



Northumberland
County Council

BECOMING A COUNTY COUNCILLOR

A guide about membership of
Northumberland County Council

ELECTIONS OFFICE
UPDATED NOVEMBER 2021

elections@northumberland.gov.uk
01670 624811

DESCRIPTION OF THE ROLE OF A COUNTY COUNCILLOR

Role	County Councillor
Responsible to	All people resident within your division
Regular liaison with	Other councillors, parishes, local residents, council staff, local businesses and community groups
Period of service	4 years before re-election
Salary	There is no salary, but allowances will be paid for time and expenses on council business
Main purpose	<p>Representing your county division and the people who live in it.</p> <p>Take part in the development of policies and services for the people of the county as a whole.</p>
Core skills	<p>Communication Skills: To be able to communicate clearly in written and spoken forms and listen sensitively.</p> <p>Local Leadership: An ability to engage with the community, canvass opinion and act on issues of local concern. Mediate fairly and constructively between people and groups with conflicting needs, represent all sections of the community, and work with others to develop and champion a shared local vision.</p> <p>Partnership working: To be able build and shape key partnerships at local, regional and national levels, as well as supporting people from all backgrounds to feel valued, trusted and included.</p> <p>Scrutiny and challenge: Able to identify areas suitable for scrutiny and ensure that the community is involved in the scrutiny process.</p> <p>Political understanding: Able to demonstrate consistency in views and values through decisions and actions; looking for ways to promote democracy and increase public engagement. Also the ability to work effectively in range of political environments including outside the Council.</p> <p>Regulating and monitoring: The ability to use evidence to evaluate arguments and make judgments. Councillors also need the ability to follow legal process and balance public needs and local policy. Monitoring of their own and others' performance and intervene when necessary to ensure progress.</p>

1.

What is a county council?

County councils are administrative bodies in local government and provide the majority of public services in their particular area. Northumberland is a unitary council and as such provides all the services that are delivered at a local government level in the local authority area. These include:

Education	Highways
Environmental Health	Transport planning
Social care	Housing
Libraries	Birth, marriage and death registration
Trading Standards	Waste collection and disposal
Planning applications	Local tax collection
Fire	Leisure

2.

The role of county councillors

Councillors are democratically elected by local people to represent their division and the people who live in it. A councillor's responsibility also involves:

- Making decisions about council services and how they are provided.
- Scrutinising decisions made by council officers and Cabinet members.
- Take part in locality meetings and parish council meetings within the division.
- Developing and reviewing council policies.
- Contributing to and participating in the good governance of the council.
- Scrutinising decisions made by other councillors and outside organisations.
- Engaging in the local community and providing leadership for them.

County councillors must act within the law and must abide by a Code of Conduct which requires them to act impartially and fairly which does not bring the council into disrepute. They must also disclose any pecuniary interests for themselves, spouse or partner within 28 days of taking up office.

3.

Northumberland County Council

The council's constitution describes in detail how the council is governed and how it makes decisions. Northumberland currently uses a Leader and Cabinet decision-making model. The cabinet, also known as the executive, is formed of councillors, or cabinet members, who each have a different portfolio of responsibilities. By law, some important council functions such as planning permissions and public rights of way claims cannot be undertaken by the cabinet. These functions are exercised by committees.

Meetings are normally open to the public except where, for example personal or confidential matters are being discussed.

Alongside the decision-making structure of the council, there is a management structure in place to deliver and oversee the services we provide. The council's

paid employees are called officers. Senior officers make up the council's senior management team, heading up the main functions or departments of the council.

There are 67 councillors who represent the 66 divisions in Northumberland:

County Division	Members	County Division	Members
Alnwick	2	Hirst	1
Amble	1	Holywell	1
Amble West with Warkworth	1	Humshaugh	1
Ashington Central	1	Isabella	1
Bamburgh	1	Kitty Brewster	1
Bedlington Central	1	Longhorsley	1
Bedlington East	1	Longhoughton	1
Bedlington West	1	Lynemouth	1
Bellingham	1	Morpeth Kirkehill	1
Berwick East	1	Morpeth North	1
Berwick North	1	Morpeth Stobhill	1
Berwick West with Ord	1	Newbiggin Central & East	1
Bothal	1	Newsham	1
Bywell	1	Norham & Islandshires	1
Choppington	1	Pegswood	1
College	1	Plessey	1
Corbridge	1	Ponteland East & Stannington	1
Cowpen	1	Ponteland North	1
Cramlington East	1	Ponteland South with Heddon	1
Cramlington Eastfield	1	Ponteland West	1
Cramlington North	1	Prudhoe North	1
Cramlington South East	1	Prudhoe South	1
Cramlington Village	1	Rothbury	1
Cramlington West	1	Seaton with Newbiggin West	1
Croft	1	Seghill with Seaton Delaval	1
Druridge Bay	1	Shilbottle	1
Haltwhistle	1	Sleekburn	1
Hartley	1	South Blyth	1
Haydon	1	South Tynedale	1
Haydon & Hadrian	1	Stakeford	1
Hexham Central with Acomb	1	Stocksfield & Broomhaugh	1
Hexham East	1	Wensleydale	1
Hexham West	1	Wooler	1

4.

How much time does it take up?

Each Councillor works in their own way, therefore a fixed number of hours is not set. The number of hours would depend on your role within the council and the number of commitments you take on, which could vary from a few hours each week to a full time position.

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 correspondence and many telephone calls at all times of the day.

- You may have drop in surgeries and spend some of your time visiting constituents at their homes, or at the council offices.
- You will be expected to attend Full Council meetings.
- Many councillors represent the council on one or more outside bodies. Background reading and attendance at meetings of these bodies would increase your time commitment. There will be papers that you will need to read beforehand which 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 very demanding.
- If you are a member of a political party there will be additional calls on your time to attend political group meetings.

5.

Do I get paid to be a county councillor?

There is no salary for being a councillor for the time that you give up to serve your community. However, you will be paid a basic allowance with travelling and subsistence expenses whilst on council business. Members of the council's cabinet and chairmen of committees will receive additional allowances. A dependent carers allowance is available as a result of carrying out duties as a councillor.

6.

How long does a county councillor serve for?

Once elected, county councillors serve a four year term. If they then want to stay in the post they can stand for re-election.

7.

How do I become a county councillor?

To become a county councillor, you have to stand for, and win, an election in one of the county's electoral divisions.

The ordinary elections of councillors (when all of the county seats become vacant) in Northumberland are organised by the Returning Officer of the County Council and take place on the first Thursday in May every four years – 2013, 2017, 2021 etc.

In an election year, the formal election process begins with the publication of the Notice of Election in the last week of March, after which you may submit a nomination paper to formally register your intention to stand for election. This must be supported by a proposer, seconder and eight assentors from the division you are standing in. Nomination packs will be made available from the elections office or from the Electoral Commission website during the election period.

8.

Do I have to stand for a political party?

Councillors can either represent a political party or stand independently. If you want to represent a political party then the next step is to get involved with your local party branch as soon as possible. If you want to stand as an independent

candidate, you may wish to start building your profile so that local people know who you are and how your opinion differs from those of political parties.

9.

Am I eligible to be a county councillor?

To be qualified to be elected a member of a county council, you must:

- Be at least 18 years old.
- Be a British Citizen, an eligible Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any member of state of the European Union, and

Meet at least one of the following qualifications:

- You are and will continue to be on the electoral register for the local authority area in which you wish to stand, from the day of your nomination and throughout your term of office.
- You have occupied as owner or tenant, land or premises in the local authority area during the whole of the 12 months before the day of your nomination and the day of election.
- Your main or only place of work during the 12 months prior to the day of nomination and the day of election has been in the local authority area.
- You have lived in the local authority area during the whole of the 12 months before the day of your nomination and the day of election.

You are unable to stand for election as a councillor if you:

- Are employed by or hold office under the local authority (including joint boards or committees). You may be employed by the local authority if, for example you work at certain schools, fire services, police or health services.
- Hold a politically restricted post.
- Are subject to bankruptcy restrictions.
- Are the mayor of a combined authority area that the local authority is part of.
- Have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment of three months or more during the five years before polling day.
- Have been disqualified under the Representation of the People Act 1983.

10.

Training and support

The council will provide an initial comprehensive induction programme with on-going training and dedicated support from Democratic Services to meet the needs of councillors.

You will be offered a laptop for use at home for council business with email and internet access and a mobile phone. In addition, you will have access to fully equipped members' rooms and meeting rooms based at the council offices.

11.

Will I get time off work?

The amount of time off will depend on your responsibilities and the effect of your absence on your employer's business. Some employers understand of the need for councillors to attend meetings during work hours and recognise the benefit of their staff undertaking civic duties. Those in employment may be entitled to some time off under the Employment Rights Act 1996, Section 50, however this is a matter best discussed with your employer.

12.

Are you interested in becoming a county councillor?

The best way to find out what it is like to be a county councillor is to talk to someone who's doing it now, or go along to a county council meeting. By law, ordinary people are allowed to be present at most council meetings and are encouraged to attend. Information about public meetings can be obtained by contacting the council or going on line. The Local Government Association has produced helpful guides for people interested in becoming a councillor – beacouncillor.co.uk and local.gov.uk