

# Could I be a District Councillor?



## **Introduction**

Wychavon District Council is made up of 45 Councillors who represent 32 wards. Wards are groups of Parishes or areas in the Towns, where each Councillor represents about 2,500 people.

The Councillors are elected every four years, with the next elections in May 2011. If a vacancy occurs during the four year period a by-election is usually held to maintain the membership of 45 Councillors.

## **What does Wychavon Council do?**

Wychavon is responsible for the following main services in the District:

- refuse collection
- recycling
- parks
- planning
- car parking
- environmental health
- housing benefits
- sports and leisure services . although the leisure centres are run by an independent Trust.



Whilst the Council still runs some services directly, many services are run through shared arrangements with other Councils or are contracted out to the private sector or other organisations. In 2010, the Council spent £6m on contracted services, £3m on shared services, £1m on joint working and £5m on directly providing services.

## **Who can be a Councillor?**

You can stand for election for Wychavon District if:

- you are over 18
- you are a British, Commonwealth, Irish or European Union citizen
- you are registered to vote in the Wychavon District or you have lived, worked or owned a property in the District for at least 12 months.

You cannot stand for election if:

- you are bankrupt
- you have been sentenced to 3 or more months in prison in the last 5 years (up to the date of the election)
- you have been disqualified for corrupt and illegal practices

- you are an employee of Wychavon District Council or if you hold a politically restricted post in any Council.

If you meet the requirements you could also stand for election as a County Councillor in Worcestershire and for your local parish or town council.

### **Do I have to join a Political Party?**

You do not have to belong to a political party to stand for election, although most many people choose to do so. The parties generally have officers to support candidates through the election process.

You may decide to stand as an Independent candidate with no political affiliation.

In its work, the Council recognises political groups, which are not necessarily the same as the political parties. The relative sizes of the groups are used to help allocate seats on committees to Councillors after the election and the group process may also be used for informal consultation about issues before they come to more formal meetings of the Council.

You may find the following websites helpful for more background information about being a Councillor:

[www.beacouncillor.org.uk](http://www.beacouncillor.org.uk)

<http://www.21st.cc>

### **What do Councillors Do?**

Councillors have many roles, which vary between individuals depending on their interests, talents, the area they represent and time available.

Councillors make decisions about how local services are provided, the level of Council tax and how this and money from Central Government is spent.

Councillors represent their communities both in the work of the Council itself and to other organisations. All 45 Councillors make decisions together in meetings of the Council to agree how services should be run and to decide the budget for the Council.

The Council has agreed an outline role description which shows the expectations on Councillors. A copy is enclosed at the end of this document.

### Councillors Represent their Residents:

Every Councillor is expected to represent their residents, whether or not they voted for them. To be able to do this you will need to:

- keep yourself up-to-date with what is going on in your area
- represent your community to the District Council and other organisations
- be able to be contacted by your residents, ideally in a number of ways eg telephone, email
- liaise with Parish and Town Councils in your area and with other local groups and societies
- keep residents informed about the Council and your work.

Residents will expect you to help with their problems, which may not always be about the District's work. You will need to be prepared to learn about who to contact to help resolve issues.

### Councillors Influence others on behalf of their Residents:

Many services are not run by Wychavon, but Councillors will work with other organisations as part of representing their residents. Examples are: housing associations, voluntary organisations, the health services and the Leisure Trust. As well as the County Councillor and Parish Councillor for their ward, the Council may also appoint Councillors to outside bodies to be a liaison point for the services they provide.

### Councillors make Decisions:

All 45 Councillors meet as the Council 5 or 6 times a year, to make major decisions. For example, the Council:

- agrees its budget
- sets the Council tax
- decides the policies about how services are run
- appoints a Chairman to run the Council meetings and represent the Council in the community
- appoints a Leader who chairs the Executive Board, which decides how services will run to carry out Council policies;
- appoints Committees such as Planning and Licensing, to carry out services.

Some Councillors enjoy being active on one or more Committees or small working groups. You do not have to have any special qualifications or knowledge to be able to take part in these. However, all Councillors are expected to learn more about the work of the groups they are on and the Council trains and supports all Councillors in this. The Council's officers also help deal with queries and case work that Councillors may have.

Meetings involving Councillors where decisions are made are usually open to the public. Most are held at 6.15 pm in the Civic Centre. Planning Committee meets during the day. More details about our meetings are on our website at <http://www.e-wychavon.org.uk/modern.gov/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>

### Councillors Code of Conduct

The way Councillors carry out their role is governed by law and by a Code of Conduct. You may have heard that this is going to change, but any changes are unlikely before the end of 2011.

When elected, Councillors are required to sign a declaration that they will observe the Council's Code of Conduct. This requires Councillors to declare any financial or personal interests they have. Details of land or property you hold, your employment and memberships of any groups or societies are recorded in a register which is open to inspection by the public. The Code also requires Councillors to declare interests at Council and other meetings.

Councillors are advised and trained in their duties about the Code by the Council's Monitoring Officer, who is the Head of Legal and Support Services.

### **Will I Be Paid for Being a Councillor?**

Councillors are not paid a salary for what they do.

Each Councillor is entitled to receive a Basic Allowance which is paid in monthly instalments. This is currently £4200 per year. This allowance goes towards the incidental costs incurred by being a Councillor such as telephone, broadband and the use of your home etc and in part recognises the time spent to be a Councillor, including attending meetings and meeting with residents. Allowances are subject to tax and national insurance.

Councillors may also claim travel costs for going to Council and other meetings. This is capped at 40p per mile.

The Leader of the Council, Executive Board members and Chairmen of Committees are also paid a Special Responsibility Allowance because these roles involve more responsibility and time commitment than other Councillors.

All these allowances are reviewed and recommended to the Council by a Group of independent people, the Independent Remuneration Panel. Their report and recommendations are considered by the Council each year.

The Council supports and encourages the use of IT for Council business and to communicate with residents. It pays an allowance towards the running costs of

such equipment and we provide some training for specific uses of IT based on the needs of individuals.

### **How Much Time does it Take?**

Every Councillor is different and carries out their role in their own way. If you are involved in lots of meetings you will need to put time aside to read papers beforehand so you are able to take part in the discussion and ask questions. The amount of time taken up in work for your residents will vary depending on the issues going on at any one time. For example, you are likely to get more contact if there is a controversial planning application in your ward. Residents may contact you at any time of day and not always at what you would consider a reasonable time. You will need to allow time to research and respond to residents queries. You may hold surgeries where they can come and meet you for example.

When the Independent Remuneration Panel carried out research with Councillors recently, most reckoned they spent about 11 hours a week in meeting residents, phone calls, following up queries, preparing for and attending meetings at the Council or elsewhere. But this is an average . some weeks involved more time commitment than others. Councillors with additional responsibility such as chairing meetings, often spent more time on Council duties.



Most of Wychavon's Councillors attend Parish or Town Council meetings to help keep up to date with issues in their area and communicate what the District Council is doing. If you are involved in a political party there are also likely to be meetings and briefings to attend.

Each Councillor is expected to attend the Wychavon Council meetings, which meets 5 . 6 times a year. If you are on Planning Committee this meets every 4 weeks and takes most of the day. You may get involved in research for Overview and Scrutiny exercises which can take up a few hours a week for a short period.

You will be expected to attend occasional briefings and seminars for issues relevant to your role. Most of these will be arranged for the early evening and often when there is another event at the Civic Centre so you only have to commit one evening. You will need to allow time for induction to the Council and ongoing training and development.

Ultimately, it is for each individual Councillor to decide how much time they can devote to their role.

### **How will I be Supported?**

Wychavon Council is committed to supporting its Councillors throughout their term of office. We welcome all new Councillors with an induction process which covers the basics of what you need to get up and running as a District Councillor. This includes briefings on how to comply with the Code of Conduct and other protocols; the major issues facing the Council; introductions to specific services and more detailed training events.

For example, you will not be able to serve on the Planning or Licensing Committees without undergoing an introductory training course. These roles are subject to legal requirements and a lot of public scrutiny.

Every year, each Councillor is offered a one-to-one discussion about their training needs. From these discussions we pull together a training plan which covers the priorities and also caters for skills development. For example, IT training, running public meetings, communication skills and dealing with the media. Much of the learning is shared with other Councils in Worcestershire and beyond, to help keep costs down.

All our Senior Managers are very approachable and will help Councillors deal with queries from their residents and advise on Council policies and procedures. We also provide practical support such as business cards, personalised stationery and compliment slips for use by Councillors. We have a room at the Civic Centre which is for use by Councillors only and contains copies of the latest agendas, local newspapers and a learning library of resources, plus a photocopier. Councillor support is arranged and co-ordinated by the Support Services Team.



## **What Next?**

If you would like to find out more then you are welcome to attend our meetings to see the Council in action. Details of dates and times can be found on our website here:

<http://www.e-wychavon.org.uk/modern.gov/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1>

You can approach current Councillors to find out more about what they do . their details are also on our website.

If you are interested in joining a political party, most have local offices you can contact in the first instance.

If you would like more information from the Council's officers then please contact us at [elections@wychavon.gov.uk](mailto:elections@wychavon.gov.uk) or [membersupport@wychavon.gov.uk](mailto:membersupport@wychavon.gov.uk)