**How to become a Councillor**

**What does a Councillor do?**

The role of a Councillor is both a rewarding and a demanding role. Councillors hold the privileged position of representing the needs and concerns of the local community. They speak for the local community ensuring that their voice is heard and considered in the provision of services and facilities for the Council area. Councillors have to balance the needs and interests of their electorate (the people who elected them), the political party they represent (if any) and the Council. All of these groups will make legitimate demands on a Councillors time, on top of the demands of personal and professional lives.

The responsibilities of a Councillor are varied. These responsibilities are extensive however can be grouped into three key areas; community representation, political leadership and participation in meetings of Council, statutory bodies, community groups and other external groups.

The following documents will provide an insight into the commitments of a Councillor:

* Councillor Diary
* Councillor Role Description
* Council Meeting Schedule
* External bodies which Council is represented on

**Who can be a Councillor?**

The easy answer is almost anyone, as long as the following qualifications can be met.

The candidate must be:

* A British citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland, a qualifying Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any other state of the European Union.
* Are at least 18 years of age.
* Meet at least one of the following three qualifications:
1. Be registered to vote in the district of the Council in which you are standing on both the day you are nominated and on polling day
2. Have occupied as owner or tenant, land in that district or have resided in that district during the whole of the period of twelve months immediately preceding the day of the poll.
3. Your principal or only place of work during the twelve months before the election has been in that district.
4. Not be disqualified from being a Councillor. The most common disqualifications are set out in section 4 of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972.

**What is the difference between being an Independent Member and being a Member of a Political Party?**

Prospective candidates can either stand in a Local Council election as an Independent candidate or as a Party Political candidate. The key distinction is that an Independent candidate is not affiliated with a political party; whilst a political party candidate is affiliated to a particular party which includes commitment to that parties manifesto.

**Will I get paid for being a Councillor?**

Councillors do not receive a salary. Councillors however do receive an allowance paid on a monthly basis in recognition of their time commitment and incidental costs incurred in their official capacity and are also reimbursed for expenses which are incurred while on council business. Each council sets its own rate for Members’ allowances and these are published on the Councils website.

**What are the Key Timescales?**

Councillors are elected for a period of 4 years. The next Election for local Councils will be held in 2019. The political parties like to have decided upon their candidates at least a year before an election. This is so that there is time for the candidate to get to know the important local issues, meet as many voters as possible, visit community groups and raise their profile in the local media before the election takes place.

**What are the Next Steps?**

If you intend standing as an Independent Candidate, you can contact the Electoral Office of Northern Ireland who will provide guidance to you on the nomination process.

If you are interested in standing for a political party, you should contact the local Party Constituency Office to express your interest. Don’t worry if you’re not already a party member as they will be able to go through all the options with you. Some parties have special training and encouragement schemes for new candidates.

To stand in the election, all candidates are required to submit a nomination paper to the local Council within the specified deadline. The nomination paper has to be signed by 10 subscribers who are registered electors in the specific District Electoral Area in which you wish to stand.

Detailed guidance and all associated forms relating to the nomination process and all aspects of the election are available from the Electoral Office of Northern Ireland. Contact details are as follows:

Website: www.eoni.org.uk

Email: info@eoni.org.uk

Address: St. Anne’s House, 15 Church Street, Belfast BT1 1ER

Tel: 08004320712