilities and the effect it will have on your employer's business. This should be discussed before making the commitment to being a councillor.



Probity and Integrity

Councillors' conduct is formally governed by the Code of Conduct adopted by every authority. It sets out the rules members should work to. On election all councillors are required to sign the declaration of office and undertake to observe the code. Breaches may be considered by the Standards Committee.

They must work to make sure they do nothing to bring the Council into disrepute and not misuse their official position to their own advantage or the advantage of others

Councillors must also follow the general principles for England:

- **Selflessness** - members should serve only the public interests and should never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person
- **Honesty and Integrity** - members should not place themselves in situations where their honesty and integrity may be questioned, should not behave improperly and should on all occasions avoid the appearance of such behaviour
- **Objectivity** - members should make decisions on merit, including when making appointments, awarding contracts or recommending individuals for rewards or benefits
- **Accountability** - members should be accountable to the public for their actions and the manner in which they carry out their responsibilities and should cooperate fully and honestly with any scrutiny appropriate to their particular office
- **Openness** - members should be as open as possible about their actions and those of their authority, and should be prepared to give reasons for those actions
- **Personal judgment** - members may take account of the views of others, including their own political group, but should reach their own conclusion on the issues before them and act in accordance with those conclusions
- **Respect for others** - members should promote equality by not discriminating against any person and treat people with respect regardless of their race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability. They should respect the impartiality of the councils statutory officers and its employees
- **Duty to Uphold the Law** - members should uphold the law and on all occasions act in accordance with the trust that the public places in them
- **Stewardship** - members should do whatever they are able to do to ensure that their authority uses its resources prudently and in accordance with the law
- **Leadership** - members should promote and support these principles by leadership and by example and should always act in a way that secures or preserves public interest

Getting elected

Once you have decided to stand for election as a councillor you need to be proposed and seconded by two people and have a further eight people as assentors to your nomination. It is your responsibility - or that of your agents - to present nomination papers to the Returning Officer before the closing deadline.

Electoral Register

In the run up to the election candidates can have a free copy of the electoral register for the ward for which they are standing which lists residents who can vote at the next election and maps the ward boundaries.

Election Agents

You can take on this role yourself but it can be helpful to have an agent. Some political parties will supply agents - some take on the role for several candidates. It becomes the agent's responsibility to ensure all the forms are lodged at the correct times and to keep an accurate record of the financial expenditure which must be submitted after the election

Before completing the nomination form make sure you:

- Don't leave it until the last minute - your papers will need verifying so give yourself enough time to correct mistakes
- Take a copy of the voters list with you when collecting the ten signatures needed - this will enable you to compare the name with that on the nomination form and get their assentors number
- Read the nomination paper and supporting material carefully
- Make sure the people nominating and seconding you are only backing you and not several candidates

Full details of the nomination process is available from:

Electoral Section
Hambleton District Council
Civic Centre, Stone Cross
Northallerton DL6 2UU

0845 1211 555

elecrag@hambleton.gov.uk



Polling Stations and Counting Agents

You can nominate polling agents to go into polling stations to check that they are being run correctly. However they cannot ask the polling clerks who has and has not voted. Counting agents are nominated to oversee the counting process to ensure a fair and accurate count takes place

Election Expenses

If you decide to become a councillor it is important that a record of expenditure is kept. If you are a member of a political party there may be financial help available. Either way it's important that all receipts are retained as you will need to submit a statement of election expenses shortly after the election. This is to ensure that you do not spend over the laid down limit of £600 plus 5p for every voter in your ward.

Useful contacts

Hambleton District Council

Civic Centre
Stone Cross
Northallerton DL6 2UU

0845 1211 555
01609 767228
www.hambleton.gov.uk
info@hambleton.gov.uk

Chief Executive: Peter Simpson
01609 767001
Executive Director and Deputy Chief
Executive: Phil Morton
01609 767023
Executive Director and Deputy Chief
Executive: Liz Smith
01609 767043

Assistant Chief Executive: Sandra Walbran
01609 767235
Head of Legal Services: Martyn Richards
01609 767002

Committee and Member Support
Services: Jane Hindhaugh /
Louise Davis
01609 767015 / 767016
committeeservices@hambleton.gov.uk

Electoral Services Manager: Diane Henry
01609 767131
diane.henry@hambleton.gov.uk

Political Parties:

Conservative Party office
67 High Street
Northallerton
DL7 8EG
01609 772060

Liberal Democrats c/o Jackie Griffiths
42 Meadowfield
Stokesley
Middlesbrough
TS9 5HG
01642 711572

Labour
The Labour Party
Eldon House
Regent Centre
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE3 3PW
08705 900 200

Independent Group
c/o David Smith
Glenaire
Crakehall
Bedale DL8 1HS
01677 422908

Other political parties are accessible
through the Register of Political Parties
on the Electoral Commission's website

Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW
0207 271 0500
www.electoralcommission.gov.uk
info@electoralcommission.org.uk

Useful Local Government contacts

Local Government Association (LGA)
Local Government house
Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ
0207 664 3000
www.lga.gov.uk

Audit Commission
1 Vincent Square
London SW1P 2PN
0297 828 1212
www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Local Government Information Unit (LGIU)
22 Upper Woburn Place
London WC1H 0TB
0207 554 2800
www.lgiu.gov.uk

Improvement and Development Agency
(IdeA)
76 – 86 Turnmill Street
London EC17 5QU
0207 296 6600
www.idea.gov.uk/knowledge



Hambleton District Council

Civic Centre, Stone Cross, Northallerton, North Yorkshire DL6 2UU

Tel: 0845 1211 555 Fax: 01609 767228

www.hambleton.gov.uk