



Becoming a city councillor in Norwich

Serving your local community



This booklet gives you information about becoming a city councillor in Norwich. It tells you about the time commitments, demands and rewards of a four-year term of office as an elected member of Norwich City Council.

People of all backgrounds are welcome – the greater the mix of people, the more effectively the council can reflect the views of its communities.



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About Norwich

Norwich is a successful and growing economy and is the economic, social, cultural and environmental hub for the wider region. It has all the essential ingredients for economic success. This includes a world renowned university, an international airport, improving transport infrastructure and a traditional charm, history and quality of life that major companies say is important to the people who work for them.

Norwich also has a large cluster of knowledge-based industries, such as financial services, health and life sciences, and creative industries.

The city offers a diverse mix of shops, ranging from the vast complexes of Chapelfield and Castle Mall to small independent traders in the picturesque and distinctive Norwich Lanes. An estimated 20,000 to 25,000 people take advantage of the nightlife on offer on a weekend evening.



Justifiably, Norwich has an excellent reputation for further education and the University of East Anglia (UEA), City College Norwich and the Norwich University of the Arts are key players in the economic success of the city.

However, mainstream education remains a real issue, with many attainment levels below the national average, and this is compounded by low levels of aspiration, low staying-on levels and high levels of absence.

There are also concerning levels of deprivation which are concentrated in certain areas and which mean many people are not able to benefit from the city's successes. More than 30 per cent of Norwich children are affected by income deprivation and overall Norwich is the third most deprived local authority in the eastern region.

Population/age profile statistics:

Age range	Norwich	England
0 – 15	16.81 %	18.90 %
16 – 24	16.87 %	11.80 %
25 – 39	24.40 %	20.10 %
40 – 64	27.34 %	32.70 %
65 +	14.58 %	16.40 %
Total	132,500	52,234,000

Source: Office for National Statistics, 2011 census

Interested in becoming a city councillor?

The city is divided into 13 electoral areas called wards. There are three councillors for each ward giving a total of 39 councillors.

Each councillor is elected for a four year term of office. Some councils have 'all out' elections once every four years with all councillors being elected at the same time. However, Norwich City Council has elections 'by thirds' which means that one of the three councillors in each ward gets elected each year. There is, therefore, no city election every fourth year which coincides with the year Norfolk County Council elections are held.

Local elections are traditionally held on the first Thursday in May. However, in 2014 the

council election has been moved to Thursday 22 May, to coincide with the European parliamentary election. This offers you the opportunity to stand as a representative of your local community and become a Norwich city councillor.

The local election process for Norwich City Council begins in April 2014 when a Notice of Election will be published in City Hall and on the council's website. If you are thinking about becoming a councillor and standing as a candidate you will have to formally submit nomination papers. Information about the nomination process and what candidates need to do is available further on in this booklet and on the council's website.

Why are councillors important?

Councillors play a key role in the district, representing the people that elected them and providing a voice of the community. They are champions of the users of local services; they help shape those services for the benefit of local people, and act as community leaders.



Why become a councillor?

Becoming a councillor is a rewarding form of public service that puts people in the privileged position where they can make a difference to the quality of other people's daily lives.

There are many reasons why people decide to become a local councillor. For example, some individuals stand because they:

- want to make a difference and be involved in shaping the future of the local community
- are concerned about the local area in which they live and want to ensure that their local community is provided with the services needed
- want to represent the views of local people and ensure that local community interests are taken into account
- want to pursue their political beliefs
- are concerned about one particular issue, for example care for older people, the need for facilities in an area or traffic congestion.

For some, it is an extension of what they are already doing as they are active in a political party, trade union or school governing body and they see the next step is to become a councillor.

We asked some of the serving elected members of the council why they became councillors and this is what they said...

**Councillor Mike Sands,
Bowthorpe ward:**

"After becoming involved in local affairs as secretary of a residents group, I decided that the time had come to raise my head above the parapet and run as a councillor and take an active role."

**Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton,
Sewell ward:**

"Helping people in the community, being involved with different aspects of the city council and working on projects with the local residents is a very worthwhile lifestyle."

**Councillor Deborah Gihawi,
Mile Cross ward:**

"I wanted to make a difference to people and their lives and felt that I would be a strong advocate to approach people who hold the power to make that difference real".

**Councillor Brenda Arthur,
University ward:**

"Having spent most of my working life campaigning for and with people across a wide age range I decided when I retired that I would like to continue to work towards improving the lives of Norwich citizens. Being a councillor allows me to do this. I listen to what communities say they need and then work through the council to make those changes where possible. "

**Councillor Claire Stephenson,
Nelson ward:**

"All councillors have the opportunity to find out about decisions made by the cabinet and senior officers and sometimes they're able to influence these decisions. As a councillor I get the opportunity to meet a lot of people and to find out what matters most to them."

**Councillor James Wright,
Eaton ward:**

"Becoming a councillor is an excellent way to contribute to the local community. It means I can use the skills and experience I have built up through my work to benefit the city I grew up in."

Who can stand for election?

Almost anyone can stand to be a city councillor. However, you must:

- be at least 18 on the day of nomination
- be a British subject or an Irish Republic or European Union citizen living in the United Kingdom
- be on Norwich City Council's electoral register or have lived, worked or owned property in the district for at least the last 12 months
- have your nomination paper proposed, seconded and signed by ten people who are all on the electoral register in the ward you would like to represent as a councillor.

You can't stand for election if you:

- work for Norwich City Council
- are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order
- have a criminal conviction involving a prison sentence of three months or more (including a suspended sentence) in the last five years
- are otherwise specifically disqualified from holding office by order of the court.

We welcome people from all backgrounds. The greater the mix of people, the more effective the council can reflect the views of its communities.

Unlike parliamentary elections, you do not need to pay a deposit before you stand in a local government election.

***Something you may not know...**

You do not need any qualifications to be a councillor. Life experience is probably the best thing you can bring to the role.

Do I have to belong to a political party or group?

No. It is possible to stand as an Independent (a candidate who does not belong to a particular political party). A website giving more detailed information about this is www.picx.co.uk



If you are thinking of standing as a candidate for a particular party, you will need to be a member of that party's local organisation. More information about political parties can be found on the register of political parties section of the Electoral Commission's website www.electoralcommission.org.uk

The current (as of May 2013) political makeup of the council is as follows:

Group	Councillors
Labour	21
Green Party	15
Liberal Democrats	3
Conservatives	0
Independent	0
Total	39

What do councillors do?

The role of a councillor can be very varied and it is up to each individual how they carry out their work. Councillors have responsibilities to their ward, to the council and to the community.

Being an effective councillor requires hard work. Every day, councillors have to balance the needs and interests of their residents,

voters, political parties and the council. All of these groups place legitimate demands on councillors' time on top of their personal responsibilities to family, friends and workplace.

It is important that councillors understand that role so they can perform responsibly and effectively for the council and maintain the quality of their personal lives.

Ward responsibilities include:

- listening to and representing the views of the residents
- monitoring effective delivery of services in the ward
- helping out individual constituents 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 officers to deal with constituents' enquiries and complaints.

Decision making and influencing policy – this involves:

- helping to form policy
- helping to set the council's budget and agreeing the level of council tax
- making or scrutinising decisions.

Councillors are essential to deciding what is in the public interest amidst a range of conflicting issues, views and pressures.

As a councillor you will be a member of council, and could also be part of the cabinet and/or various committees such as scrutiny, planning applications or licensing committees. You will meet with other councillors from all political and other groups, to influence and determine the development and review of council policy and strategy.

Community leadership – this involves:

- developing an understanding of the local community and the groups and organisations within it and the ability to build effective partnerships with those organisations.
- responding effectively to local priorities
- having a commitment to community engagement and empowerment.

Community leadership is at the heart of modern local government and councils work in partnership with other organisations from the statutory, business and voluntary sectors, to improve services and the quality of life of citizens.

How much time is involved in being a councillor?

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 commitments you decide to take on. It could range from a few hours each week to a few hours each day at busier times.

Some of the issues you need to consider are:

- how your role as a councillor will impact on any family and personal relationships – you will need their support and understanding as you may be spending a lot of your spare time on council business
- 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 find that a large proportion of your time is spent dealing with constituency and associated casework. You may spend some of your time visiting constituents in their homes or at the council offices, and you may also meet with officers of the council to help you with any issues.

You will need to attend some committee meetings, depending on the roles you volunteer for and are appointed to. The average length of a committee meeting is approximately an hour and a half but this could vary.

You also need to consider the following:

- most of the meetings you attend will have papers that you will need to read beforehand. These papers can be quite detailed and take time to read and understand
- if you are elected as a chair, spokesperson or member of the cabinet, the role can be much more demanding
- if you are a member of a political party there will be additional calls on your time to attend political group meetings.

This could all mean that, in the course of one week, you could have a scrutiny committee meeting, represent the council on an outside body or partnership, and if you are a member of a political group, you could also have a political group meeting and be holding a ward surgery.

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

In all of this it is worth remembering that there are lots of officers in the council who will be happy to provide you with support and advice and help with specific issues.

A job profile of a councillor is attached as an appendix to this booklet.

Can I be a councillor and keep my existing job?

Yes. Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 says that an employer is required to permit an employee reasonable time off during the employee's working hours to perform any of the duties as a member of a local authority, which includes attending committee meetings.

However, there is no statutory right for time off with pay to be granted for this purpose. The amount of time off will depend upon your responsibilities and the effect of your absence on your employer's business. You should discuss this with your employer before making any decision about whether to stand as a councillor.

Will I get paid for duties as a councillor?

There is no salary for being a councillor. However, councillors are paid allowances to reimburse for time and expenses incurred while on council business. Every city councillor is entitled to a basic allowance. This was set by the council at £6,000 (taxable) a year for 2013-14.

Councillors who hold particular positions of responsibility within the council, such as chairing or being a member of some of the

bigger committees, receive a special responsibility allowance as well.

Allowances are paid in monthly instalments throughout the year.

Councillors may use car park passes and claim travelling allowance for certain approved duties, such as attending council meetings or attendance at meetings of outside bodies.



What support will I receive if I am elected?

The democratic services team provide dedicated support to councillors. Council officers are employed to carry out the decisions of the council and if you have a specific service related query, procedures are in place to ensure that you get responses within five days – all you would need to do is ask. For urgent matters, senior officers including the chief executive, chief officers and heads of service can be contacted direct.

All new councillors are offered the chance, if they wish, to have a senior officer appointed as a mentor who will help you understand the workings of the council; how to get things done and, if necessary, to understand the limitations.

You will be offered a broadband line, laptop and printer for use at home with email and internet access. LGSS, our IT partner, will set

this up and ensure that everything works correctly and you are trained to use it. However, most new councillors choose to use their own PC and internet connection if they have one but this is entirely up to you.

If you have any concerns over any potential barriers to becoming a city councillor you can contact the democratic services manager who will be happy to discuss anything with you in confidence.

If you are a member of a political group, support and assistance will be available from other members of your group. The larger groups have dedicated support from a political assistant.

You will have access to a fully equipped group room in City Hall which can be used for informal meetings.

Will I be given any training to help me perform my duties as a councillor?

After each election, successful candidates will receive a welcome pack and lots of useful information.

There is an induction programme for all councillors that initially involves attending a couple of evening sessions in the first two weeks following the election to help get you up and running.

This will be followed by sessions to help you with the basics such as understanding the councillors' code of conduct; introduction to local government finance and the workings of any particular committee you put yourself forward for and are appointed to.

An on-going training and development programme designed by fellow councillors

from all political parties will help you to deal with the role and all councillors are encouraged to attend as many events as possible to develop their skills and broaden their knowledge of the work of the council.

IT training is available throughout the year and can be tailored to individual needs.

Councillors are offered the opportunity and help to produce their own personal development plans to identify individual development needs. This will be a confidential statement of your skills and knowledge. The plan will help you to recognise and value skills, knowledge and experience you already have, and will help you make informed decisions about your future development needs.

How do I become a city councillor?

Local elections are usually held on the first Thursday in May. The next elections are due to be held on 22 May 2014 when one councillor in each of the 13 wards will be elected.

All you have to do is decide to stand for election and win the public vote!

Sometimes by-elections take place between the election dates if a councillor retires prematurely. If you are elected at a by-election you will serve until that seat comes to the end of its four year term.

There is a formal nominations process and the closing date by which you must submit your nomination will be during April 2014 (confirmation of the dates will be made available by the returning officer nearer the time).

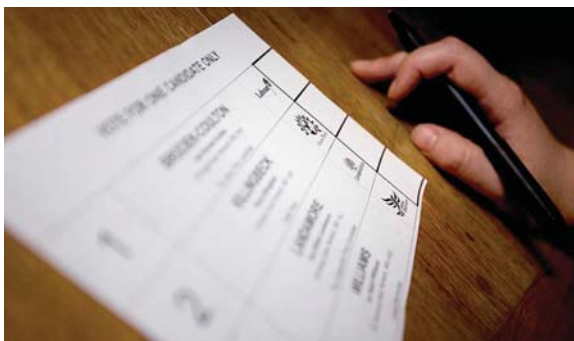
The calling of an election is published in the local press, on the council's website and by formal notice at City Hall at which time you can apply for a nomination pack.

Where can I get a nomination pack?

If you would like information and advice about nominations or any other aspect of the election process, please contact the council's elections officer.

The elections officer
Norwich City Council
City Hall
Norwich
NR2 1NH

t: 01603 212027 or 212055
e: elections@norwich.gov.uk



Other sources of information on becoming a councillor include:

Electoral Commission
www.electoralcommission.org.uk

Local Government Association
www.lga.gov.uk

If you would like more information about the role of a councillor please contact:

Andy Emms
Democratic services manager
Norwich City Council
City Hall
Norwich
NR2 1NH

t: 01603 212459
e: andyemms@norwich.gov.uk

Norwich city councillor job profile

A job profile has been prepared for guidance purposes and to raise awareness of the type of skills required to be a councillor. It is intended for use as a practical tool to help councillors undertake their role and responsibilities and help to identify any further training requirements.



Job profile for all councillors

Purpose

- To participate constructively in the governance of the council.
- To contribute to the formation and scrutiny of the council's policies, budget, strategies and service delivery.
- To represent effectively the interests of their wards and deal with enquiries and representations from their constituents in an appropriate and timely manner.
- To champion the improvement of the quality of life of the community in terms of equality, economy and environment.
- To represent the council effectively when appointed to an outside body and regularly report back on issues relevant to the council via e-councillor, the members bulletin and or the cabinet/council.
- To act at all times with probity and propriety in the best interests of the council.

Duties and responsibilities

- To fulfil the statutory and any locally determined requirements of an elected member of a local authority and the authority itself, including compliance with all relevant codes of conduct, and participation in those decisions and activities reserved to the full council – eg agreeing the policy framework and setting the budget.
- To participate effectively as a member of any committee, panel or working party to which the councillor is appointed.
- To participate in the activities of an outside body to which the councillor is appointed providing two way communication between the organisations. Also to develop and maintain a working knowledge of the council's policies and practices in relation to that body and of the community's needs and aspirations in respect of that body's role and functions.

- Except for cabinet members, to participate in the scrutiny or performance review of the services of the authority including, where the council so decides, the scrutiny of policies and budget and their effectiveness in achieving the strategic objectives of the council.
- To participate as appointed in consultative processes with the community and other organisations.
- To provide a link between the authority to the community through the various forums available.
- To develop and maintain a working knowledge of the council's services, management arrangements, powers/duties and constraints and to develop good working relationships with relevant officers of the council.
- To develop and maintain an understanding of other organisations and services which serve the area.
- Be responsible for continuous personal development. Take advantage of learning opportunities to build on understanding and knowledge, and to develop relevant skills.
- To contribute constructively to open government and democratic renewal through active encouragement to the community to participate generally in the democratic process.
- To conduct the business of the council within the council and not through the written or broadcast media.

Skills required

- Good communication and interpersonal skills.
- Ability to relate and deal with the public in a professional and timely manner.
- Ability to work effectively with council officers and outside organisations.
- Community and civic leadership skills.



If you would like this information in another language or format such as large print, CD, audio cassette or Braille please call the democratic services manager on **01603 212459** or email **andyemms@norwich.gov.uk**

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