

Becoming a Councillor



A Guide for Prospective Councillors in Torrige

www.torrige.gov.uk



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TORRIDGE a great place to live, work and visit

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Becoming a Councillor - an introductory guide

Thank you for your interest in the work of Torridge District Council and in standing for election to be a Councillor.

Councillors play a crucial role in providing local leadership by representing local residents' views and making decisions as to how the area is managed. Local democracy depends on people like you getting involved. We hope the information in this pack helps you think through whether to become a Councillor, and that you might want to join us in the Council.

If you would like to talk with someone about becoming a Councillor, please contact Jon Walter, Corporate Services Manager on (01237) 428784, or Paula Hunter, Senior Democratic & Electoral Services Officer on (01237) 428702.

You can also find information about the work of the Council and elected members in particular on our website, www.torridge.gov.uk.

Thank you once again for your interest in being a Councillor.

Jenny Wallace
Head of Paid Service

If you require this information in another format, or in a language other than English, please contact the Senior Democratic & Electoral Services Officer on 01237 428702 or e-mail elections@torridge.gov.uk.

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Becoming a Councillor - an introductory guide

Could you do it?

**Interested in becoming a Councillor ...?
... then read on and find out what it's all about and how
you can stand for election.**

All of the 36 Torridge District Council seats are up for election in May 2015.

This offers you the perfect opportunity to stand as a representative of your local community and become a Torridge District Councillor (sometimes known as elected member).

We hope that this information pack will be of interest to anyone who is thinking of standing for election or wishes to know more about the role of the Councillor.

The local election process for Torridge District Council begins in March 2015 when a Notice of Election will be published in public places throughout the District.

If you are thinking about standing as a candidate you will have to formally submit your nomination papers. Information about the nomination process and what candidates need to do can be found later in this pack.

There are some exceptions which would disqualify you from standing as a Councillor; these are listed on page 6.

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About being a Councillor

What do Councillors do and why are they important?

Councillors provide local leadership to help make the areas they serve better places to live. They are involved in improving services to local people and checking that local areas are being managed effectively. They represent local people's views and concerns. They work with other bodies such as health services, police, businesses and voluntary and community groups to help achieve these aims. They take part in making important decisions affecting the whole of the District.

What skills and qualifications do I need?

No formal qualifications are needed - the most important skills that Councillors bring are those they have gained through life experience. Most people become Councillors because they have an interest in speaking on behalf of local people and making their voices heard, and improving aspects of local communities and services. Some Councillors have had previous experience of working with

their local communities. Others bring skills that they have gained through paid or voluntary work.

Do I have to belong to a political party?

People who are interested in becoming a Councillor do not have to belong to a political party. If you are a member of a political party you will have the support of your political group, but some Councillors prefer to stay completely independent.

However, to represent a particular party on Torridge District Council, you will need to be a member of that party.

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Who can become a Councillor?

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

- 18 or over *and*
- A UK, EU or commonwealth citizen.

You must also:

- have registered to vote in the district of Torridge *or*
- for the whole 12 months preceding, you must have occupied, as owner or tenant, any land or premises in the district of Torridge, *or*
- worked (as principal employment) in the district of Torridge *or*
- lived in the district of Torridge.

Disqualifications

Certain people are disqualified from being elected to a local authority. A person cannot be a candidate if at the time of their nomination or their election:

- they are employed by the local authority or hold a paid office under the authority (including joint boards or committees)

- they hold a politically restricted post
- they are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order
- they have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment of three months or more (including a suspended sentence), without the option of a fine, during the five years before election day
- they have been disqualified under Part III of the RPA 1983 (which relates to donations and other offences) or under the Audit Commission Act 1998.

A person may also be disqualified from election if they have been convicted or reported guilty of a corrupt or illegal practice by an election court, or if they have been disqualified from standing for election to a local authority following a decision of the Adjudication Panel for England.

Full details can be obtained from the Elections Office on 01237 428702.

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About Torrington District Council

Torrington District Council is a rural council within the north west of Devon.

The district is predominantly rural with the main towns comprising Bideford, Holsworthy and Great Torrington.

Almost half of the population live in or close to Bideford and Northam with the remainder of the area fairly sparsely populated. The district is divided into 23 Wards. Some major services such as further education and hospitals lie outside of the district.

The district comprises 984 sq km (380 sq miles) and has a high quality natural and built environment. The coastline, historic towns, nature reserves and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are valuable assets. As quality of life and environment becomes an ever more important factor in choosing where to live it is likely that population growth in Torrington will continue. In the 2011 census Torrington had a total population of 63,839

The net revenue budget for the Council for 2014/15 for services provided to the public was £8.255m.

Torrington provides a large number of services that you will be required, as an elected member, to make important decisions on.

- Were you aware that Torrington District Council manages the Bideford Harbour?
- The Council has a property portfolio which includes a variety of land and property assets including Managed Commercial land and industrial estates, offices, depots, car parks, cemeteries, play areas, public conveniences, woods and amenity land.
- For a complete list of services that Torrington provides you can log onto our website – www.torrington.gov.uk
- In 2013/14 the average Band D Council Tax in Torrington was set at £1,539.40 of which Torrington only keep about 9%. The rest go to:

Devon County Council	72%
Police Commissioner	11%
Fire and Rescue	5%
Town & Parish Councils	3%

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How is the Council made up politically?

The representation of Councillors between the political groups is as follows:

Conservatives	16
Independents	10
Liberal Democrats	4
Non Aligned	<u>6</u>
	36

(As at July 2014)

Our Strategic Goals:

- Developing a Prosperous & Sustainable Economy
- Stronger, Safer, Healthier Communities
- Protecting and Enhancing our Quality Environment
- An Effective and Customer Focused Council

Torrige District Council's vision is:

TORRIDGE - a great place to live, work and visit

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How the Council works

In addition to elected members, there are a number of non-elected representatives who sit on our Standards, Overview & Scrutiny and Audit Committees.

In the interests of openness and accountability Parish and Town Councils play an important role on the Standards Committee.

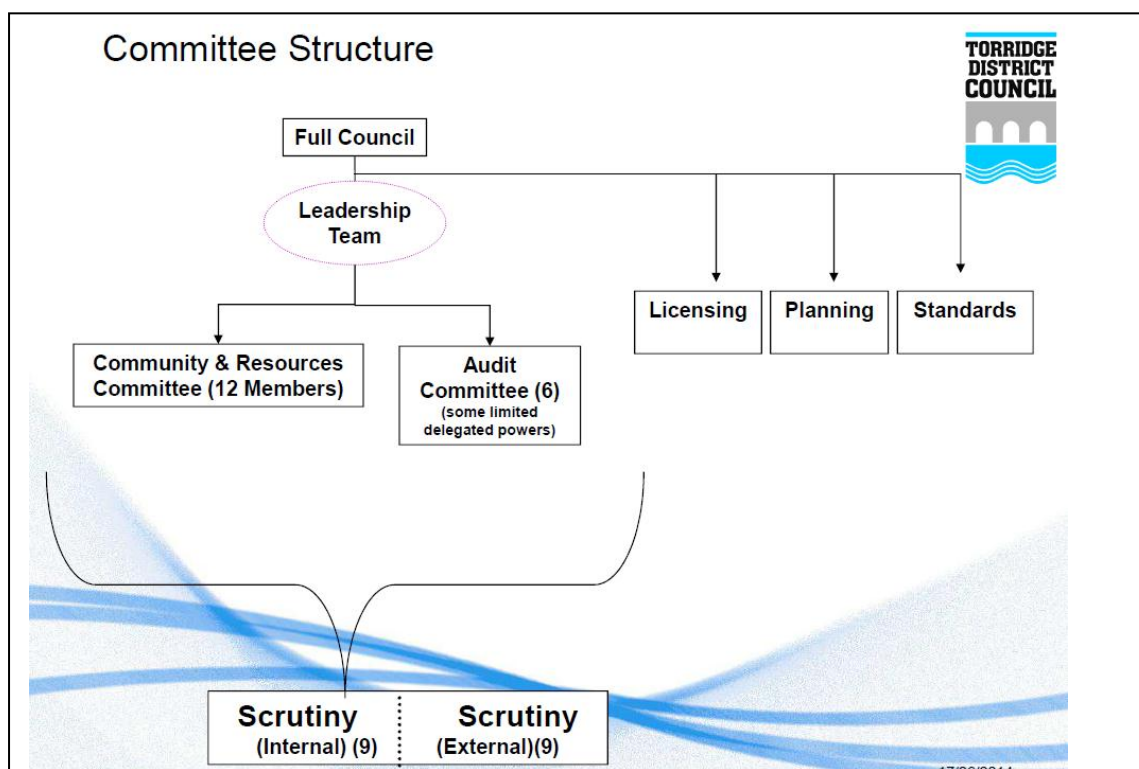
With effect from the 2010/11 the Council established the Community & Resources Committee as its main decision making committee. In addition, the Council operates the following committees:-

- Two Overview & Scrutiny Committees (one internal and one external);
- Audit & Governance Committee;
- Plans Committee;
- Licensing Committee;
- Standards Committee; and
- A Joint Crematorium Committee

Lead Members are elected members who act as an advocate or spokesperson for a Key Theme of the Council's business. The main responsibility of each Lead Member is to encourage communication and positive action over the issue they represent.

Torrige currently has seven Lead Members:

- Lead Member for the Natural & Built Environment
- Lead Member for Recycling, Refuse Collection & Street Cleaning
- Lead Member for Communities
- Lead Member for the Torrige Economy
- Lead Member for Homes & Housing
- Lead Member for Health and Community Safety
- Lead Member for Internal Resources



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What do our current Councillors say?

Philip Collins

Leader of the Council



Eleven years ago I stood up and won my first election, it has been quite an experience since that day. I have served on many committees in that time and now ended up as Leader, and all that as an Independent Member.

I cannot say I enjoyed my first year or two, it was so different and confusing, but as your experience increases you get to know what you can do, how you can help influence policy and decision making and generally be useful to TDC as a Member.

If you have the interest of your community at heart and just want to try and make a difference then please stand, we want capable willing people to help make decisions about TDC's future. We may disagree at a meeting, that's healthy debate, but we leave those disagreements at the table and walk out friends.

Gaye Tabor

Environment - Lead member



You have been elected, you have a passion, or a mission or you just agreed to stand, your work starts now. You have been voted in by your electorate in your ward. Those residents matter. Their views are important. You are now representing all of those residents.

There will be a Parish Council to attend and listen to what is important to that community. You may have more parishes in your ward. I have four. They all have different views and goals. This is your local role, but you are also a District Councillor and that means you have to expand your role to include the whole of Torridge and its residents. You will be making important decisions which will affect the district for years to come. You have this responsibility for the next four years, use it wisely. It is time consuming, it can be frustrating but it can also be very rewarding, enjoyable and satisfying. You can make a difference.

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The role of Councillor

What responsibilities do Councillors have?

Councillors are elected to represent a number of local residents in an area called a ward. The average population of a ward is 2154 and all but eight in Torridge has one Councillor. The role of a Councillor can be very varied and it is up to each individual Councillor how they work, although there are a range of types of activity that Councillors get involved in. Councillors have responsibilities to their ward, to the Council and to the community.

Ward responsibilities could include:

- listening to and representing the views of residents to make sure services are run effectively in their ward
- trying to secure extra resources for their ward
- helping out individual ward members on specific issues, known as 'casework'.

As a Councillor you will find that much of your time is taken up by contact with local people. This could be in the form of dealing with complaints or enquiries. Your role will be to listen, explain Council policy and make sure that the policy has been carried out fairly, according to official procedures. You will get help and support from Council officers to deal with constituents' enquiries and complaints.

As a ward representative you can represent views and issues associated with the Council on constituents' behalf.

Council responsibilities include:

- representing the whole District
- helping to form policy
- helping to develop the Council's budget and agreeing the level of council tax
- making or scrutinising decisions.

Your role on the Council as a whole is to plan, run, monitor and develop Council business. Councillors are essential to deciding what is in the public interest amidst a range of conflicting issues and views.

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How great a commitment will it need?

It is for you to decide the level of commitment you are able to give to being a Councillor. It also depends on your role within the Council and the number of duties you decide to take on. It could range from a few hours each week to a few hours each day at busier times.

There are some issues you will need to consider.

- How will your role as a Councillor affect your family and personal relationships? You will need their support and understanding as you may be spending some of your spare time on Council business.
- It is a fundamental requirement of the role that Councillors work from home as well as the Council offices to effectively serve their constituents' interests. Office facilities at the Council offices are limited and Councillors receive an annual allowance to purchase IT equipment to facilitate home working.
- The people you represent will look to you for help in dealing with their problems. You are likely to receive a lot of post, emails and a great many telephone calls, and not every caller will telephone at what you might think is a reasonable hour!
- You may spend some of your time visiting constituents at their homes, or at the Council offices, and you may also have to meet with officers of the Council to help you with any issues.
- There are usually eight full Council meetings each year, which you will be expected to attend.
- You are likely to be a member of at least one committee. Your meetings may not be evenly spread out over the cycle, so some weeks you may be out more evenings than others.
- The average length of a committee meeting is approximately three hours, but this could vary. Some are evening meetings, some are held in the daytime.
- Many Councillors also represent the Council on one or more outside bodies. Background reading and attendance at meetings of these bodies would increase your time commitment.
- For most of the meetings you attend there will be papers that you will need to read beforehand. These papers can be quite detailed and take time to read and understand.

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- If you are a member of a political party there will be additional calls on your time. Political groups require the members to attend group meetings, which are normally held in advance of Council meetings, and you may also attend training events and seminars, organised by the political party.
- inspiring and leading the senior management team and Council staff in delivering the Council's vision
- acting as an ambassador of the Council
- determining and publicising the structure and staffing of the Council.

You will receive a lot of information as a Councillor: managing this and prioritising it will be important if you want to make an impact and not spread yourself too thinly.

It is worth remembering that the officers employed by the Council are there to provide you with briefings and help on specific issues.

The roles of the Head of Paid Service and the Council's Monitoring Officer are particularly important.

The Head of Paid Service is responsible for the following:

- managing the Council effectively
- providing advice to group leaders and the Council as a whole and, where appropriate, individual Councillors in relation to identifying and developing strategic policy objectives and priorities

The Monitoring Officer in Torridge is the Council's Senior Solicitor and is responsible for the following:

- maintaining the Constitution
- ensuring the lawfulness and fairness of decision making
- ensuring high standards of conduct through support to the Standards Committee, receiving reports and conducting investigations
- ensuring access to information
- providing advice to all Councillors on the scope of powers and authority to take decisions, maladministration, financial impropriety, probity and budget and policy framework issues.

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What support will I get?

What support will I receive if I am elected?

Information to help you deal with ward matters and other work you do as a Councillor will be provided by officers of the Council, but it is more likely that help and guidance on your role will come from the senior officers, including the heads of service.

If you need any other help or assistance after you have been elected, don't be afraid to ask.

Will I get any training?

During 2010 the Council was awarded Charter Status for its Member Development. This accolade evidences the Council's firm commitment to supporting its elected members.

Officers will work closely with you to develop a Personal Development Plan to your specific training and development needs and help you develop the competencies required to be an effective 21st century Councillor.

A pack containing useful information will be provided and our Democratic Services team will be on hand to

answer questions and provide general support and guidance throughout your term in office.

Will I get time off work?

If you are working, by law 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 will depend on your responsibilities and the effect of your absence on your employer's business. You should discuss this with your employer before making the commitment.

Will I get paid for duties as a Councillor?

Councillors receive an annual basic allowance which is currently £4568 per annum and is paid monthly. A 21st century Councillor is expected to embrace modern technology and be accessible via email and have access to the internet. An ICT allowance is paid towards this personal provision.

Councillors are also entitled to claim travelling expenses and subsistence for expenses incurred while on Council business. Special responsibility allowances are also paid where appropriate.

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I'd like to be a Councillor. What do I do next?

Nominations

Once you have decided to stand for election as a Councillor, you will need to be proposed and seconded by two people and have a further eight people as 'assentors' to your nomination.

Full details of the electoral process, including the nomination procedure, is available on request from the Council's Senior Democratic & Electoral Services Officer, Paula Hunter, on 01237 428702.

The nomination pack will include nomination forms, timetables and guidance notes. The timetable for the next local election is available on request.

It is your responsibility, or your agent's (see next page), to present your nomination papers to the returning officer before the statutory deadline.

A prospective candidate briefing will be held in Jan/Feb 2015. Please contact the election team on 01237 428702 if you would like to be informed of the date of the briefing, once set.

Nomination Forms

Some points you should consider:

- Nomination packs will be available in March 2015 and must be completed and returned by 4pm on 9th April 2015.
- All Nomination Papers must be hand delivered by the candidate or agent to Riverbank House, Bideford.
- Do not leave this task until the last minute, as there may be a mistake in your papers and you will need time to rectify this.
- It is important to read the nomination papers and supporting material and make a careful note of when each of the various papers needs to be returned. The returning officer can help with any queries.

Nomination Register

In the run up to the election, candidates are entitled to a nomination register for the ward for which they are standing, which lists residents who can vote at the next election and includes a map showing the ward boundaries.

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The Deputy Returning Officer is Paula Hunter – 01237 428702.

Do I need an election agent?

You do not have to have an election agent - you can take on this role yourself - but most people standing for election find that having an agent is a great help.

It is the agent's responsibility to make sure that all the necessary forms are sent in at the correct times, and to keep a clear and accurate record of financial expenditure, to be submitted after the election.

If you are in a political party, it's quite common to share an election agent with several other candidates.

Election expenses: who pays?

If you decide to become a Councillor, it is important to note that you will have to pay for your own publicity material, property, services or items used for your election campaign.

However, if you are a member of a political party or some other group, you may find that it will provide some financial help with your campaign. You will need to check this with your political party or group.

Furthermore, although you or your party or group pays your election expenses, you must keep all your receipts. You will need to submit a statement of election expenses, supported by receipts shortly after the election. This is done to make sure that the money you spend on the election campaign does not go over the limit set by the Electoral Commission which is £740 + 6p¹ per elector within the ward you are standing.

If you have any queries about election expenses please contact the Senior Democratic & Electoral Services Officer on 01237 428702.

1 – Candidate election spending limits amended on 1 August 2014

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Useful contacts

Contacts at Torridge District Council

Main Switchboard

01237 428700

www.torridge.gov.uk

Head of Paid Service

Jenny Wallace

01237 428701

jenny.wallace@torridge.gov.uk

Senior Solicitor & Monitoring Officer

Jamie Hollis

01237 428701

jamie.hollis@torridge.gov.uk

Senior Democratic & Electoral Services Officer

Paula Hunter

01237 428702

paula.hunter@torridge.gov.uk

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Local government useful contacts

Local Government Association (LGA)

Local Government House
Smith Square
LONDON SW1P 3HZ
0207 664 3000
www.lga.gov.uk

Devon Association of Local Councils

First Floor
3 & 4 Cranmere Court
Lustleigh Close
Matford Business Park
EXETER EX2 4PW
01392 2489194
www.devonalc.org.uk

Electoral Commission

South West of England Team
0300 0683386
www.electoralcommission.org.uk

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Political Party useful contacts

CONSERVATIVE

Local

01409 254931

office@westdevonconservatives.com

National

www.conservatives.com

INDEPENDENT

Head of Independent Group

Local Government Association (LGA)

Local Government House

Smith Square

LONDON SW1P 3HZ

Tel: 0207 664 3224

Independent.group@lga.gov.uk

www.picx.co.uk

GREEN

Local

01805 628256

ruth.funnell@btinternet.com

National

www.greenparty.org.uk

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

Local

01237 422032

organiser@twdd.org.uk

National

www.libdems.org.uk

LABOUR

South West

01179 729446

southwest@new.labour.org.uk

National

www.labour.org.uk

UKIP

Local

07868 728688

Derekmarj241@btinternet.com

National

www.ukip.org.uk

If you are interested in other political parties, please visit the Electoral Commission's website for the Register of Political Parties.

www.electoralcommission.org.uk

The Electoral Commission site also includes information on local elections including a guide for candidates and agents.