Bridport Town Council

BECOME A COUNCILLOR AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

YOUR GUIDE TO BEING A BRIDPORT TOWN COUNCILLOR



Are you passionate about Bridport? Do you want to help make a difference? Do you have innovative ideas for the council? Do you have concerns about an issue and want to do something about it? If this is you, then we need you. We need people from all backgrounds and experiences who reflect our community to put themselves forward for election for the new, enlarged Bridport Town Council in May 2024.

These pages aim to tell you everything you need to know about being a local councillor in Bridport and we hope the guide will help to dispel some myths too.

If you have any questions contact the Town Clerk, Will Austin, on 01308 456722 or by email will.austin@bridport-tc.gov.uk. Will is particularly keen to hear from people who'd like to be a councillor but think there may be obstacles – time commitment, child care issues, work clashes, etc. – so that we can consider how we could change things to make it possible.

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Bridport Town Council

WHAT IS A TOWN COUNCIL?

Town Councils are statutory bodies (which means they are set up and controlled by law) and are local authorities in their own right. They are the most local level of government and can represent the concerns and aspirations of a genuine local community.

Unlike the larger principal councils (unitary, county, district, or borough), town councils don't have many specific legal duties. Instead they focus on the needs of the local community, often filling 'gaps' in service provision that aren't met by other bodies

In a town council the Chairman takes on the role of Mayor – a figurehead for the town and a focus for civic pride.

The range of powers of the council continues to change and grow. Bridport Town Council has adopted the 'General Power of Competence', which enables it to do anything provided there isn't a law that prohibits it. This means we get involved in a wide variety of activities, like:

- a host of local public services, including community events, Bridport's markets, parks and open spaces, highway verge maintenance, tourism (including Bridport Tourist Information Centre), Licensing, and a community bus service.
- management of land and buildings, and providing community buildings and spaces for public use/hire.
- community projects like solar car ports, the Bridport Sculpture Trail, 'Changing Places' Toilets, and public WiFi.
- strategic plans for Bridport, such as the Climate Emergency Action Plan, Neighbourhood Plan, Bridport Investment Plan, the Access & Movement Study, and the Streetscape & Heritage Study.
- 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? Councillors overs an annual budget of £1.4 million.

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. In Bridport, the council raises about 40% of its income from sources other than the Council Tax.

Town councils' activities are strictly controlled to make sure they don't break the law and are accountable to their communities. Their governance and finances are independently audited every year. Councillors must adhere to a Code of Conduct and complete a Register of Interests. Their meetings are open to the public. This means that they are fully accountable to the public and assures the community that decisions are always taken in the public interest.



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WHAT DOES BRIDPORT TOWN COUNCIL DO?

- Allotments; we provide and manage 170 allotment plots across Bridport.
- Capital Projects; we deliver and support projects for community benefit such as the Changing Places toilet in West Bay
- Community Representation and Leadership; our position gives us a strong voice in representing the community to other local and national public sector bodies. We also take a lead on issues of importance to the community, including establishing Bridport as a 'Rights Respecting' town.
- Cemetery; we manage the highly regarded Bridport Cemetery
- Civic and Ceremonial; the Town Mayor and Deputy Mayor are elected from Bridport's Town Councillors, and they attend a wide range of events and functions as the town's representatives.
- Community Bus; we launched a round-Bridport bus service in 2018 to enable residents to access the town centre and other parts of the town
- Environmental; we look after all public highway verges and various other green and open spaces in Bridport (including Asker Meadows, and Bucky Doo Square), manage sites and a range of footpaths, and hold events to promote environmental, health and wellbeing issues. Our grounds maintenance work is expanding quickly and our environmental work includes community leadership in areas such as climate change.
- Events; The Town Council is represented at the Food Festival, Melplash Show, Community and Charter Fair, as well as providing logistical support for a host of local events each year. These include the Jurassic Fields, Christmas Cheer and Hat Festivals. We also organise the Remembrance Parade in November. We support smaller community events and promote Bridport as 'Dorset's Eventful Town'.







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WHAT DOES BRIDPORT TOWN COUNCIL DO?



- Grants; we award nearly £60,000 a year in grant support to community organisations.
- Hire/Lease of Facilities; we have conference, meeting and events venues at Mountfield, the Salt House, the WI Hall and the Town Hall, which are available for private hire. We also offer long leases at Council-owned properties for office, commercial and community uses.
- Markets; we manage Bridport Market, West Bay Summer Market, and West Bay Car Boot Sale.We are the market authority for the town, meaning that we control what markets can be provided.
- Partnership Working; we work with a range of local organisations to make the most of resources in the Bridport area. These include parish councils and charitable and voluntary organisations. We are a member of, and provide administrative support to, the Bridport Local Area Partnership, which brings together over 200 local groups and individuals to benefit the community in areas such as health and wellbeing and homelessness.
- Planning; the Town Council is a statutory consultee on planning applications, and a partner with other local councils in developing the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan.
- Play Areas; The Town Council maintains and enhances a number of play areas, including the fully accessible West Bay Play Area.
- Street Collection Licences, Sitting Out Licences and A-Boards; we manage these on behalf of Dorset Council.
- Tourist Information Centre; As well as its tourism information services, the award winning TIC also now manages the Town Hall, WI Hall, Bucky Doo Square, the Bridport and West Bay web site and the production of the Town Guide. It provides a Box Office Service to a range of local organisations and events including the Electric Palace and the BridLit Festival.



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WHAT DOES A TOWN COUNCILLOR DO?

Listen and be a voice for your community

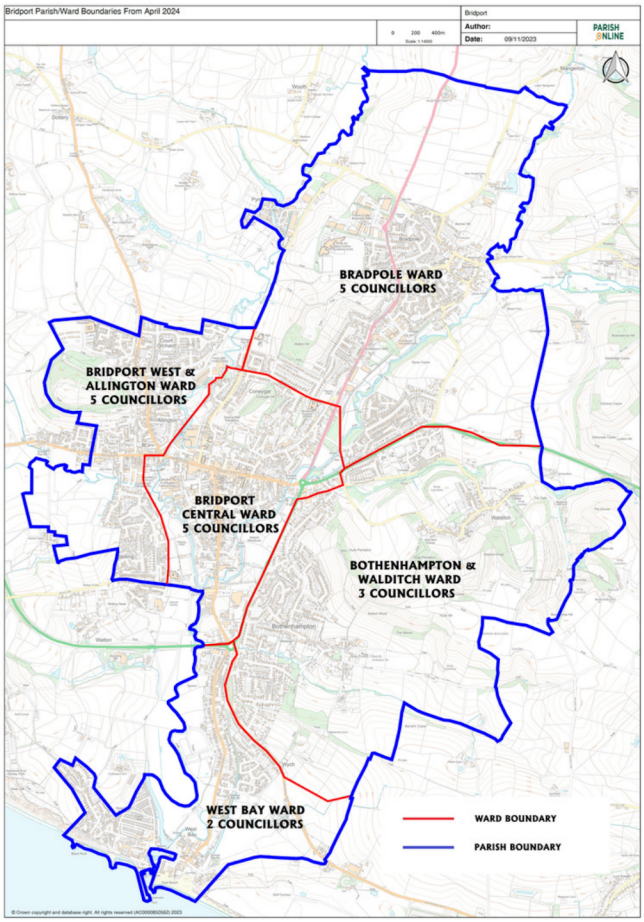
The single most important task for a town councillor is to listen to the views of the people in their community. By doing this, councillors gain important information about the concerns and aspirations of the people they represent. It is for this reason that many public bodies turn to the Town Council for information about the services they provide. For example, Dorset 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 the community

From May 2024, town councillors will represent one of five geographical areas, called wards. The wards and councillor numbers are shown on the map to the right. Ideally the ward councillor would be a resident of the ward, but the important thing is to understand the area well enough to be able to represent its needs.

Town councillors act as ambassadors for their community, keeping everyone aware of local needs and concerns and reporting back on county and regional matters. Councillors represent the voice of their community as a whole, whilst being aware of, and considerate to specific minority needs. Councillors make representations at other local government meetings (such as Dorset Council). They are appointed to sit on local bodies/ organisations whose work affects the community. Some may be asked to serve on certain groups or attend functions on behalf of the Council.



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WHAT DOES A TOWN COUNCILLOR DO?

Attend meetings

When elected, Councillors agree to attend meetings, and these are normally held in public. Bridport Town Council meets in full session six times a year, and it operates a number of committees, sub-committees and working groups. Councillors decide which committees they want to be members of (although the numbers are limited so you're not guaranteed a place!).



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 receptions and attendance at 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 sometimes 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!

Bridport Town Council covers quite a large population (about 13,500 from April 2024)

The next Bridport Town Council elections are in May 2024



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SUPPORT

What support will I get?

The Town Council is supported by the office of Town Clerk, and we have some 24 other committed staff to ensure delivery of the decisions of the Council, and provide support to councillors. As a new councillor you will be able to seek procedural advice and guidance from the Clerk as well as through the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils. Appropriate training will also be arranged, and some of your fellow councillors will be experienced so can help you get 'up to speed'.



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 to cover expenses, currently £707 per annum (as at April 2023). The Mayor and Leader can both claim an extra £707 recognising their additional responsibilities.

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 Bridport and will be expected to use your position in a measured and responsible way.

The Town Council has adopted a code of conduct that all councillors must adhere to.

Local Councils are usually elected once every four years and occasionally a byelection will be held if a Council seat becomes vacant. As a result of Local Government Reorganisation in Dorset, the next town council election, in May 2024, will be for a term of five years. This is to bring all councils' electoral cycles into line, and will revert to four-yearly terms from 2029.



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WHEN DOES THE TOWN COUNCIL MEET?

The Full Council meets six times a year in the evening. The Council committees variously meet either monthly, every two months or quarterly, again mainly in the evenings. Councillors sometimes agree to set up working groups to meet on an ad hoc basis for particular issues. These ad hoc groups generally meet in the daytime.

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.

We offer virtual attendance at all of our meetings if requested, but the law as it stands means that – for Full Council and committee meetings – councillors must attend in person. We are looking at ways to make use of virtual attendance until the Government changes the law – one idea is to hold informal meetings virtually, so that the formal meetings can be kept as short as possible.





The meetings schedule which is at https://www.bridport-tc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2023-2024-calendar-of-meetings-1.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!

Councillors are there to consider the information gathered and make a group decision. No one councillor is responsible for any single decision.

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AM I ELIGIBLE?

Get a feel for it

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 Team at Dorset Council (who administer all local elections in the Dorset Council area) 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. They also publish details of upcoming elections at https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/councillors-committees-elections/elections-and-voting/forthcoming-elections-referenda-and-polls/forthcoming-elections-referenda-and-polls.



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. As a result of Local Government Reorganisation in Dorset, the next election will be for a term of five years. This is to bring all councils' electoral cycles into line, and will revert to four-yearly terms after that.

Can I become a Town Councillor and how do I stand for election?

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 (or within 4.8km of the town boundary) for twelve whole months.

You may not stand for election as a 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.

Detailed information on how to stand for election is available from the Electoral Commission: www.electoralcommission.org.uk or contact the District Council Electoral Services team – 01305 838299 or email elections@dorset.gov.uk.



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MORE INFORMATION

Contact Will Austin, Town Clerk, 01308 456722 or email Will.Austin@bridport-tc.gov.uk. Alternatively the Mayor or current councillors will be able to tell you more about serving on your local council – their contact details can be found at https://www.bridport-tc.gov.uk/councillors/.

To find out if you are eligible to stand as a councillor or to ask for nomination papers, contact the Dorset Council Electoral Services team – 01305 838299 or email elections@dorset.gov.uk.

If you would like to know more details about the work of a town councillor visit the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils (DAPTC) at www.dorset-aptc.gov.uk or National Association of Local Councils (NALC) at: www.nalc.gov.uk.

Useful information and experiences of other councillors can be found at: www.beacouncillor.org.uk and in the NALC publication 'It Takes All Sorts' – http://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/publications/804-ittakes-all-sorts/file.

