

Central  
Bedfordshire

**great**  
communities

# Becoming a councillor in Central Bedfordshire

**"I want to  
be part of  
decisions  
affecting my  
area"**

**"I'm  
passionate  
about services  
for older  
people"**

**"I want to  
influence  
council  
spending"**

**"I want to  
develop my  
leadership  
skills"**

**A great place to live and work.**

Find us online  [www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

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## Foreword from Chief Executive Richard Carr

Thank you for expressing an interest in becoming a councillor with Central Bedfordshire council.

For local democracy to work well it is so important that local communities have good representation, with people who prepared to be the voice of their community and help us make Central Bedfordshire a great place to live and work.

Local democracy depends on people like you showing an interest and taking part in the council's work, which is very rewarding and I hope you will think about coming to join us. Perhaps you are already involved in local affairs and want to take the next step. Or you may be looking for a worthwhile and rewarding way to help your local community. Whatever needs changing in your area you could be just the person to change it by becoming a councillor.

This booklet should help you decide whether to stand as a representative of your local community in the next local election on 2 May 2019. There are roughly 20,000 local councillors in England, each representing their local community and all with their own reason for doing so.

No other role gives you a chance to make such a huge difference to quality of life for people in your local area.

If you would like further information, or have any queries, please contact Electoral Services on 0300 300 8008 or email: [electoral.registration@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:electoral.registration@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk).

More information about becoming a councillor can be also be found on the council's website: [www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk).

Thank you for taking the time to enquire about becoming a councillor. I hope you find the information in this booklet useful.



Richard Carr  
Chief Executive & Returning Officer



# The role of a councillor

## Why are councillors important?

councillors play a key role:

- as a voice of the community, representing local people and communities;
- as champions of the users of local services;
- setting council strategy;
- helping to shape future services for the benefit of local people, working in partnership with other organisations such as the police, voluntary community sector, health services and other public bodies and the private sector.

## Why become a councillor and what is expected of you?

Becoming a councillor is a rewarding form of public service that puts people in the privileged position of being able to make a difference to the quality of other people's daily lives.

There are many reasons why people decide to become a local councillor. For example, some individuals stand because they:

- want to make a difference and be involved in shaping the future of the local community;
- are concerned about the local area in which they live and want to ensure that their local community's needs are addressed. This might include by encouraging self-help as well as influencing services;
- want to represent the views of local people and ensure that local community interests are taken into account. In this context, councillors often have to strike a balance between the interests of their ward and the area as a whole;
- want to pursue their political beliefs; and/or
- are concerned about one particular issue, for example care for older people, the need for facilities in an area or traffic congestion.

For some, it is an extension of what they are already doing as they are active in a political party, trade union or school governing body and they see the next step is to become a councillor.

## What do councillors do?

Councillors are elected to represent local residents in an area called a ward which is an electoral area within Central Bedfordshire. The role of a councillor can be very varied and it is up to each individual councillor how they work. Councillors have responsibilities to their ward, to the council and to the whole community of Central Bedfordshire.

Being an effective councillor requires hard work. Every day, councillors have to balance the needs and interests of their residents, voters, political parties and the council. All of these groups place legitimate demands on councillors' time on top of their personal responsibilities to family, friends and workplace.

Ward responsibilities	Council responsibilities	Community leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to and represent the view of residents</li> <li>• Help arrange for the needs of the community to be addressed, including through self-help</li> <li>• Help out individual ward constituents on specific issues, known as casework.</li> </ul> <p>As a councillor, you will find that much of your time is taken up by contact with local people. This could be in the form of dealing with complaints or enquiries. Your role will be to listen, explain council policy and make sure that the policy has been carried out fairly according to official procedures. You will get help and support to deal with constituents' enquiries and complaints from officers in the council.</p> <p>As a ward representative, you can present views and issues associated with the council on constituents' behalf.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help form policy</li> <li>• Help develop the council's budget and agree the level of council tax</li> <li>• Make or scrutinise decisions.</li> </ul> <p>councillors are essential to deciding what is in the public interest across a range of conflicting issues and views.</p> <p>As a councillor, you will be a member of the council and attend council meetings, and could also be part of the Executive and/or various committees such as an Overview and Scrutiny Committee or a Regulatory Committee.</p> <p>You will meet with other councillors from all political groups, to debate and approve council business in a formal setting. Meetings are open to the press and public. There are written rules, which govern behaviour and procedures at these meetings and these assist councillors to participate effectively.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an understanding of the local community and the groups and organisations within it and the ability to build effective partnerships with those organisations</li> <li>• Responding effectively to local priorities</li> <li>• Having a commitment to community engagement and empowerment.</li> </ul> <p>Community leadership is at the heart of modern local government and councils work in partnership with other organisations from the statutory, business and voluntary sectors to improve services and the quality of life of people who live and work in the area.</p>

# How to become a councillor

## I'd like to become a councillor, what do I do next?

The answer depends on whether you want to represent a political party or would like to stand as an independent candidate.

If you want to represent a political party then the next step would be to get involved with your party locally as soon as possible. This will help you find out more about what the role entails, who you will be working with and what it takes to win elections. Ultimately, it's up to the political parties' local groups to decide whether to select you as a candidate, so you need to make contact with them as soon as possible and get involved with their work. Political parties will expect you to be, or become, a party member.

As an independent candidate, you should start building your profile so that local people know who you are, and working out your position on topical local issues. You will need to know what the council is doing about these issues. Nearer election time, as you start going door to door trying to persuade people to vote for you, you may be challenged on your opinions.

Whether you have been selected by a party or are standing as an independent candidate, you must make sure that you are officially nominated as the election date draws nearer. There is a formal nominations process. This means you will need to be proposed and seconded by two people and also to have eight further people as assentors to your nomination (all ten signatories must be registered electors in the ward where you wish to stand). The nomination papers are available from the council's Elections Office. You must also give your consent in writing to your nomination. Nomination papers for the local elections on 2 May 2019 will be available from 18 March and the closing date for receipt of nominations is 4pm on 3 April 2019.

You may find the following useful before you complete your nomination form:

- Do not leave this task until the last minute as there may be a mistake in your papers and you will need time to rectify this;
- When collecting your 10 signatures, it is useful to take a copy of the electoral register with you. You can then compare the name with that on the nomination form and write down the assessor's electoral registration number. The name and number should be exactly the same;
- Make sure the people nominating or seconding you have nominated only you;
- Read the nomination papers and supporting material and make a careful note of when each of the various papers need to be returned. The Returning Officer can help with any queries.

All 59 Central Bedfordshire seats are up for election on 2 May 2019. This offers you the opportunity to stand as a representative of your local community and become a Central Bedfordshire councillor. The local election process for Central Bedfordshire council begins in March 2019 when a Notice of Election will be published. If you are thinking about standing as a candidate you will have to request your nomination papers. Information about the nomination process and what candidates need to do is set out further on in this booklet.

## Who can become a councillor?

To stand for election, on the day of nomination, you must:

- be 18 or over; and
- be a UK, EU or commonwealth citizen;
- be registered to vote in Central Bedfordshire or for the whole 12 months preceding, have lived, worked or owned property in Central Bedfordshire;
- have your nomination paper proposed, seconded and signed by a further eight people who are all on the electoral register in the ward you would like to represent as a councillor.

You cannot stand if you:

- work for Central Bedfordshire council;
- hold a politically restricted post for another authority;
- are bankrupt;
- have served a prison sentence (including suspended sentences) of three months or more within five years prior to the election;
- have been disqualified under any legislation relating to corrupt or illegal practices;
- are an alien (i.e. a person who is not a British subject) or a person of unsound mind;
- have been surcharged in excess of £2,000 by the auditor or court.

## Do councillors need any qualifications?

No, you do not need any qualifications to be a councillor. Life experience is probably the best thing you can bring to the role.

## Do I have to belong to a political party or group?

No, although most people become councillors as a result of joining a political party. However, some people stand for election as “independents” (candidates who do not belong to any political party). The current (as of 1 June 2018) political makeup of the council is as follows:

Group	councillors
Conservatives	52
Independent	4
Labour	2
Liberal Democrats	1
Total	59

## How to register and the election process

If you are thinking of standing as a candidate for a particular political party you will need to be a member of that party's local organisation. More information about political parties can be found on the register of political party's section of the Electoral Commission's website. [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

## Can I claim expenses to run my campaign?

If you decide to become a councillor and spend money on your campaign, it is important to note that you have to pay for your own publicity material, property, services or items used for the campaign. However, if you are a member of a political group or some other group, you may find that financial help is available. You will need to check this with your political party or group.

Furthermore, although you or your party/group pays for the election expenses, you must keep all your receipts. You will need to submit a statement of election expenses, supported by receipts, shortly after the Election. This is done to make sure that the money you spend on the election campaign does not go over the limit of £740, with an additional 6p for every entry in the ward register of electors for which you are seeking to be elected. If you have any queries about election expenses, please contact the Electoral Services team at Central Bedfordshire council.

## Support for councillors

### How much time is involved in being a councillor?

How much time you spend on your duties as a councillor is largely up to you and will depend on the commitments you take on. It could range from a few hours each week to a few hours each day at busier times.

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 post, emails and a great many telephone calls, and not every caller will telephone at what you might think is a reasonable hour!
- Some councillors hold regular drop in surgeries. You may spend some of your time visiting constituents at their homes, or at the council offices, and you may also have to meet with officers of the council to help you with any issues.



*Council Chamber at Priory House*



- There are usually six full council meetings each year, which you will be expected to attend. These are formal meetings with other council colleagues from all political groups. Meetings start at 6.30pm, are held at the council offices at Chicksands and could last up to two hours, occasionally longer.
- You are likely to be a member of at least one committee. Nearly all committee meetings are held at Chicksands during the day and the majority start in the morning. The average length of a committee meeting is approximately two hours, but this can vary. More information on the current year's cycle of council meetings can be found on council's website at <http://centralbeds.moderngov.co.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx?GL=1&bcr=1>
- Some councillors are appointed as School Governors and some represent the council on one or more outside bodies. Background reading and attendance at meetings of these bodies would increase your time commitment.
- For most of the meetings you attend there will be reports that you will need to read beforehand. These reports can be quite detailed and take time to read and understand.
- There is increasing use of documents in electronic form, so you should have access to a computer or tablet for emails and to read electronic documents.
- If you are a member of a political party there will be additional calls on your time to attend political group meetings. Political groups require their members to attend regular group meetings.

This could mean that in the course of one week, you could have an overview and scrutiny committee meeting, a seminar, represent the council on an outside body or partnership and if you are a member of a political group, you could also have a political group meeting and be holding a ward surgery!

You will receive a lot of information as a councillor, so managing this and prioritising it will be important if you want to make an impact and not spread yourself too thinly across too many areas.

In all of this it is worth remembering that there are professionally qualified officers in the council who will be happy to provide you with support and advice on specific issues.

## Will I get paid for my duties as a councillor?

There is no salary for being a councillor. However, councillors are paid allowances to reimburse them for time and expenses incurred while on council business.

Every councillor is entitled to a basic allowance. For 2018/19 this is £10,995.60 (taxable) a year and is paid in monthly instalments throughout the year. In addition, those councillors who hold formal positions in the council, such as Executive members or chairs of committees, are paid an additional allowance called a “special responsibility allowance”. This recognises the additional and often significant time commitment for these duties as well as the additional responsibility of these positions. Councillors may claim travelling expenses for certain approved duties, such as attending council meetings or attendance at meetings of some outside bodies.

You can find more information on the Members’ Allowances Scheme on the council website here (item 38 refers)

<http://centralbeds.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=900&MId=5540&Ver=4&Info=1>

## What support and development is available?

- Information to help you deal with the work you do as a councillor will be provided from officers of the council and it is likely that senior officers including Directors and Heads of Service will be helping you and providing guidance.
- The Council also provides a monthly allowance for ICT, which are currently as set out below. The Council wants to make the most of the technology that enable mobile and paperless working as a result of which all of the agendas and reports for our public meetings are available online. Members are encouraged to use mobile devices to receive all papers online rather than in hard-copy and advice is available from the Council’s IT department on the equipment that can be purchased using the below allowance to support this approach to paperless meetings. Support and guidance is provided to all Members on how to access papers online.

Allowance	Monthly amount (£)
Equipment	12.50
PC support and consumables	Initial payment 19.80 then 47 of 16.80
Fixed line plus broadband	Initial payment 34.90 then 47 of 33.30
Mobile	25.00

Members have the option to claim one, two, three or all four allowances depending on their personal requirements.

- You will be provided with a Central Bedfordshire telephone number (0300 300 xxxx) which will be diverted to either your home line or mobile telephone number.
- You will be provided with a council email address which you should use for all council business as it operates within the secure network required by Government.
- You will have access to the Members’ room and meeting rooms based at the council offices at Chicksands.

## **Member Learning and Development Programme**

The council is committed to supporting you in your role as a councillor by ensuring you are offered a range of learning opportunities so that you can be effective in your role throughout the term of the council. Our Member Development Programme begins with a number of induction sessions to broaden your knowledge of your role and the work of the council.

Immediately after the election, successful candidates will receive a welcome pack and lots of useful information. There is an induction day for all Members on 9 May 2019; this will be your opportunity to meet key officers, have your official photograph taken and enable you to complete your register of interest's form. This will be followed by an induction programme of briefings on the services of the council and topical issues. You will be offered a range of opportunities to attend events as part of our Learning and Development Programme for councillors, which includes community leadership, scrutiny and challenge, communication skills and partnership working as well as regular briefings on topical issues. We also offer a range of e-learning opportunities to support you in your role.

## **Will I get time off work to attend council meetings?**

Yes. Under Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 an employer must allow you to take a reasonable amount of time off during working hours to perform your duties as a councillor. This includes attending committee meetings.

However, employers can choose to pay you for this time, but they don't have to. The amount of time off will depend upon your responsibilities and the effect of your absence on your employer's business. You should discuss this with your employer before making any decision about whether to stand as a councillor.

## **Members Code of Conduct**

Central Bedfordshire council has adopted a Members' Code of Conduct that sets out rules for how its councillors should behave. councillors need to register 'disclosable pecuniary interests' and these include interests held by a Member's spouse, civil partner or similar. If your interest is registered, you do not have to declare it at meetings. If your interest is not registered, then you need to declare it. Following election, all newly elected councillors will be required to sign a written undertaking to abide by the Members' Code of Conduct, and they will also be asked to complete a register of interests form within 28 days of election. The Code of Conduct can be found on the council website (part 33 refers)

<http://centralbeds.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=900&MId=5540&Ver=4&Info=1>

## **Am I entitled to a copy of the Electoral Register?**

Yes. In the run up to the election, candidates can request a free copy of the electoral register for the ward for which they are standing. The electoral register lists residents who can vote at the election.

# About Central Bedfordshire council

## About the council

Central Bedfordshire council is a unitary council and was formed on 1 April 2009, following Bedfordshire County council being disbanded and the merging of the former districts of Mid Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire. The council was initially formed with 66 seats, but this was reduced to 59 following a Boundary Commission review in 2010. This review also established 31 wards (comprising a mix of single, two and three-member wards) within Central Bedfordshire, as shown on the map on page 13.

The area of the council is 716 square kilometers and Central Bedfordshire is the 11<sup>th</sup> largest unitary authority council in England by area. The council serves a growing population of around 276,700 which is set to increase to 287,300 by 2021. Central Bedfordshire is the 15<sup>th</sup> largest unitary council in England by population size and covers a largely rural area, with over half the population living in the countryside and the rest in a number of market towns. The largest of these are Leighton Linlade, Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Biggleswade.

The area is generally prosperous, with above average levels of employment. However, there are pockets of deprivation and greater need in some areas (mainly in Dunstable and Houghton Regis).

The Chiltern Hills, an area of outstanding natural beauty, form a major feature in the south west. The Greensand Ridge runs eastwards through the area, and the Forest of Marston Vale provides over 30 square miles of woodlands in the north west. There are more than 30 sites of special scientific interest, as well as three national and 11 local nature reserves.

The area has excellent transport links with the A1 and M1 running through it, three main rail lines and two international airports, Luton and Stansted, on our doorstep.

It is in the centre of an academic 'golden triangle' between Oxford, Cambridge and London Universities and also benefits from its own academic institutions at Cranfield University, the University of Bedfordshire and other further education colleges.

Residents have given the council clear and consistent feedback about their attitudes to the authority and the area. In response to this, the council is committed to six key priorities which are:

- Enhancing Central Bedfordshire
- Great resident services
- Improving education and skills
- Protecting the vulnerable and improving wellbeing
- Creating stronger communities; and
- A more efficient and responsive council

The council's ambition is to ensure Central Bedfordshire is a great place to live and work. To realise this ambition, the council is seeking to improve the experience of local residents and to help the area realise its true potential as a place, particularly bearing in mind the housing growth planned for the future.

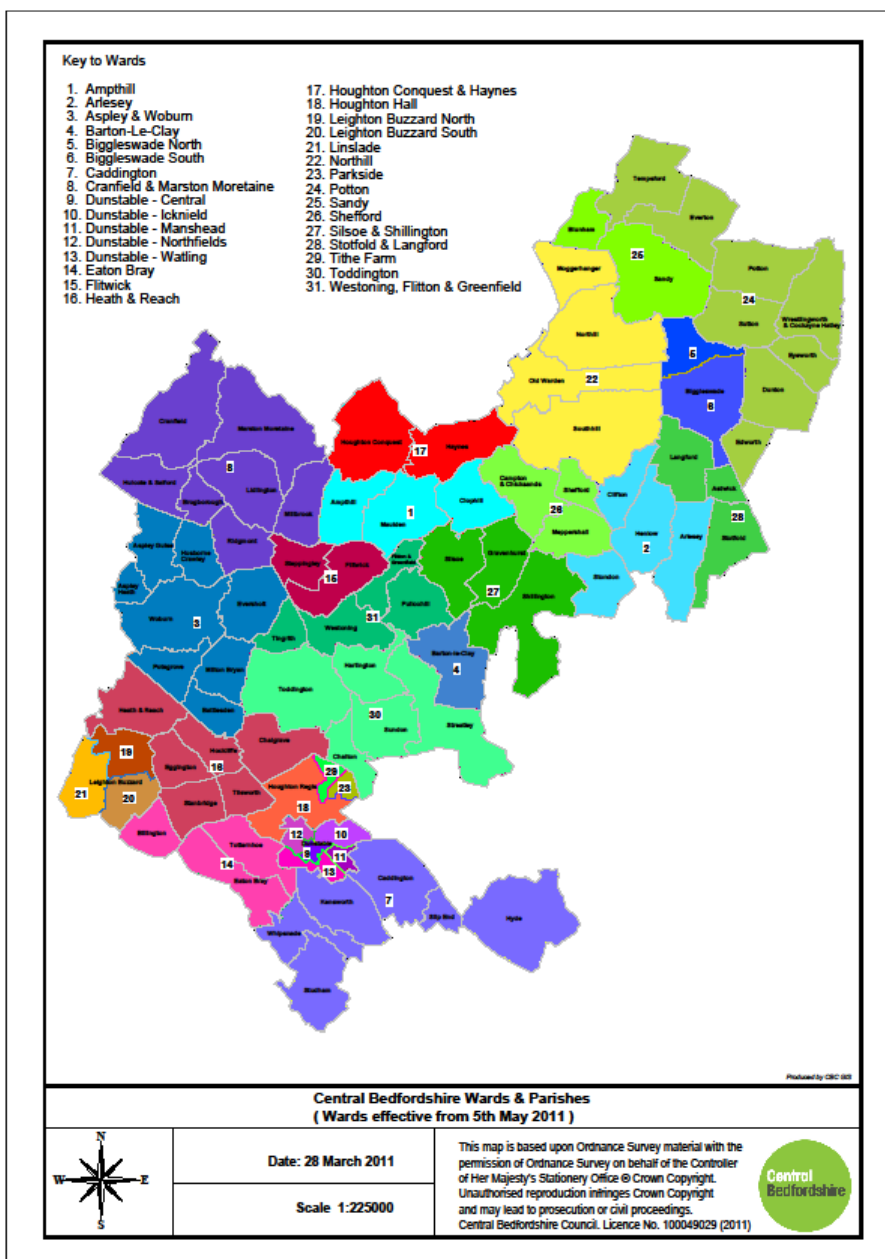
## About the area

Central Bedfordshire is a relatively safe, green and affluent area which has attracted major investment. People living in Central Bedfordshire earn more than the national average; this is in part influenced by some residents commuting out of the area – primarily to Hertfordshire, Luton, London and Milton Keynes.

## Population estimates of largest towns 2016

Leighton-Linslade	41,725
Dunstable	38,850
Biggleswade	19,580
Houghton Regis	18,700

## Council Wards map



## How decisions are made

The council operates a Leader and Executive model of political management.

The Executive is made up of the Leader of the council and currently seven other councillors, one of whom is designated the Deputy Leader.

The council also has a General Purposes Committee, 4 Overview and Scrutiny Committees, an Audit Committee, Development Management Committee, Licensing Committee, and a Health and Well Being Board. All councillors meet together as the council. These meetings are open to the public except where “exempt” (confidential) items are discussed. Here, councillors decide the council’s overall policies and prepare the budget each year. There are certain things which the law says only the full council can decide such as setting the budget. Other matters are decided by a Committee or by the Executive. These are set out in the [council’s Constitution](#).

<http://centralbeds.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=900&MId=5540&Ver=4&Info=1>

## Useful contacts

- For further information on elections in Central Bedfordshire please visit <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/elections> or contact the elections office by email [electoral.registration@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:electoral.registration@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk) or by telephone 0300 300 8008
- Guidance for candidates and information on the electoral cycle is available on the Electoral Commission website: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)
- The Local Government Association represents councils in England and Wales and information on its work can be found at: [www.local.gov.uk](http://www.local.gov.uk)
- For more information and advice from the Local Government Association on becoming a councillor, visit [www.beacouncillor.org.uk](http://www.beacouncillor.org.uk)



# **Central Bedfordshire in contact**

## **Find out more**

For more information about this publication, further copies, or a large print copy, get in touch.

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