

# Barnstaple Town Council



## Become a Town Councillor and make a difference...

- Play a part in making decisions affecting your area
- Get more involved in your community
- Influence the way local services are provided

## What is a Town Council?

Parish and Town Councils are one and the same in most respects. They are statutory bodies and are local authorities in their own right. They have a range of statutory powers and so act within a body of legislation. They are the most local level of government and are sometimes described as the tier of local government closest to the people. Such Councils can represent the concerns and aspirations of a genuine local community. Town Councils are different in that their Chairman can take on the role of Mayor – a figure head for the town and a focus for civic pride. Some smaller Parish Councils do not have a permanent office or any full-time staff and will meet in the local hall or school. Some larger councils such as Barnstaple Town Council can cover quite large populations and will often provide or help provide a wide range of services, such as local facilities, giving grants to local groups and maintaining allotments. The range of powers of local councils continues to change and grow and are many and varied including:

- the purchase of land and buildings
- providing and maintaining green areas
- provision of community and recreational facilities
- crime prevention measures including provision of CCTV and traffic calming
- provision of grants to local organisations

Did you know that your parish/town councillors are responsible for, take an active part in, or are consulted on nearly everything happening in your local area that affects you and your family?

Town Councils are funded through the Council Tax, although additional income can be raised through the services they provide or through delegation of funding from other bodies. Town Councils are strictly audited each year. Members must adhere to a Code of Conduct and complete a Register of Interests. This means that they are fully accountable to the public and assures the community that decisions are always taken in the public interest.

## What does Barnstaple Town Council do?

Our website at [www.barnstapletowncouncil.co.uk](http://www.barnstapletowncouncil.co.uk) will tell you all you need to know about our services. The main areas we are involved in are:

- Environmental – we look after all public highway verges and various other green spaces in Barnstaple (including The Square), manage five allotment

sites and a range of footpaths, and hold events to promote environmental, health and wellbeing issues. Our environmental remit is expanding quickly, as we take on the task of making up for major reductions in highways grounds maintenance by Devon County Council

- Heritage, Culture and Community – we manage the Guildhall, and the Albert Clock, and we own St Anne's Arts & Community Centre. The Plough Arts Centre run St Anne's, providing a varied programme of arts, cultural and community events and activities. We also run heritage tours of Barnstaple and work closely with partners to promote the town's history, and organise a host of community, civic and cultural events/activities, including Barnstaple Fair Proclamation, Remembrance Services, Community Day, Wellbeing Day, and arts, cultural and educational events.
- Civic and Ceremonial – the Town Mayor and Deputy Mayor are elected from Barnstaple's Town Councillors, receiving the chains of office each year at a grand Mayor-Making ceremony, and they attend a wide range of events and functions as the town's representatives. We organise Mayoral events – some civic events, others aimed at raising funds for the Mayor's chosen charities.
- Planning – the Town Council is a statutory consultee on planning applications.
- Rock Park – we manage the park through the Rock Park Trust, a charity to which the Council is the sole corporate trustee.
- Hire/Lease of Facilities – we have conference, meeting and events venues at the Castle Centre, Guildhall, and Barum House which are available for private hire. We also offer long leases at Council-owned properties for office, retail and community uses.
- Community Representation – although the smallest of the councils that provide services in Barnstaple, our position as a statutory public body gives us a strong voice in representing the community to other local and national public sector bodies.

A team of staff led by the Town Clerk delivers these services. Our work is governed by seven Council committees made up of councillors.

### **What does a Parish/ Town Councillor do?**

Councillors are there to consider the information gathered and make a group decision. No one Councillor is responsible for any single decision. As a Councillor you will need to:

- Listen and be a voice for your community:

The single most important task for a Parish/Town Councillor is to listen to the views of the people in their community. By doing this, Councillors gain important information about the concerns and aspirations of the people they represent. It is for this reason that many public bodies turn to the Parish/Town Council for information about the services they provide. For example, the District Council consults the local Parish and Town Councils on planning applications which affect their area. Local Councils act as a voice for their

communities, responding to other authorities and drawing attention to issues which concern the community.

- Act as an ambassador for your community:

Parish/Town Councils also make representation at other local government meetings (District and County Councils). Councillors are often appointed to sit on local bodies/organisations whose work affects the community. Councillors may be asked to serve on certain groups or attend functions on behalf of the Council.

Parish/Town Councillors act as ambassadors for their community, keeping everyone aware of local needs and concerns and reporting back on district, county and regional matters. Councillors represent the voice of their community as a whole, whilst being aware of, and considerate to specific minority needs.

- Attend meetings:

When elected, Councillors agree to attend all meetings that they are summoned to (if reasonably possible). The Council also arranges surgeries and other events at which the public can speak to their councillors, who are expected to attend.

- Attend Ceremonial functions:

There will be times when Councillors are asked to attend Civic Functions as part of their duty to the community. This may be Remembrance Services, civic dinners and attendance at public events such as the Carnival and other community events throughout the year. Your fellow Councillors will be there to give you the benefit of their experiences.

- Volunteer to help with the Council's work:

As the Town Council is relatively small and employs a limited number of staff, councillors are often asked to help when staging events. As well as helping to deliver services, this provides another way for councillors to engage with the local community – and it shows residents your commitment to the town!

### **When does the Town Council meet?**

The Full Council meets once a month in the evening. The Council committees variously meet either monthly or quarterly, again mainly in the evenings. Councillors sometimes agree to set up working parties or other groups to meet on an ad hoc basis for particular issues.

These are the arrangements agreed by the current councillors. When a new Council is elected, they have the opportunity to review the frequency and timing of meetings, and to change the number and remit of committees and sub-committees.

Our meetings schedule at

<http://www.barnstapletowncouncil.co.uk/PDFs/Documents/Copy%20of%20Copy%20>

[of%202016-2017%20calendar.pdf](#) gives an indication of the number of meetings, but remember – not all councillors have to attend all meetings, so it's not as onerous as it looks!

### **To find out more about being a Parish or Town Councillor:**

Contact Will Austin, Town Clerk, 01271 373311 or email [townclerk@barnstapletowncouncil.co.uk](mailto:townclerk@barnstapletowncouncil.co.uk). Or alternatively the Chairman or current Councillors will be able to tell you more about serving on your local council – their contact details can be found at <http://www.barnstapletowncouncil.co.uk/barnstaple-town-councillors.asp>

To find out if you are eligible to stand as a councillor or to ask for nomination papers, contact the District Council Electoral Services team - 01271 388277 or email [elections@northdevon.gov.uk](mailto:elections@northdevon.gov.uk).

If you would like to know more details about the work of a parish/town councillor visit the Devon

Association of Local Councils (DALC) at: [www.devonalc.org.uk](http://www.devonalc.org.uk) or National Association of Local Councils (NALC) at: [www.nalc.gov.uk](http://www.nalc.gov.uk)

### **How can I become a town councillor?**

You can stand for election as a Councillor if you:

- Are 18 years of age or over on the day of nomination;
- Are British, or a citizen of the Irish Republic, European Union or Commonwealth, and on the day of nomination and election day you are and continue to be an elector for the Town Council, or, you have owned or leased land in the Town for twelve whole months preceding nomination, or, your principal or only place of work during that twelve months has been in the Town, or, you have resided in the Town for twelve whole months.

You may not stand for election as a parish or town Councillor if:

- In the last five years before the day of election you have been sentenced to prison for three months or more (including a suspended sentence) without the option of a fine;
- You are the subject of a bankruptcy restriction order;
- You are an employee of the Town Council;
- You have been disqualified by the Adjudication Panel for England.

More detailed information on how to stand for election is available from the Electoral Commission:

- [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk) or contact the District Council Electoral Services team - 01271 388277 or email [elections@northdevon.gov.uk](mailto:elections@northdevon.gov.uk).

## **What support will I get?**

The Town Council is supported by the office of Town Clerk, and we have other staff to ensure delivery of the decisions of the Council and provide support. As a new councillor you will be able to seek procedural advice and guidance from the Clerk as well as through the Devon Association of Local Councils. Appropriate training will also be arranged.

## **Will it cost me anything to stand for election and will I be paid?**

During the elections: If you stand for election you may wish to canvass voters. Your election campaign may be very small such as a hand distribution of leaflets, or a large campaign featuring glossy brochures and public meetings. The choice is yours but you will have to bear the costs. There is a spending limit. If you are standing as the representative for a political party, they may help you with your election costs but you will have to declare this if you are elected.

When you are elected: Councillors can claim an allowance and/or reasonable expenses in relation to their work as a Councillor.

## **Are there any special rules about how I should act as a councillor?**

Rules apply to Councillors and the standards of behaviour which is expected of them in their role. Councillors are expected to act in the wider interests of the community at all times. There is a lot to learn in the early days – the work of a Local Council at any level is full of complexities and interest. You will have an influence on many things which happen in Barnstaple and will be expected to use your position in a measured and responsible way.

## **What's next?**

Local Councils are elected once every four years and occasionally a by election will be held if a Council seat becomes vacant.

Before you decide to stand, gain knowledge of your local Council. You can learn a lot by attending Council meetings as an observer – see our [meetings schedule](#). Nearer the date of the election, the Elections Officer at North Devon District Council (who administer all local elections in North Devon) will put up a Notice of Election at public points across the area informing you of where and when to apply to be a candidate.

## **Get more information/useful contacts:**

- The Town Council can answer most of your questions – contact Will Austin, Town Clerk, 01271 373311 or email [townclerk@barnstapletowncouncil.co.uk](mailto:townclerk@barnstapletowncouncil.co.uk)
- NDC provides useful information on becoming a councillor at [http://www.northdevon.gov.uk/index/igcl\\_council\\_government\\_and\\_democracy/igcl\\_elections/nonigcl\\_becoming\\_a\\_councillor.htm](http://www.northdevon.gov.uk/index/igcl_council_government_and_democracy/igcl_elections/nonigcl_becoming_a_councillor.htm)

- Useful information and experiences of other councillors can be found at: [www.beacouncillor.org.uk](http://www.beacouncillor.org.uk)
- Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC): [www.devonalc.org.uk](http://www.devonalc.org.uk)
- National Association of Local Councils (NALC): [www.nalc.gov.uk](http://www.nalc.gov.uk)
- NALC publication 'It Takes All Sorts' - <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/publications/804-ittakes-all-sorts/file>