

HOW TO BECOME A CITY COUNCILLOR

A guide for prospective candidates
for the 2023 elections





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Introduction

Thank you for your interest in becoming a councillor at Canterbury City Council. The purpose of this guide is to give you some background information about the role of a city councillor and the council,

and to set out what you need to do to stand as a candidate in the next elections which take place on 4 May 2023. There are also parish and town council elections taking place on the same day.

The council

The council is represented by 39 councillors. Each councillor represents constituents in a particular area, known as a ward, but also has a wider responsibility in shaping policies that affect the whole of the Canterbury district.

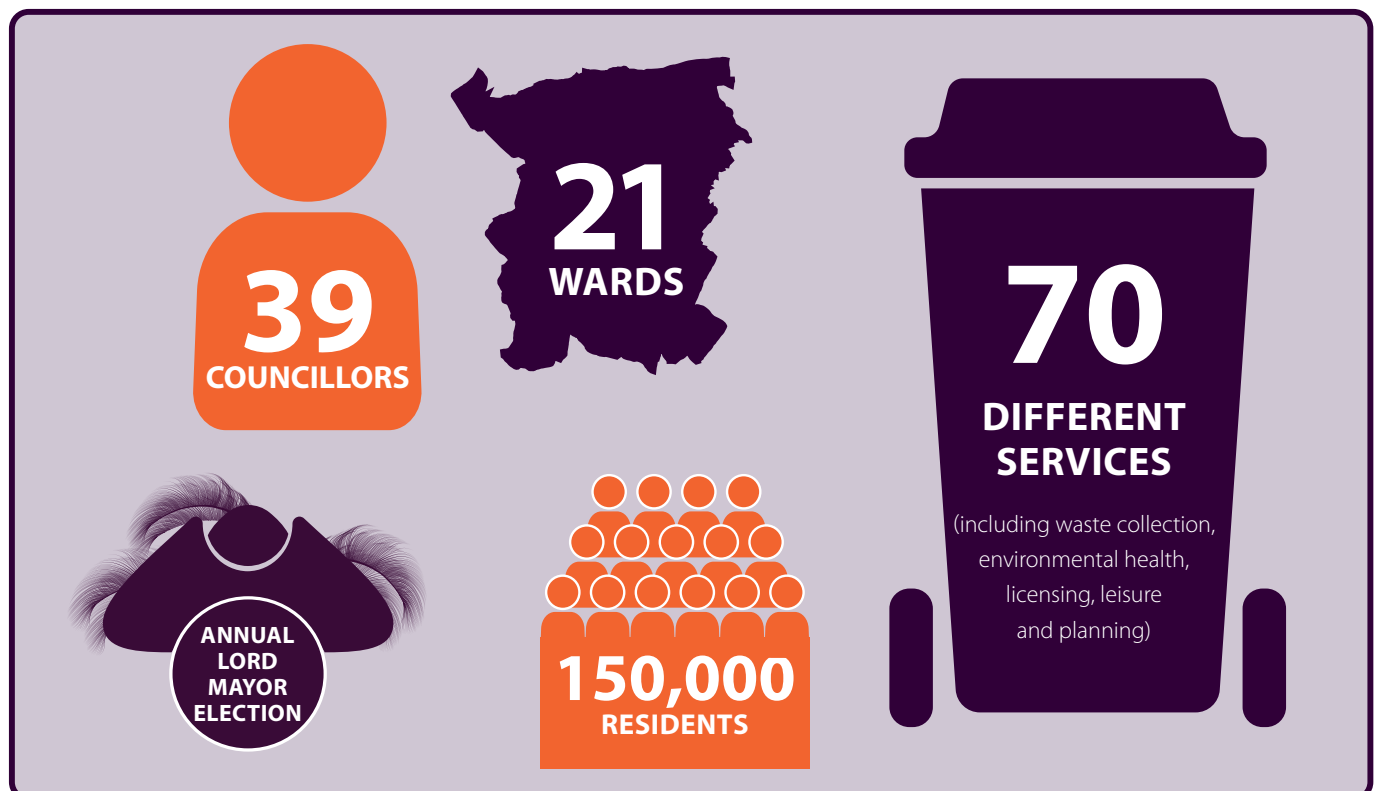
There are 21 wards, and each ward is represented by either one, two or three councillors depending on the size of the electorate in each ward.

There are over 150,000 residents in the Canterbury area, and the council provides services for the benefit of local businesses, visitors and service users.

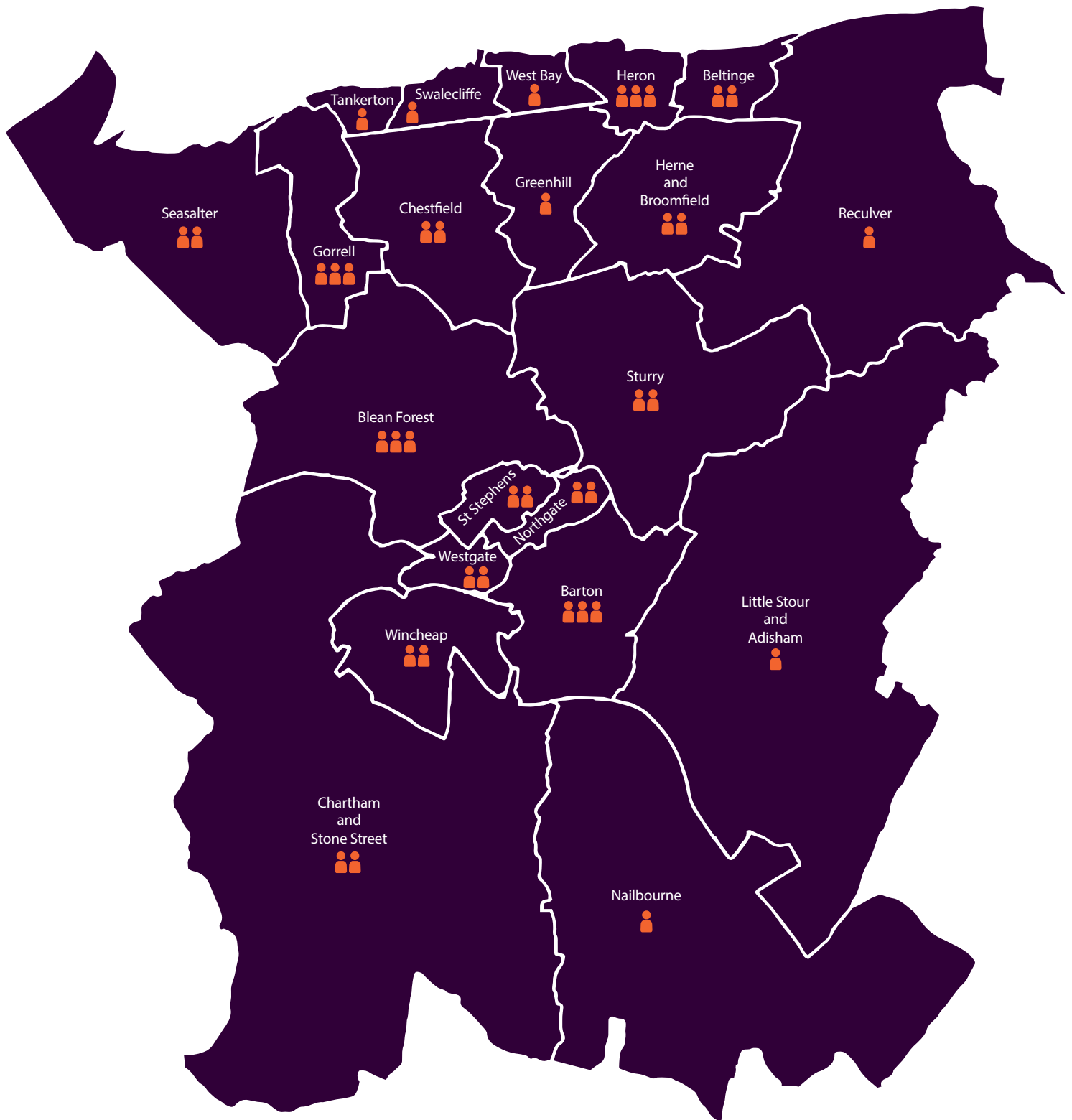
Council officers are employed to advise the council, implement its decisions and oversee the statutory requirements of central government.

The council provides over 70 different services, including waste collection, environmental health, licensing, leisure and planning to name a few.

The Lord Mayor is elected annually at the Annual Council meeting from among the councillors. He or she is the 'first citizen' of the district and represents the council at events throughout the locality.



Ward map and number of councillors for each ward



Why become a councillor?

People stand for election for all sorts of reasons including to:

- speak on behalf of and help their local communities;
- pursue their political beliefs;
- contribute to business or professional skills;
- shape the future of their community;

- enjoy an active involvement in their community; and
- help improve the quality of life in their area.

Councillors play a vital role in shaping and directing the effectiveness of local services. They work with police, health services and other public bodies and with the private sector in order to achieve those aims.

What do councillors do?

Councillors are elected to represent the council, their local community and constituents. The term of office lasts for four years (although if you are elected at a by-election, you serve until the next scheduled council elections).

People will come to you with problems and ask for your assistance, for example, a contentious planning application or problems with noisy neighbours. Groups and organisations will ask for your help. These issues may not always be related to the council's area of activity.

Councillors also have a community leadership role, by working with groups and organisations in your ward and the wider district. Such groups could include the police and health services, to ensure that local efforts to improve the wellbeing of people in the district are coordinated and effective.

All councillors meet together as a full Council to decide on specific policies and governance issues, and to agree the budget each year. The council appoints the Leader and the Leader then appoints a Cabinet which can be made of up to nine Cabinet Members. The current structure is the Leader plus five cabinet members.

The council has a Scrutiny Committee which monitors the decisions of the Cabinet and can call-in decisions for review. There are also regulatory committees which deal with matters such as planning, licensing and standards.

Most meetings are open to the press and public, and discussion in public session is audio recorded and available to view on the council's website, together with the agenda, reports and minutes of meetings.

Can anyone become a councillor?

Councillors come from all walks of life and should be representative of the whole community.

A summary of the criteria to stand as a councillor is set out below but you are encouraged to read all of the guidance available on the Electoral Commission's website.

You must be:

- aged 18 or over
- a British citizen, an eligible Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any member state of the European Union,

- and meet at least one of the following four qualifications which are summarised below:
 - (a) on the electoral register
 - (b) occupied land or premises in the district for the preceding 12 months
 - (c) worked in the district for the preceding 12 months
 - (d) lived in the district for the preceding 12 months.

You must also make sure that you are not disqualified from standing for election.

Full information about the criteria can be viewed on the Electoral Commission website (link on page 11).

What do I need to do to stand as a candidate?

There are nomination papers and other forms to complete and submit to the Returning Officer within a statutory deadline.

You will need to ask two registered electors from the ward you are standing in to sign your nomination papers.

Electoral Commission produces nomination forms and guidance for candidates.

We will also provide you with local information regarding arrangements for the election, such as where the polling stations are, when postal votes will be sent out and where and when the count will take place.

To stand as a councillor, you do not have to be a member of a political group, but if you wish to stand for a party then you will need to contact your local party as soon as possible about this as they will need to support your nomination.

What else do I need to consider ?

Being an effective councillor requires commitment and hard work, but it can also be very rewarding. There is support available to help you and this is summarised later in this document.

The time commitment varies between councillors, depending on the number of committees you serve on, your approach to constituency work (you are likely to deal with constituent's enquiries at home) and how active you choose to be. The majority of council meetings are held in the evening. You will need to read the agenda and papers in advance of the meeting. Agenda, reports and minutes are published on our website.

If you are working, by law your employer must allow you to take a reasonable amount of time off during working hours to perform your duties as a councillor. The amount of time off will depend upon your responsibilities as a councillor and the effect of your absence on your employer's business. You should discuss this with your employer before making a commitment. See link on page 11.

The council does have a scheme of Member Allowances which councillors may choose to claim. There is a basic allowance paid to all councillors plus reimbursement for travel to 'approved' meetings. A special responsibility allowance is available for councillors who hold certain posts, such as chairman or vice-chairman, or being a member of the Cabinet. You find out more information using the link on page 11.

All Councillors are required to sign an undertaking to abide by the council's Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct sets out the standards expected of members, and the Monitoring Officer and Standards Committee can investigate alleged breaches of the code. The code of conduct can be viewed using the link on page 11.

All councillors are also required to complete a register of interests form, which includes details of financial and personal interests, and this information is publicly available and published on the council's website.



What happens after the election?

The Returning Officer will be in contact with you or your agent regarding completion of the election expense returns which must be submitted within a statutory deadline, and these are open to public inspection.

If you are elected, Democratic Services will be in contact with you regarding arrangements for induction and training; to collect various information from you; to make arrangements for signing your acceptance of office and completing register of interest forms; and to guide you on what happens next and what support is available.

At Canterbury we currently offer support to councillors by way of training, regular briefings, IT support (including a dedicated council email address for your council work) and equipment.

You will have access to members rooms and officers will provide you with advice to help you respond to enquiries.

Democratic Services will also give you information about the annual council meeting, and will calculate the political balance so that group leaders can put forward names of councillors for the seats available to them.

Council officers are employed to advise on and to carry out the decisions of councillors. They are committed to help you fulfil your duties as a councillor and are able to offer advice or support on any issue. If you are a member of a political group, or other group, support and assistance will also come from other members of your group.



What are the next steps?

The formal election process begins with the publication of the Notice of Election which is expected to be published on 16 March 2023.

After this date, you can submit nomination papers to the Returning Officer and you are encouraged to contact the Elections team in advance of this date to register your interest, to be sent a nomination pack, and to make arrangements for an informal check of your nomination papers.

The pack will include:

- Nomination Form
- Consent Form

- Home Address Form (candidates can ask for their home address not to appear on ballot papers or notices)
- Election Agent Form (candidates who do not appoint an agent are their own agent, and an address is required to be published)
- Authorisation forms to use a party emblem and description (required if you wish to stand for a political party)

We encourage all candidates to take up the offer of an informal check of their nomination papers before submitting them.

Phone: **01227 862 007**

E-mail: **electoralservices@canterbury.gov.uk**



Useful contact details

Elections

01227 862 007

electoral.services@canterbury.gov.uk

Democratic Services

01227 862 009

democracy@canterbury.gov.uk

Useful information

[Allowances information](#)

[Budget](#)

[Code of Conduct](#)

[Constitution of the council](#)

[Councillors and meetings information](#)

[Council decision making](#)

[Corporate Plan](#)

[Corporate structure](#)

[Electoral Commission](#)

[Population stats](#)

[Time off work for public duties](#)

[What do district councils do?](#)

[What does Kent County Council do?](#)

[What do parish councils do?](#)



