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**SANDWELL!**



# Becoming a Sandwell Councillor: A Public Guide

May 2026



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## 1. Introduction

1.1. Becoming a councillor is a significant and valued public role. Councillors are central to local democracy, giving voice to residents, shaping decisions about services and resources, and supporting the long-term needs and aspirations of communities across the borough. People become Councillors for many reasons, including to:-

- **Make a difference:** Shape the future of Sandwell and improve services that matter to you and your neighbours.
- **Give back:** Many Councillors feel a strong desire to serve their community and help others.
- **Use your voice:** Represent under-represented communities or bring a fresh perspective to local government.
- **Personal development:** Gain new skills in leadership, negotiation, public speaking, and policy-making.
- **Political ambition:** For some, it is a first step into a career in politics or public service.

1.2. This guide provides a clear and realistic explanation of what the role involves in practice. It is written for anyone considering standing for election, as well as residents who want a better understanding of how democratic representation works.

1.3. The guide reflects Sandwell's commitment to transparent, accountable and effective local government. It sets out the responsibilities of councillors, the support available to them, and the steps required to stand for election. It also recognises the importance of diverse representation and encourages people from all backgrounds to consider contributing to public life.

## 2. About Sandwell

2.1. Sandwell is a metropolitan borough made up of six towns and 24 wards, each with its own community identity, strengths and priorities. Councillors play a crucial part in helping these communities thrive.

2.2. The Council's priorities focus on improving opportunities for children and young people, strengthening neighbourhoods, promoting health and wellbeing, supporting a strong local economy, and providing high-quality services.

2.3. The borough and all its communities continues to evolve. Councillors contribute to shaping long-term investment, regeneration, community development and partnership working across the region.



### 3. Role of a Councillor – what’s involved

3.1. Councillors act as the democratic link between residents and the Council. They represent the views and concerns of people in their ward, advocate for individuals requiring support, and help shape the priorities and direction of the borough as a whole.

3.2. In their representational role, councillors engage directly with residents through casework, community meetings, ward surgeries, local events and informal conversations. They speak for residents in formal settings, ensuring local issues are understood and addressed. Councillors are responsible for:

- **Representing residents:** Listen to concerns, attend community meetings, and advocate on behalf of individuals and groups.
- **Decision-making:** Participate in full council meetings, scrutiny boards, and other committees, contributing to strategic decisions affecting the borough.
- **Setting budgets and priorities:** Help shape the Council’s annual budget and develop and review council policies and local plans.
- **Scrutinising services:** Ensure that council services are delivered effectively and fairly.
- **Promoting equality fairness and inclusion:** Actively listening to diverse voices, addressing systemic barriers and advocating for policies that promote fairness and justice.

3.3. Some Councillors may also take on additional responsibilities, such as being a Cabinet Member, Chair of a Committee, or Leader of a political group.

3.4. Councillors also contribute to collective decision-making. All councillors attend Full Council and may serve on a range of committees. These include:

- **Talking to constituents** by phone, email and letter, social media, home visits, drop-in sessions, street or community meetings, and local events.
- **Responding to queries and issues** from local people, investigating concerns, helping with solutions (this is called casework).
- **Keeping the community informed** about local issues and events – for example through email, newsletters, blogs, social media and in person.
- **Reading Council meeting agendas and reports**, research and evidence to understand issues and participate in discussions and decisions.
- **Attending formal Council and committee meetings** as well as meetings with local partners and organisations.
- **Working collaboratively** with local people, voluntary and community organisations, police, health partners, and businesses to shape the future of the local area. Building strong relationships and encouraging people to get involved and share their views and ideas.



3.5. Councillors work across political groups and in partnership with residents, community organisations, health partners, police, businesses and voluntary groups. Effective councillors build relationships, facilitate dialogue and help partners collaborate to address complex issues.

3.6. While the public aspects of the role are often most visible, much councillor work happens in preparation: reading reports, analysing information, discussing proposals with officers, and considering the impact of decisions on residents and the borough.

3.7. You don't have to be a member of a political party to be a Councillor. If you are an independent Councillor, there is support and events available from the [Local Government Association Independent Group](#).

#### 4. Standards, behaviour and conduct

4.1. Upholding high standards is essential to maintain public trust. Councillors must comply with the Council's Code of Conduct, which incorporates the seven Nolan Principles of Public Life and our residents and communities rightfully expect the highest standards of behaviour from Councillors when undertaking this role. The seven principles are:

4.2.

1. **Selflessness** – Act solely in the public interest, not for personal gain.
2. **Integrity** – Avoid obligations or influences that might compromise independent judgment.
3. **Objectivity** – Make decisions impartially, based on merit.
4. **Accountability** – Be answerable for decisions and actions and submit to scrutiny.
5. **Openness** – Be transparent about decisions and actions, unless there are clear lawful reasons not to.
6. **Honesty** – Be truthful in all matters.
7. **Leadership** – Uphold and promote these principles, leading by example.

4.3. Councillors are elected to serve the public and must meet high standards of behaviour at all times. This means acting respectfully, lawfully and professionally in all settings—whether in meetings, online, or when engaging with residents and officers.

4.4. If you are elected, you have to sign a declaration accepting the office of councillor before you can take up the role – this also commits you to complying with the Code of Conduct and the Nolan Principles.



4.5. Respect is essential. Councillors must treat colleagues, officers and the public with courtesy, even when views differ. Debate can be robust, but it must remain focused on issues, not individuals. Personal attacks, insults or belittling behaviour are not acceptable. Councillors must not name officers in debate (except to seek advice from the Monitoring Officer), nor use the role to pressure or criticise officers personally. Officers must always be treated with professionalism and respect.

4.6. The same standards apply outside formal meetings. Councillors should act with integrity, honesty and openness in all interactions, including on social media. They must follow the Code of Conduct, register and declare interests, and avoid any conduct that could bring the Council into disrepute.

4.7. All Councillors must register disclosable pecuniary and other interests, declare relevant interests during meetings, and withdraw from discussions where legally required. These measures ensure transparency and protect decision-making from conflicts.

4.8. Councillors should model respectful behaviour in meetings, in correspondence, and online. They must treat officers, residents and other councillors fairly and courteously, even where views differ strongly.

4.9. Under the law, councillors risk losing office if they fail to attend any meeting for six consecutive months without prior approval of Full Council. Attendance is both a legal requirement and a practical necessity to allow you to fulfil the role effectively.

## 5. How much time does the role take?

5.1. A typical councillor spends around 10–15 hours or more each week on council duties. This varies depending on personal circumstances, ward issues, and committee responsibilities. Time commitments include:

- Responding to resident enquiries and casework;
- Attending community, town or ward-based meetings;
- Preparing for and attending Full Council or committee meetings;
- Reading agendas, reports, evidence and policy documents;
- Participating in briefings, training sessions and workshops.



5.2. Councillors with additional responsibilities – such as the Leader, Cabinet Members or committee chairs – will normally spend more than 20–30+ hours of work each week. These roles carry greater decision-making responsibilities and require more substantial preparation.

5.3. While councillors can often carry out casework flexibly, formal meetings generally require attendance at specified times. Many meetings take place in the evening, enabling councillors to combine the role with work or caring responsibilities.

5.4. Remember – the meetings you see listed on the Council’s website are only the tip of the iceberg! Being a Councillor involves much more than committee meetings.

## **6. Support, Training and Development**

6.1. All councillors receive a structured induction covering how the Council works, its services, statutory responsibilities, and the legal and ethical framework underpinning local government. This ensures councillors can participate effectively from the outset.

6.2. Ongoing training is provided throughout each term of office. This includes mandatory training for certain committees, such as planning and licensing, and development opportunities relating to scrutiny, finance, safeguarding, equality, leadership skills and community engagement.

6.3. Officers provide professional advice, detailed reports and technical guidance to support councillors’ decision-making. Councillors are encouraged to draw on officer expertise to ensure decisions are well-informed and lawful.

6.4. Peer learning is a valuable part of the role. Councillors benefit from mentoring schemes, political group support, and training offered by national organisations. Over time, councillors develop broader skills in communication, influencing, negotiation, strategic thinking and public leadership. These are often useful beyond your role as a councillor.

## **7. Working with Officers and Understanding Roles**

7.1. Councillors and officers work in partnership to deliver the Council’s objectives. Councillors set policy direction, approve budgets, scrutinise performance and represent residents. Officers implement decisions, manage staff and resources, and provide professional advice.



7.2. Councillors are elected representatives responsible for setting policies, making strategic decisions, and representing the views of their constituents. Officers, on the other hand, are employed by the Council to implement these policies, provide professional advice, and manage day-to-day operations. Decisions regarding staffing, employment, and operational management are the responsibility of officers, not councillors.

7.3. Understanding the distinction between these roles is central to good governance. In its simplest form:-

- Councillors influence and shape what the Council should do;
- Officers determine how it is delivered within the legal and policy framework.

7.4. Councillors receive impartial advice from officers, who explain risks, options and statutory requirements. This helps councillors reach informed decisions. Officers should be treated with professionalism and respect, reflecting the shared aim of serving Sandwell's residents.

7.5. Councillors do not become involved in day-to-day management or staffing matters. Any concerns about service delivery should be raised with the relevant senior officer, who retains operational responsibility.

7.6. Trade unions also play an important role in representing council staff, supporting fair employment practices, and ensuring that employee rights are upheld.

7.7. While councillors decide what the council should do, officers advise on how to achieve these goals and ensure decisions are delivered effectively, legally, and in accordance with employment regulations. Clear boundaries and collaboration between these roles are essential for good governance and accountability.

## **8. Allowances and practical things to consider**

8.1. Councillors receive a basic allowance of £12,129 (as at April 2025), set annually under the Members' Allowances Scheme, to ensure they are not out of pocket when undertaking their duties.

8.2. Councillors are not employees and they are not Officers. Councillors are elected and hold the role for a term of office, leaving when either they are voted out of office, resign, pass away or are excluded from holding office for some other reason.

8.3. Councillors with significant additional responsibilities, such as Cabinet Members or committee chairs, receive a Special Responsibility Allowance to reflect the greater commitment required.



8.4. Expenses relating to approved duties may be claimed where appropriate. A scheme is in place to support councillors with caring responsibilities, helping to ensure the role is accessible to all.

8.5. If you are employed, your employer must allow reasonable unpaid time off for public duties. Many councillors find that early discussion with their employer helps ensure responsibilities can be balanced effectively.

## 9. Who Can Stand for Election

9.1. You must be aged 18 or over, meet nationality requirements, and satisfy at least one local connection criterion (residence, work or property ownership in Sandwell). Full details are set out in electoral law and in advice given to candidates.

9.2. Certain individuals are disqualified from standing, including those in politically restricted posts, those subject to bankruptcy restrictions, and those with specific criminal convictions.

9.3. Candidates may stand for a political party or as independents. Party candidates must follow their party's selection processes; independents prepare their own nomination forms and campaign material.

## 10. How to become a Councillor

10.1. Start by attending a Council or committee meeting to observe the role in practice. Talk to serving councillors about their experiences and review recent council reports to understand the issues councillors regularly consider.

10.2. To stand for election, you must submit nomination papers to the Returning Officer during the formal nomination period. Electoral Commission guidance provides detailed step-by-step advice.

10.3. During the campaign, you must comply with rules on spending, publicity and conduct. The Council remains politically impartial but will provide information to all candidates equally.

10.4. If elected, your term of office begins on the fourth day after the election. You will then take part in induction, sign the declaration of acceptance of office, and complete your register of interests.

10.5. You **do not need to be a member of a political party**, although many candidates are. Independent candidates are welcome.



## 11. Further Information and next steps

11.1. Becoming a councillor is a rewarding but demanding opportunity to make a positive contribution to your community. If you are thinking about standing, you may wish to:

- **Attend a Council meeting:** See what Councillors do first-hand. Meetings are open to the public, you can also watch them online on: <https://civico.net/sandwell> or access agendas, minutes and reports as well as Councillor information by viewing **Modern.Gov**
- **Talk to your local Councillor:** Learn about their experiences and how they manage their role.
- **Join a political party or community group:** Many people start their journey here.
- **Apply to stand as a candidate:** Elections are held every year, with a third of seats up for election, apart from one 'fallow year' in the four yearly electoral cycle when no elections take place.

## 12. Key Dates

12.1. If you are successfully elected as a Councillor, there are a number of essential commitments immediately following the election. These dates must be kept free, as attendance is a core part of taking up office and ensuring you are able to perform your duties effectively from day one.

### 12.1.1. Acceptance of Office Event

**Tuesday 12 May 2026**

You will be required to attend one of the following sessions:

- 9.00am – 1.00pm or
- 1.00pm – 5.00pm

This session is mandatory. You will formally complete your Declaration of Acceptance of Office and receive key information required to begin your role.

### 12.1.2. Induction Day

**Wednesday 13 May 2026, 9.00am – 4.00pm**

Full attendance is expected. This session provides essential briefings on governance, standards, decision-making processes, and your responsibilities as a Councillor.



### **12.1.3. ICT Equipment Handover**

Appointments will be scheduled between Tuesday 12 May and Friday 15 May 2026.

You will be issued with your Council ICT equipment and given instructions on accessing Council systems. Timely collection is essential to ensure you can undertake casework and receive Council communications without delay.

### **12.2. Member Training and Development**

All newly elected Members are required to undertake a comprehensive induction and training programme as part of their Member Development Plan. This programme is designed to equip you with the knowledge and skills necessary to fulfil your responsibilities lawfully, effectively, and confidently.

Further details of the training schedule will be provided following the election. Some sessions may be mandatory, particularly those relating to standards, planning, licensing, and regulatory functions.



