

BECOMING A TOWN COUNCILLOR

A councillor can become a voice for the community and help make real change. Councillors represent the hopes and aspirations of the public they serve – the Town Council is the most local part of the democratic system and is closest to the people.

The Town Council has a wide number of powers which enable it to get involved in a range of local services and facilities:

Allotments • bus shelters • litter bins • public seats • play areas • Christmas lights • events such as the Jubilee celebrations and the Olympic torch • visitor information • floral displays and planting projects • dog fouling measures • projects such as the restoration of Castle Vale and Coronation Park • war memorials • giving grants to local organisations for events and for environmental projects • giving the local view on applications for planning permission and on wider planning issues.

If you are passionate about Berwick and have energy, enthusiasm and commitment, this is a role where you could make a real difference.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q What do councillors do?

A There are 3 main areas of work:

- (1) Decision making – through meetings with other members, the Council decides what activities to support, where money should be spent, what services should be delivered and what policies should be implemented
- (2) Monitoring – making sure what they have decided happens and keeping an eye on how well things are working
- (3) Getting involved locally – the main responsibility is to constituents and local organisations, and this can include going to meetings of local groups; taking up issues on behalf of members of the public, running a surgery for residents to bring up issues.

Unlike the County Council and the old Borough Council there is not a large staff employed by the Town Council – the equivalent of just over 2 people! So like most Parish and Town Councils, members need to roll up their sleeves and get involved, which could mean inspecting playgrounds, stewarding at events, putting up posters, looking after one of the 6 notice boards, or otherwise getting ‘hands-on’, helping to push projects along to success.

Q Am I qualified?

A There are a few rules: you need to be over 18 and a British citizen or a citizen of the Commonwealth or EU, and to have lived or worked in the Town Council area for the previous 12 months. You can get full details from the Town Council office.

Q I don't belong to a political party, does that matter?

A No. Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council agreed early on that it did not want to be party-political; all members would work in the interests of the community, not of a political party.

Q Are councillors paid?

A No. Unlike County Councillors, Town Councillors receive no payment, but can claim some expenses.

Q How much time does it take up?

A The national body for local councils says that councillors say their duties take up about 3 hours a week. Some will spend more time than this and some less. There are usually several evening meetings a month. Being accessible and available to the local residents who elect you is obviously important – running a regular surgery would be a good way of making contact.

Q I am at work and would find it difficult to commit time and get to meetings.

A Most meetings are held in the evening (6 pm start), but in any case, employers must, by law, allow employees time off for their council duties.

Q How can I find out more?

A As a first step you can talk informally to the Town Council staff, at their office at 5 The Chandlery, Quayside. There are also various websites that can help (try www.nalc.gov.uk).