

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Your guide to being a Bridport Town Councillor



Bridport
Town Council



These pages provide a summary of the things you need to know about being a town councillor in Bridport. If you have any questions contact the Town Clerk, Will Austin, on 01308 456722 or by email will.austin@bridport-tc.gov.uk.

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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, elected in this role by the councillors, takes on the role of Mayor - a figurehead for the town and a focus for civic pride. Unusually for a town council, Bridport Town Council elects a Council Leader from among its councillors, whose role is to drive the strategic direction of the council.

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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, 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? Bridport Town Councillors oversee an annual budget of £1.6 million.

Town councils have statutory tax raising powers and are in part 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 nearly 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'. For 2024, Bridport has been named as Dorset's first 'Town of Culture'.



- Grants: we award about £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.

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- **Markets:** we manage Bridport Market, West Bay Summer Market, and the 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.
- **Open public spaces:** we look after all public highway verges, a range of footpaths, and various green and open spaces in Bridport (including St Mary's Playing Fields, Plottingham Fields, Riverside Gardens, Borough Gardens, Asker Meadows and Bucky Doo Square). Our grounds maintenance work is expanding quickly, as we take on work on behalf of Dorset Council, parishes surrounding Bridport and other local organisations.
- **Planning:** the Town Council is a statutory consultee on planning

applications, and a partner with other local councils in 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.
- **Strategic Plans:** we work in conjunction with the Bridport community to provide a vision for the town, through documents like the Climate Emergency Action Plan, Neighbourhood Plan, Bridport Investment Plan, the Access & Movement Study, and the Streetscape & Heritage Study.
- **Charity 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. Local Councils act as a voice for their communities, drawing attention to issues which concern the community.

Town councillors represent one of five geographical areas, called wards. The wards and councillor numbers are shown on the map in your induction pack. It is of course important that councillors understand their ward well enough to be able to represent its needs.

Act as an ambassador for the community

Town councillors act as ambassadors for their community, keeping everyone aware of local needs and concerns and reporting on county and regional matters. Councillors represent the voice of their community as a whole, whilst being aware of specific minority needs. Councillors make representations at other local government meetings. They are appointed to sit on local bodies/organisations whose work affects the community.

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.

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 run Town Council stands at community 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!



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What support will I get?



The Town Council is supported by the office of Town Clerk, and we have some 26 other committed officers whose role is to ensure delivery of the decisions of the Council, and provide support to councillors. As a councillor you can seek procedural advice and guidance from the Town Clerk as well as through the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils. Appropriate training will also be arranged, and some councillors will be experienced so can help newer councillors get 'up to speed'.

Councillors can claim an allowance to cover expenses, currently £734 per annum (as at April 2024). The Mayor and Leader can both claim an additional allowance, recognising their additional responsibilities.

What rules do I need to follow?

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.

Procedurally, the council's work is governed by its constitution, which contains a range of rules the council must follow. Three key procedural documents are (i) Standing Orders, (ii) Financial Regulations, and (iii) the Scheme of Delegation.

Remember – as an individual councillor you cannot make a decision or incur expenditure on behalf of the council. Decisions are made at council meetings unless they are specifically delegated by the Scheme of Delegation.



How long is my term as a councillor?

Local Councils are usually 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 term for the 2024 Town Council will be five years. This is to bring all councils' electoral cycles into line, and we 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.

From 2024, the Town Council is divided into five wards, and the expectation is that councillors will want to meet at ward level. The remit, frequency, timing, and membership of ward-based member groupings will be an early issue for town councillors to decide on.

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.

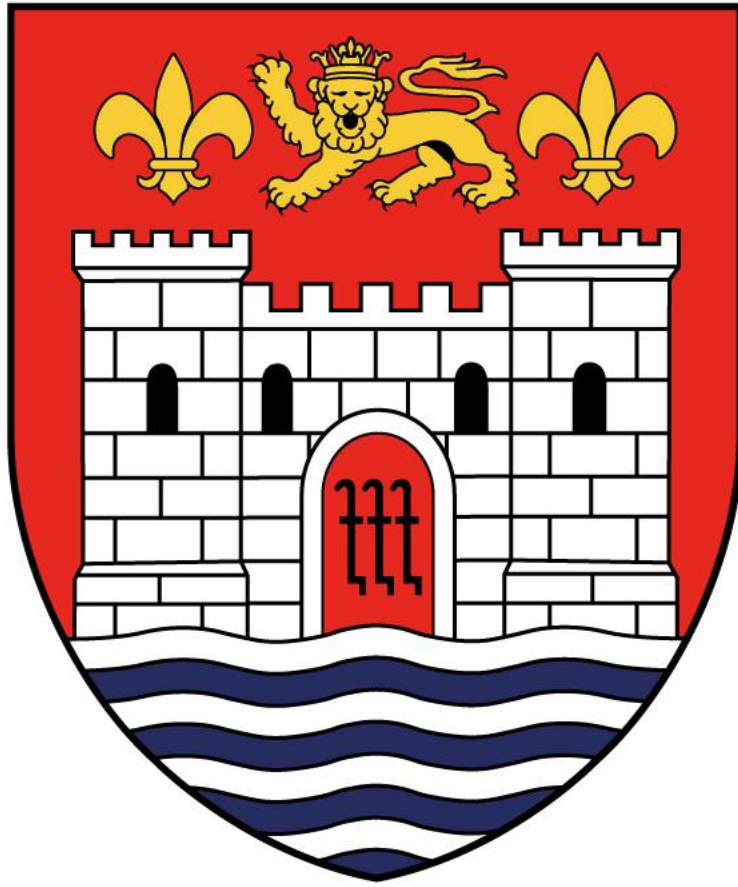
Our latest meetings schedule can be found at <https://www.bridport-tc.gov.uk/committee-meetings/> and gives an indication of the number of meetings, but remember – not all councillors have to attend all meetings, so it's not as onerous as it looks!

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

More information

Contact Will Austin, Town Clerk, 01308 456722 or email Will.Austin@bridport-tc.gov.uk. If you are newly elected you may also want to liaise with more experienced councillors who will be able to tell you more about serving on the town council - their contact details can be found at <https://www.bridport-tc.gov.uk/councillors/>.

For more general information about town and parish councils in Dorset, visit the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils (DAPTC) website at www.dorset-aptc.gov.uk. The national sector body, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) also provides a range of information at www.nalc.gov.uk.



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