

# A Guide to Becoming a Councillor



**Working Together**

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# 1. Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have been working in partnership since 2013, coming together to deliver services to over 197,000 residents within central and south Suffolk. Both Councils share a Chief Executive, a workforce, and a management team, but both remain two separate sovereign Councils in their own right.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils' headquarters are located in Endeavour House, Ipswich, IP1 2BX – these facilities are shared with Suffolk County Council.

## 1.1. Babergh District

Babergh District Council encompasses 24 wards which are represented by a total of 32 Councillors.

Ahead of the 2023 election, Babergh has 10 Independent, 4 Green, 3 Liberal Democrat, 1 Labour, 4 Independent Conservative and 10 Conservative Councillors.



Babergh's current Cabinet is "rainbow" – this means that Members of multiple different parties make up the administration and have decision-making powers.

## 1.2. Mid Suffolk District

Mid Suffolk District Council encompasses 26 wards which are represented by a total of 34 Councillors.

Ahead of the 2023 election, Mid Suffolk has 16 Conservative, 12 Green, 5 Liberal Democrat and 1 Independent Councillor.

Mid Suffolk's current administration is jointly run by the Conservative Party and the Independent Councillor.



## **2. What is a Councillor?**

A Councillor is someone who has been democratically elected to represent their local community in the running of local Government.

The size of the area that a Councillor represents is dependent on the tier of local Government that they are elected to. At the District level, Councillors are representatives for a “ward” – a reasonably sized region encompassing a section of a town or one to several villages.

Some wards have more than 1 Councillor representing them at a District level.

### **2.1. The Role of a Ward / District Councillor**

Councillors are expected to fulfil several responsibilities as part of their role. These responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Representing the interests of their ward and of individual/groups of constituents.
- Respond to enquiries and concerns from constituents.
- Attend and participate in Full Council meetings.
- Develop strategies and policies that will affect their ward and the whole of Babergh and/or Mid Suffolk.
- Lead campaigns on the Council’s behalf.
- Provide information, help, and advice on Council issues via surgeries and correspondence.
- Supporting local partnerships and organisations

Councillors should engage in community activities and allow themselves to become a publicly accessible point of contact for residents in their ward.

## 2.2. Other Councillor Role Profiles

Alongside fulfilling their responsibilities as a District Councillor, some Councillors may take on other roles and responsibilities within the Council during their tenure.

Title	Purpose
Leader of the Council	To provide leadership to the Council by managing and leading Cabinet. The Leader of the Council is the Leader of the political group(s) with a majority in the Council.  The Leader also has a Deputy.
Chairman	To uphold the Constitution of the Council, preside over meetings of the Council, and act as an Ambassador for the Council.  The Chairman also has a Deputy.
Opposition Group Leader	To provide leadership and strategic direction for the main political group(s) in the opposition.  The Opposition Group Leader also has a Deputy.
Cabinet Member	To provide strategic leadership and set policy priorities related to their specific remit as determined by the Leader of the Council.
Chair of a Committee	To preside over their specific committee and ensure that the work of the committee is conducted to a standard that fulfils its role and functions.
Committee Member	To frequently attend meetings of the committees in which they sit and assist in conducting work to a standard that fulfils the committee's role and functions.

## 2.3. Code of Conduct

All tiers of local government are required to have a Councillor Code of Conduct document. This is a set of strict guidelines of behaviours that a Councillor must follow during their tenure.

The purpose of the Code is to set out the general principles of conduct expected of a Councillor, supply a Councillor with their own means of conducting a personal check and balance against their actions, and detailing the types of conduct that could result in action being taken against you and your position.

A Councillor who is alleged to have breached the code of conduct will be investigated by the Council's Monitoring Officer and faces the risk of receiving reprimands.

All holders of public office are required to uphold the Seven Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles):

**1. Selflessness**

All Members should act solely in terms of the public interest.

**2. Integrity**

All Members should not act in order to gain personal benefits.

**3. Objectivity**

All Members must act and take decisions impartially and fairly.

**4. Accountability**

All Members are accountable to the public for their actions.

**5. Openness**

All Members must make decisions openly and transparently.

**6. Honesty**

All Members must be forthcoming and truthful.

**7. Leadership**

All Members must lead by example and promote the Principles.

The full Suffolk Local Code of Conduct can be found online on the Babergh and Mid Suffolk website [here](#).

### 3. How are decisions made?

Both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council operate under a “Leader and Cabinet” model of governance and decision-making.

This means that the Cabinet makes most of the decisions about how the Council carries out its day to day business within the major policy framework and budget approved by Full Council.

The Leader of the Council, elected to this position by a vote involving all Councillors, has the power to appoint 2 – 9 other Councillors to sit on the Cabinet. These Councillors will be responsible for the direction and decisions within their specified portfolio.

Alongside Cabinet, both Councils also have several Committees that carry out functions either obligated by the Constitution or delegated by the Cabinet.

These committees are:



#### **Planning (BDC) / Development Control (MSDC)**

Members make a determination on planning applications where a decision cannot be solely made by the Chief Planning Officer.



#### **Overview and Scrutiny**

Members review and scrutinise decisions made by Cabinet and can make reports and/or recommendations to both Cabinet and Full Council.



#### **Audit and Standards**

Members undertake the Council's duties in relation to financial governance issues as well as review and consider annual reports regarding statutory functions.



#### **Licensing and Regulatory**

Members consider policy issues on licensing and discharge the Council's function as a licensing authority.

## 4. How do I become a Councillor?

### 4.1. Qualifications

Whilst there are no formal qualifications needed for becoming a Councillor, there are legal criteria that must be met for you to be eligible to stand for office.

You must be:

- Aged 18 or over on the day of nomination
- A UK, EU, or Commonwealth Citizen
- Be registered to vote on the current register with the local council,
- or have either worked or lived in the council's area for one year
- or have been an owner or tenant of any land or premises in the council's area for one year

You **cannot** stand for election if you:

- Work for your local council or hold a politically restricted post
- Are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order
- Have served a minimum of 3 months prison sentence during the 5 years before election day
- Have been disqualified under legislation relating to corrupt or illegal practices.
- Are subject to the notification requirement of or under Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003

## 4.2. How do I stand in the election?

If you meet the above requirements, to officially become nominated as a candidate in a local election you must submit a completed set of nomination papers to the Elections Team. These papers must be submitted by 4pm on the 19<sup>th</sup> working day before the election.

There are three nomination papers that you must submit to make your nomination valid:

- a nomination form;
- a home address form;
- and your consent to nomination

Each nomination form must be signed by 10 people on the electoral register in the ward. The first 2 signatures will be registered as the proposer and the seconder, and the remaining 8 as assenters.

You can obtain all the necessary nomination papers from the Electoral Commission website [here](#).

Please note that the nomination form, the home address form, and the consent to nomination must all be delivered by **hand** to Endeavour House. It is important that you arrange a time with the Elections Team to ensure that an officer is around to collect your papers.

If you would like your nomination papers checked in advance of formally submitting them, please make an appointment with the Electoral Services team.

## 4.3. Standing as a Member of a Political Party

Those wishing to stand in the election as a candidate representing a political party are advised to contact the relevant party's local branch and begin discussions with them. Political groups will be able to supply you with further guidance and support throughout the elections process.

If you are selected as a political party candidate, you must also submit a certificate of authorisation (which states you can stand on that party's behalf) and a political party emblem request with your nomination papers.

#### **4.4. Standing as an Independent Candidate**

You do not need to be a member of a Political Party in order to stand as a candidate in an election – both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council have Independent Councillors.

If you want the word Independent to appear on the ballot paper underneath your name, you need to state this in the description section on your nomination form.

Extra resources and advice are available from the Local Government Association's Independent Office and the Independent Campaign Corner.

#### **4.5. Further Contact Information**

If you wish to discuss further information relating to Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council's elections, please contact the team at:

[elections@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:elections@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk)

Alternatively, you may wish to get in contact with the Local Government Association or the Electoral Commission to discuss requirements further.

## **5. What support do you get as a Councillor?**

### **5.1. Allowances**

All Councillors are awarded a basic allowance for the work that they do for the Council and within their communities.

At Babergh and Mid Suffolk, all Councillors are provided £5,332 per annum. This basic allowance is paid in monthly instalments.

Councillors may receive other allowances dependent on their personal and professional circumstances.

#### **5.1.1. Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA)**

Councillors who undertake the positions set out in the table on Page 5, alongside their Ward Councillor responsibilities, are entitled to an extra allowance on top of their basic allowance.

This Special Responsibility Allowance is dependent on the role in which the Councillor is undertaking.

At Babergh and Mid Suffolk, Councillors are entitled to 2 Special Responsibility Allowances and will be awarded their 2 highest allowances. An exception is made for Group Leaders who will receive this particular SRA independently.

Group Leaders are only entitled to receive an SRA for their position if there are more than 5 members in their political group.

### **5.1.2. Travel and Subsistence Allowance**

Councillors are able to claim travel allowances for travel from, and return to, home or work to attend duties for which the payment of travel allowances has been approved.

Where Councillors undertake approved duties involving absences of more than four hours which extend over a period which fully covers a normal evening meal-time, an allowance for a meal may be claimed.

All rates and full details are viewable under Part 5 of both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council's Constitutions entitled "Members' Allowances Scheme" and can be found [here](#).

### **5.1.3. Childcare and Dependants' Carers' Allowance**

Allowances for meeting the costs of Childcare and/or Dependants' Carers can be claimed by Councillors to enable them to undertake approved duties

Childcare Allowance of up to £13.00 per hour and Dependants Relative Care/Specialist Nursing Care Allowance up to £30 per hour are payable on the production of satisfactory receipts.

Childcare and Dependants' Carers' Allowances are not payable in respect of care undertaken by a family member, friend or neighbour but should be for professional care. The Allowance is also only payable for the duration of the approved duty undertaken by the Councillor, including travelling time.

## **5.2. Time Required**

Being a Councillor comes with varying time commitments – the more time you put into your role the more you will get out of it. You would need to be able to commit a number of hours a week to your Council responsibilities, perhaps in the evenings and at the weekend, to fairly represent your ward.

Councillors with additional responsibilities, such as being a member of the Cabinet or a Committee, will be required to commit more time to their role in comparison to others. This time will involve policy work, reading and producing reports, attending briefings, and contributing to meetings.

Councillors at both Babergh and Mid Suffolk are able to and are supported in holding full-time external employment outside of their Council work. For Councillors in other employment, an employer should permit them the right to time off to carry out public duties as per the Employment Rights Act (1996).

Full Council meetings are held once a month and begin at 5:30pm to give those Councillors with other employment a fair opportunity to attend. It is strongly advised that all Councillors attend their monthly Full Council meetings as a bare minimum commitment.

## **5.3. Training and Further Support**

Members will receive training throughout their time as a serving Councillor to enable them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities as effectively as possible. Training can be delivered both internally from officers at Babergh and Mid Suffolk or may be sourced externally.

All Councillors that are appointed to a committee will be required to undergo the appropriate formal training specific to that committee before being allowed to sit, participate, and make decisions.

The Democratic Services Team at Babergh and Mid Suffolk are responsible for providing support for all Councillors.



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