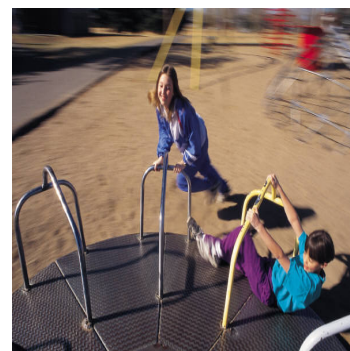




# Standing as a Borough Councillor



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If you are reading this, then chances are you've thought about standing for election as a Councillor. So, what does the term 'Councillor' mean for you? How much time will you have to spend on Councillor duties? How will it affect your day to day life? What sort of issues will you be able to tackle? Will you receive any training? This booklet aims to answer these questions.

Swale Borough Council has 47 Councillors who represent 25 wards in the Borough. Depending on its size each ward has between one and three Councillors. Councillors are elected in thirds meaning a regular election of 15/16 Councillors in rotation is held, usually on the first Thursday in May, every three out of four years. County Council elections are held on the remaining year of the four year cycle. Town and Parish Council elections are held in conjunction with one of the Borough Council election years. Each Borough Councillor serves a four year term.

**In 2009 there will be Kent County Council and European Parliamentary elections. The next Borough Council elections will be in May 2010.**

### **Wards in Swale up for election in 2010**

<b>Ward</b>	<b>Current Councillor for the Ward</b>
Abbey	Mulhern, B. (C)
Chalkwell	Truelove, R. (L)
Grove	Randall, G. (C)
Hartlip, New'ton and Upchurch	Lewin, G. (C)
Kemsley	Simpson, B. (C)
Minster Cliffs	Pugh, K. (C)
Murston	Tomes, M. (LD)
Queenborough & Halfway	Garside, D. (C)
Roman	Clark, S.D. (L)
Sheerness East	Ellen, M. (L)
Sheerness West	Harrison, A. (L)
Sheppey Central	Morris, J.C. (C)
St Ann's	Cosgrove, M.R. (C)
Teynham & Lynsted	Fentiman, T. (C)
Watling	Davis, Mrs C. (C)
Woodstock	Willicombe, A.T. (C)
TOTAL	16
	11 Conservative (C) 4 Labour (L) 1 Liberal Democrat (LD)

### **Political composition at Swale Borough Council 2007/2008**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Number Of Seats</b>
Conservative	28
Labour	10
Liberal Democrats	5
Independent Group	4
Total Seats:	<b>47</b>

Candidates can stand for a political party or as an independent member. In order for a new political party to be established there must be a minimum of two candidates elected to sit on the Council.

## **Introduction**

### A Councillor's Role in the Community - Community Leadership

As the main contact for Council issues within your Ward, it is essential that your residents know who you are and are able to contact you. The profile of Councils' and the degree of respect the public has for them, has been on the decrease, so a fresh focus on the community leadership role provides opportunities to give local communities more influence. Councillors need to be in touch with *all* parts of their communities, including parishes and neighbourhoods, local organisations and partners, young people and the elderly and minority ethnic groups.

Local people want to know that the people they elected to represent them are doing so. This can involve speaking out for local people on major issues that impact on the community - like planning applications and school closures and acting on behalf of specific groups or individuals.

The Council website ([www.swale.gov.uk/dso](http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso)) has information on every Council Committee, agenda, minutes and reports, Parish Clerk information, Borough Councillors, Kent County Councillors and Member for Parliament's details and the Council meetings diary.

### Casework

The problems and issues people raise with Councillors are known as casework. Casework will come through surgeries, letters, phone calls, e-mails, responses to leaflets, door knocking and ward walks. Some Councillors will find that there is relatively little casework while others may have loads!

### Building relationships and useful contacts

The job of a Councillor is not to be the Council's advocate in the community, but to be the community's advocate in the Council. Representation involves building relationships with individuals and groups, to inform, consult and empower residents and to facilitate effective community involvement in local government.

The principal job of a Councillor is to represent the Ward, but the task of representing a diverse and mobile mix of communities, groups and individuals is a complex one. Some groups are very hard to involve, so the wider your range of approach to contact with the community, the more people you will reach.

### The Constitution and Standing Orders

The Council has a set of 'rules' or Standing Orders which are contained within its Constitution. These explain the procedural rules the Council must follow, some of which are compulsory by law. They provide rules that Councillors must follow during Council meetings, regarding voting, speaking, acceptable behaviour and declaring interests.

A representative from Democratic Services will be in attendance at each meeting and they are able to provide advice on Standing Orders. Further advice can be sought from the legal department or the Monitoring Officer.

### Code of Conduct

As a Councillor there are a number of rules and guidelines that you must consider. The Members' Code of Conduct, which can be found at Part 5 of the Council's Constitution, outlines these protocols.

At the start of each civic year every Councillor is required to sign the Member's Interests Register. This form covers a range of personal interests, for example employment, ownership of property and membership of other organisations. This information is held by the Monitoring Officer and can be viewed by members of the public on request.

Councillors are required to declare at each meeting if they have an interest in any item on the agenda. There are two types of interest:

i) Personal - You have a personal interest if the issue being discussed in the meeting affects the well-being or finances of you, your family or your close associates more than most other people who live in the area affected by the issue. Personal interests are also things that relate to an interest you must register (see above - Members Interests Register).

ii) Prejudicial - Prejudicial interests are personal interests that affect you, your family, or your close associates in the following ways:

- their finances, or regulatory functions such as licensing or planning which affect them
- and which a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of the facts would believe likely to harm or impair your ability to judge the public interest

If you have a prejudicial interest you must not debate or vote on a regulatory or financial matter, but you do have the same right to speak as a member of the public e.g. at Planning Committee.

There are exemptions to both types of interests and when they must be declared. Advice can be sought before meetings from the Monitoring Officer or Democratic Services. Detailed guidance is also available from the Standards Board for England.

### Gifts and Hospitality

Councillors are required to register any gifts or hospitality received worth £25 or over, in connection with their official duties as a Member, within 28 days of receipt. You automatically have a personal interest in a matter if it relates to or is likely to affect the source of the gift or hospitality that is registered; this applies for a maximum of three years from receipt.

### Council Representatives on Outside Bodies

Various local organisations and groups request that the Council appoints a representative to sit on their Committees. As a Councillor you may be asked to do this, which would mean attending additional meetings and also producing an annual report to Council, regarding the work that you have done in relation to that Outside Body.

Outside bodies currently include, amongst others, Age Concern, Citizens Advice Bureau, Swale Housing Association, Swale Road Safety Association and Swale Sports Council.

## **General**

### Members' Allowances

As a Councillor you would receive a yearly basic allowance, which is paid monthly. You are also able to claim a mileage and subsistence allowance for most Council meetings attended. The rates and criteria for Members' Allowances are found in the Members' Allowances Scheme in the Constitution. Allowances are designed to cover expenses incurred through your role as a Councillor; they are not intended as a salary.

If you would like any information on how claiming Members' Allowances could affect the receipt of any benefits please contact Democratic Services (contact details below). In addition, the following help lines will be able to provide detailed guidance on your particular circumstances.

General benefits advice – 0800 88 22 00

Income Support – 0845 608 8501

Members are also paid a yearly I.T. allowance to assist with the costs of computer usage. To qualify for the I.T. allowance Councillors must provide an e-mail address.

### Time Commitment

This will vary between Councillors and it is up to the individual to decide how much time they can allocate to their duties as a Councillor. You will agree within your group the committees on which you will serve at the start of the civic year. The majority of official Council meetings are held at 7pm, although you may be required to attend a number of meetings at different times depending on the committees you serve on and the types of duties you undertake.

## Time off from work

You are allowed time off if you are a member of a local authority\*. If you qualify\*\*, you're allowed reasonable time off to go to meetings or to carry out your duties. The time must be agreed with your employer beforehand and your employer can refuse your request if it is unreasonable. A specific amount of time off is not laid down in law.

\*For the purpose of this provision 'local authority' means: in England and Wales, a county or county borough council, a district council. A London borough council, or a parish or community council.

\*\*Time off for public duties won't be available if you're an agency worker, a member of the police service or armed forces, employed on a fishing vessel or a civil servant whose public duties are connected to political activities restricted under the terms of your employment.

Whether your time off is classed as 'reasonable' depends on:

- what the duties are
- the time needed to carry them out
- the impact on your employer's business
- how much time off you have already had for public duties

Your employer doesn't have to pay you while you take time off for public duties, although many do. Your contract of employment will normally say whether you're paid for this time off. If you have public duties you should let your employer know how long you'll need off and what arrangements need to be made for cover in your absence. If your employer stops you taking time off for public duties you should first of all follow the grievance procedure outlined in your contract.

For further information and useful links, please go to:

[www.direct.gov.uk/Employment/Employees/WorkingHoursAndTimeOff](http://www.direct.gov.uk/Employment/Employees/WorkingHoursAndTimeOff)

## **What support will I receive as a Councillor?**

If you wish to stand for a political party then you will receive help and advice from them. Once elected Democratic Services assist the Councillors with general enquiries, member training and administer the Council's committees. Councillors have access to a Members' Room and can book any meeting room within the Council. If you are elected for a political party then you will also have access to a Group Room.

## Training

On elections night elected Councillors will receive an induction pack outlining the dates and times of induction sessions. The sessions will be an opportunity for Councillors to meet Management Team, Officers and other Councillors. You will receive a brief introduction to the Council and how it operates and also receive a more comprehensive induction pack containing lots of useful information and contact numbers. Tours of the Council offices are held at the start of the session and there will be displays showing the work of the different service units.

Swale Borough Council has a comprehensive training package for Members. Ad-hoc and individual training sessions can be arranged, depending on individual needs throughout the year. Suggestions are always welcome and can be given to your Member Development Working Group representative or Democratic Services.

These are some of the training sessions held during 2007/08:

- Dealing with the Media
- Examining the Council's Budget and Finances
- The Council's Constitution, Code of Conduct and Standards Issues
- Planning Training (compulsory for Planning Committee Members)
- Global Warming, Climate Change and Sustainability

Member briefings are also held to inform Councillors about issues affecting the Borough, for instance, Learning and Skills, Police restructuring and Housing.

As with meetings, the majority of training sessions and briefings are arranged for a 7.00 pm start.

### **Applying to be a Councillor**

To apply to be a councillor, you will need to submit a nomination form and a consent form. These can be obtained from Electoral Services in March 2008. There is no charge to stand as a Councillor in Borough Council elections.

The form will explain in detail the requirements that you need to meet to stand as a councillor. To summarise you need to meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Be on the electoral register in the Borough of Swale.
- For the 12 months before your nomination, have occupied as an owner, or tenant, land or other premises in Swale.
- For the 12 months before your nomination, your main or only place of work has been in Swale.
- For the 12 months before your nomination, you have lived in the Swale area.

You will also need to get your nomination paper signed by a proposer, a seconder and 8 other people who are on the electoral register for the area.

There are restrictions on the number of papers that an individual can sign, so it is important that you get your nomination papers in early to Electoral Services.

More information about standing as a candidate at local government elections can be found on the Electoral Commission website: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

For nomination papers and queries regarding the elections process, please contact:

Electoral Services  
Swale Borough Council  
Swale House, East Street  
Sittingbourne, Kent  
ME10 3HT

01795 417558

[electors@swale.gov.uk](mailto:electors@swale.gov.uk)

If you have any queries regarding this document, please contact either Katherine Bescoby (Democratic & Electoral Services Manager) or Jo Hammond (Senior Democratic Services Officer) at:

Democratic Services  
Swale Borough Council  
Swale House, East Street  
Sittingbourne, Kent  
ME10 3HT

01795 417330

[democraticservices@swale.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@swale.gov.uk)

Further information can be found on the following websites:

I&DeA: [www.idea.gov.uk](http://www.idea.gov.uk)

DirectGov: [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

Electoral Commission: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)