

Becoming a councillor

Becoming a councillor in the City (known as a Common Councilman) is both a rewarding and privileged form of public service. It enables people to play a valuable part in the running of the Square Mile, contribute to civic life generally and make a difference to the quality of people's lives. Unlike councillors elsewhere, the position in the City is a purely voluntary role and it is not remunerated, although there is some help available to cover loss of earnings.

Here's an explanation of the work involved in being a member of the City's of London Court of Common Council and basic information to those interested in standing for election.

The City is divided into [25 Wards](#). Each has one Alderman and between two and ten councillors, depending on the size of the electorate. In total, there are 25 Aldermen and 100 Councillors.

Aldermen are elected for six years from their date of election, so there is no single date on which they are elected. There is, however, a local election for all 100 councillors every four years and occasional by-elections. The next local election is on **23 March 2017**.

The work of a councillor

The work of the City Corporation is overseen by the [Court of Common Council](#) and certain key decisions are taken by that body. It meets nine times a year, the meetings beginning at 1pm preceded by an informal buffet lunch. There are two additional informal meetings of the Court each year, in February and November.

The majority of the City Corporation's work is, however, carried out through [various committees](#) which are established by the Court. The committees generally meet either late morning (typically 11.30) or at 1.45pm. A modest lunch is often provided after or before meetings – which gives a good opportunity for informal discussion.

Each councillor has an opportunity to serve on two or three Committees made up of representatives from each of the various 25 wards. These are known as Ward Committees and they have broad responsibilities, including oversight of the City Corporation's finances, planning and transportation, community and children's services, port health and environmental services and culture, heritage and libraries responsibilities. The members of each ward agree among themselves who will serve on these Committees but there are also opportunities to be elected to them.

There are also a number of committees that are elected by the Court; members need to put their names forward for election to these committees and most members seek to serve on one or more. The work of these committees is wide-ranging and includes our [police authority](#) work, policy and resources, the running of the Barbican Centre, the City's open spaces and schools and much more.

Councillors are also invited to events during the day or in the evening, such as visits to open spaces or other operational sites. Attendance at these events is voluntary, but to play a full part in the work of the Court members should expect to have an involvement that goes beyond simply attending meetings.

Councillors need to prepare for committee meetings and new members can also take advantage of a comprehensive induction programme to help them be effective as soon as possible.

At a minimum, councillors can expect to spend the equivalent of half a day on City business spread over a working week; those holding major committee chairmanships or who serve on a number of committees will find the time commitment to be more than that; for some positions considerably so.

The election process

Becoming an elected Common Councilman or councillor in the City is similar in most respects to the process for election to a local authority. In both cases **candidates must be 18 years of age and a British citizen or a citizen of a Commonwealth or European Union Country.**

As elsewhere, candidates must then also meet one of a number of other qualifications. As a result of differences in legislation, the qualifications in the City are slightly different from those at local authorities. In principle, and provided those qualifications can be met, it is possible for anyone to stand for election.

In addition to the age and citizenship qualifications referred to above, to be eligible to be a candidate in the City a person must:

- be on the register of voters for City ward elections – not necessarily for the Ward in which the person intends to stand. To be included in the register a person must live in the City or occupy premises, including business premises, as an owner or a tenant. If a person works in or for a City-based organisation, they can also be on the register provided they are appointed to vote by their company or employer.

Or

- own freehold or leasehold estate in the City. In practice, this can be as simple as having a nominal interest in a small space. For example, this could be just a very small part of an office. (It should be noted that while this would make people eligible to become a candidate for election it would not make people eligible to vote in City elections as that requires actual occupancy of the premises concerned.) It is not, therefore, necessary to be on the electoral register in order to stand for election which effectively puts the City on a par with the requirements elsewhere;

Or

- have for the whole of the previous 12 months resided in the City of London.

Candidates for election must also be a [Freeman of the City](#). Many people interested in standing will already be Freemen but, for those who are not, the City will arrange for the freedom to be given immediately and at no cost.

The City arranges one or more open sessions for prospective candidates before each local election. The next session will be held in the Autumn of 2016.

The requirements for becoming an Alderman are different from those of a Common Councilman.

Common Councilmen

- [Qualifying criteria \(27KB\)](#)
- [Job description \(200KB\)](#)

Aldermen

- [Qualifying criteria \(28KB\)](#)
- [Job description \(197KB\)](#)

More information

If you want to know more contact the [Electoral Services Office](#)

The practice of being elected

Most councillors around the UK are representatives of political parties and stand on a party ticket, with the party handling many of the arrangements and giving the candidates support with their campaigns. There is nothing stopping political parties putting up candidates in the City but they rarely do and most members, in their role as a councillor in the City, are independent of party politics.

Candidates in the City standing as independents are unlikely to have the level of support available to candidates for election standing elsewhere, including identifying where to stand, writing a manifesto and canvassing. Aspiring candidates in the City often already have contacts and draw on those to help with their elections. A useful first step is to make your interest in standing known to existing members as vacancies can arise unexpectedly, for example where a member suddenly decides to retire. Officers are also a good point of contact to find more information and Simon Murrells, Assistant Town Clerk, can help in this respect. He can put you in touch with members who can provide further guidance about the work of councillors and how to be elected.

Other options worth considering are becoming involved in a [ward club](#) (every ward has one, comprising people interested in the City and the ward), or in the work of a local residents' associations, such as [Barbican Association](#), [Golden Lane Estate](#) and [Middlesex Street Estate Residents' Association](#).

Attending meetings of the [Court of Common Council](#) or any of the [Committees](#) open to the public and reading the various reports about the business before them is another way of finding out more.

Although the City Corporation's work goes beyond that of a straight forward local authority, [the Local Government Association](#) has a very good section on its website on [how to become a councillor](#).

More information

To discuss this further contact Simon Murrells, 0800 587 5537
or simon.murrells@cityoflondon.gov.uk