

# BECOMING A COUNCILLOR

## A QUICK GUIDE TO ELECTIONS AND THE WORK OF A COUNCILLOR



High Peak Borough Council

0845 129 77 77

[www.highpeak.gov.uk](http://www.highpeak.gov.uk)

*working for our community*

## Introduction



We are very proud of our 'Excellent Council' status. Our Councillors and officers work hard to deliver a wide range of services to the people of the High Peak.

Every four years local people vote to choose their local Councillor to represent their interests and be the voice of the community. Councillors play a vital role in developing the quality of life for the residents of the High Peak by making sure that we deliver the best services. They make decisions about how the Council does things now and develop plans for the future. 43 Councillors represent the people of the High Peak. The next elections for the High Peak Borough Council will take place on 5 May 2011.

This booklet is a simple guide to help you understand how to stand as a candidate for the High Peak Borough Council and to explain a little about the work of a Councillor. Becoming a Councillor means that you will be working at the heart of local democracy. It will mean a big investment by you as an individual and can be both rewarding and challenging.

If you decide that you would like to stand as a candidate in an election you will need to make sure you understand the detailed rules. More helpful information can be found on the web site of the Electoral Commission.

You can also telephone the Elections Office on 0845 129 77 77.

The main qualifications for being a councillor are that you care about the local community, are willing to give up some of your time, and are also keen to learn. Your knowledge, confidence and experience will all follow on naturally from there; however

## To be eligible as a candidate you must:

- be aged 18 or above
- be a British citizen, or a citizen of another Commonwealth country, the Republic of Ireland or the European Union.

You must also, on both polling day and the day of nomination:

- be registered to vote with High Peak Borough Council: or
- for the whole of the previous 12 months have lived or occupied land or premises (as owner or tenant); or had your main place of work in the High Peak.

You cannot stand for election if:

- You are the subject of a bankruptcy restriction or interim order.
- You are employed by High Peak Borough Council or certain other authorities with which it has close links.
- You hold what is known as a politically restricted post.
- You have served a prison sentence of three months or more within five years of the election.
- You have been disqualified from holding office as a result of an election offence relating to corrupt or illegal practices.

## How do I apply to be a Councillor?



To become a Councillor you must complete the official nomination papers. A Notice of Election will be published in early March 2011 after which time Nomination papers will be available from the Returning Officer at High Peak Borough Council, Municipal Buildings, Glossop.

The nomination paper is your legal application to become a Councillor. You will need to read it thoroughly and complete it accurately. You will need to comply with the very strict timetable for submitting it and you should try to submit it in advance of the close of nominations in case you need to make amendments to your paper. It is suggested that you collect and return your papers by hand.

You will need to gain the support of 10 people who are included on the electoral register for the Ward you will stand in. These people can be anyone who wishes to support you including family members, friends or neighbours. Two of these people will be your proposer and seconder.

You will be required to appoint an election agent. You can choose to act as your own agent. Your agent, amongst other things, will see that your campaign is conducted correctly, deals with your expenses and generally organises your campaign activities.

If you are representing a registered political party you can use a description of up to six words and a party emblem on the ballot paper. This must be authorised by the party's Nominating Officer. If you are not standing on behalf of a party you can use the description 'Independent' or no description at all but cannot use an emblem.

If your nomination paper is accepted as valid the Returning Officer will send you details of what happens next. If there is a poll, this will include details of polling stations, where the count will take place and a listing of who is receiving their vote by post. You will be invited to the opening of the postal votes and to the counting of the votes.

## What happens at the count?



You will be invited to bring a specified number of people to the count with you, these are called counting agents. Their role is to observe and ensure that the count is carried out securely and accurately. Everyone who attends the opening of the postal votes and the count will be required to make a declaration that they will maintain the secrecy of the proceedings.

The ballot boxes containing the votes cast from each Polling station will be brought to the count venue, and opened in the presence of the candidates and counting agents.

The papers will be counted and checked against the number that the staff at the polling station have issued. Once all of the ballot boxes have been checked in this way, the papers will be mixed together and counted into candidates. The candidate who receives the most votes is elected and the result is declared by the Returning Officer.

## **When would I start my duties as a Councillor?**



If you are elected as a Councillor you will have to make a declaration in the presence of the Council's Head of Legal and Democratic Services. This takes place as soon as possible after the election so that you will be able to take up your duties straight away. Outgoing Councillors retire on the 4th day after the election and new Councillors start at the same time.

All Councillors must comply with a Code of Conduct and make a declaration of financial and other interests. This is so that local residents can be sure that the people that represent them act with integrity and do not participate in decisions where they could gain personally.

## **Do I have to pay a deposit?**



No, a deposit is not required to stand as a candidate in an election to a local authority. This is only necessary at Parliamentary and European Elections.

## **Return of Expenses**



Following the election each candidate is required by law to complete a statement of expenses to show how much money has been spent towards his campaign. This has to be sent to the Returning Officer within 28 days of the declaration of the result. These expenses are not reclaimable from the Council. Your nomination pack will contain information about how much you are legally able to spend on election activities.

## What does a Councillor do?



Councillors plan, run, monitor and develop council business. Your first duty is to represent people from the Ward where you were elected. This includes promoting Ward interests at Council meetings and helping local people with particular problems in relation to Council services.

Councillors are asked for advice about all sorts of Council services and those provided by other agencies and organisations. Many Councillors hold regular monthly 'surgeries' where members of the public can drop in for help and advice. For many people, election as a Councillor will be their first real involvement with local government. To help you in your role a comprehensive training programme will be made available to you. Your fellow more experienced Councillors can be a great source of help and advice.

At meetings a Councillor will also have a responsibility to consider not only issues which benefit the Ward they represent but also the whole of the Borough.

Councillors are involved in making decisions and are appointed by Council to serve on Committees and also to take part in the scrutiny role carried out by the Select Committees. The Select Committees are involved in developing new policies and looking at decisions that have been made to ensure that they have been reached properly. You can find information on what each of the Committees and Select Committees do by visiting the Council's web site. A copy of the Council's Scrutiny Handbook is also on the web site.

Councillors are also appointed to represent the Council on Outside Bodies, local partnerships and also are invited to attend Area Forums.

To help you in your duties we will make sure that you have electronic access to Council information. You will also receive a basic allowance. Some councillors also receive an additional responsibility allowance for particular council duties such as chairing meetings.

## Further information

This booklet has been produced to act as a guide only. If after reading it you require more in-depth information please contact

The Elections Office on 0845 129 77 77 extension 2133 or 2039.

Our web site is [www.highpeak.gov.uk](http://www.highpeak.gov.uk)

Email - [borough-council@highpeak.gov.uk](mailto:borough-council@highpeak.gov.uk)

The web sites of the Electoral Commission and Local Government Association are also useful sources of information

[www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

[www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)

We can provide the information in this leaflet in larger print or other formats if required.



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