

Role and responsibilities of Councillors

Purpose and background

This is a description of the role that all councillors will be expected to perform.

Councillors may have additional regulatory, licensing or scrutiny responsibilities or be a member of the Cabinet – there will be specific role descriptions drawn up for them, and each of these responsibilities is likely to attract additional time commitments.

1. Size of the role

1.1 The number of voters in each division will be in the order of 3,700; you will be accountable to them for any issue relating to the council's activities and, through the area boards, for the much broader concerns of the community.

2. Breadth of the role

2.1 In your division you will be responsible for resolving problems associated with, amongst other things:

Planning	Housing
Licensing	Environmental health
Car parking and enforcement	Protecting the environment
Leisure	Refuse collection and recycling
Community planning	Council tax collection
Housing benefit	Education
Social services	Libraries
Roads	Consumer protection
Children's services	Health scrutiny
Transport	Economic development

3. Allowances

3.1 Allowances to Councillors are as set out in Part 14 – Members' Allowances Scheme.

4. Anticipated hours required to perform the role

4.1 The time unitary councillors will need to carry out the role will depend on many things:

- If you have a rural division, you will spend more time travelling
- If you are a new councillor you will have to spend a lot of time being trained to enable you to carry out the role
- If you have a particular interest you may choose to become more involved in committees associated with these matters
- If there are important or controversial issues in your division they may occupy a lot of your time.

4.2 National figures show that unitary councillors spend on average 27 hours a week on the role. There are formal meetings you will be expected to attend, but much of the work will be in your division when constituents contact you with a problem. The work includes:

- Resolving problems raised by your constituents
- Attending council and policy making meetings
- Being a member of an area board
- Attending Town and Parish council meetings in your division
- Representing the council on outside bodies

Councillors who have additional regulatory, licensing or scrutiny responsibilities or who are on the Cabinet will be expected to work additional hours.

5. Timing of meetings

5.1 Day time meetings at Trowbridge:

- Attendance at council meetings eight times a year
- Attendance at Cabinet, quasi judicial and regulatory meetings when items of interest to the division are under discussion
- Approximately two meetings a month.

5.2 Evening meetings within an area or on a district basis;

- Attendance at monthly area boards
- Attendance at planning committees and other regulatory committees when items of interest to your division are under discussion
- Attendance at town and/or parish meetings
- Attendance at meetings of outside bodies, some of these might be in the day
- Approximately four meetings a month.

6. Principal roles

6.1 To champion your division

- To represent your constituents and to act as the link between them and the council
- To keep up-to-date with local concerns, including those of hard to reach groups
- To identify and help to resolve local concerns

6.2 To be a community leader

- To mediate fairly and constructively between people and groups with conflicting needs
- To create effective partnerships with all sections of the community
- To work with partners to build strong and cohesive communities with a long term vision and direction
- Act as the focus for consultation and discussion of local issues.

6.3 To keep in touch with constituents

- To communicate regularly with the community using newsletters, emails, phone, or local media and through local surgeries and meetings
- To create opportunities to communicate, including hard-to-reach groups
- To provide regular feedback

6.4 To contribute to decision making

- by contributing to and informing debate at council meetings
- through membership of a community area board by:
- influencing and shaping services
- monitoring performance of local services to ensure that they are held to account
- providing for more effective working between the council and partners.

6.5 To fulfil your responsibilities as a “corporate parent” for children and young people in the care of the local authority

- by having an understanding of the profile and needs of the children in the care of the local authority
- by being aware of the impact on looked-after children of all council decisions
- by considering whether this would be good enough for your own child
- by ensuring that action is taken to address shortcomings in the service and to improve outcomes for looked-after children.
- by being aware of the work and aims of the corporate parenting panel and, if nominated by your group leader, attend meetings of the corporate parenting panel as a committee member

6.6 The council has established a Corporate Parenting Panel, whose role is to secure councillor involvement and commitment throughout the council to deliver better outcomes for children and young people who are looked after. The terms of reference are available as an appendix to this section - Part 12.1 – Role and Function of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Please contact 01225 718024 to request this.

6.7 To represent the council externally

- By sitting on outside bodies and attending seminars on behalf of the council.

6.8 Unitary councillors will be expected to

- Commit to a programme of continuing learning and development provided by the council
- Comply with the council’s code of conduct and other protocols set out within the Constitution and to maintain the highest standards of conduct and ethics in the performance of your duties
- To acknowledge any enquiries normally within four working days of receipt, and provide a substantive response, where required, within ten working days, if possible.

7. Personal Skills

7.1 To fulfil the role of an effective unitary councillor, candidates should have:

- knowledge of current issues for constituents
- good advocacy and listening skills
- good communication, presentation skills, mediation and conflict resolution skills
- integrity and the ability to set aside own views and act impartially
- good awareness of equality and diversity issues
- an understanding of the roles of officers and councillors
- knowledge of meetings rules and conventions
- the ability to challenge ideas and contribute positively to policy
- a desire to learn.