

HULLBRIDGE PARISH COUNCIL



GUIDE TO BECOMING A PARISH COUNCILLOR AND STANDING FOR ELECTION

ISSUED: 2024



GUIDE TO BECOMING A PARISH COUNCILLOR

A Parish Council is only as good, decent, and effective as its councillors, and so it is vital that the community is supported and represented by the very best councillors – they are the what ensures a coherent and efficient council.

A Parish Councillor is:

-  The voice of the community representing residents and local needs
-  The bridge between other levels of local government and local people
-  The face of the Parish Council and the community for stakeholders and external bodies
-  Able to support the Parish Council Office, staff, and community leaders in best representing the needs and concerns of their constituents

Every **four years**, all 13 seats on Hullbridge Parish Council are up for election; in 2024, these seats will be elected to the term 2024-2028. Election time is the perfect opportunity for prospective candidates for the Parish Council to get involved and stand for election in order to contribute to the fantastic body of work that Hullbridge Parish Council is undertaking, as well as bringing new ideas and schemes to the table.

This guide is designed to inform prospective candidates how and why they should stand for election and become a parish councillor, as well as provide an insight into the process of co-option which occurs when an elected position becomes vacant within a council's four-year term.

Any further questions that are not addressed in this guide can be directed to the Clerk at the Hullbridge Parish Office (clerk@hullbridge-pc.gov.uk) and/or the Elections Team at Rochford District Council (available at: <https://www.rochford.gov.uk/elections>).

Hullbridge Parish Council hopes that this guide is useful to you, and advises that any elected councillors retain a digital copy of the guide for future reference if there is an intention to stand for re-election or pass information about the electoral process onto residents/prospective colleagues.



Councillor Conner Agius,
Vice Chairman of Hullbridge Parish Council,
Parish Councillor for Hullbridge South (2021-)



HULLBRIDGE PARISH COUNCIL

Why Become A Parish Councillor?

People may become parish councillors for a whole variety of reasons. For some, this is because it is a wholly different arena to operate in than they normally would where there is a level of representation and responsibility (such as when a member of a school governing body, a trade union, or a political party).

However, more often than not, people become parish councillors wholly independent of any of those backgrounds or political loyalties/interests. Instead, people who become parish councillors have put themselves forward because they:

-  Want to make a difference to their local area and the local community, and be a part of the shaping of its future
-  Want to ensure that residents are effectively represented and served by their councillors
-  Want to ensure that services and support is available and accessible for residents
-  Want to lend their views/experience/special interests into the overall debate or debate in a particular area (i.e. in Planning and Infrastructure or in Environment and Open Spaces)

There are **no** required qualifications to be a parish councillor. It is integral that the diversity and variety of the local community's makeup and opinion is as best represented as possible, and so it is encouraged that as many residents of different backgrounds, age groups, and interests come forward as possible. Through this, Hullbridge can be better served and council decisions can be better informed and responsive.

Do I Have To Be A Member Of A Political Party?

Membership of a political party is not necessary to stand for election and be a parish councillor; it is convention that parish councils operate as an independent and impartial body rather than one made up of political groupings as seen in higher levels of government both local and national.

However, if a prospective candidate is a member of a political party, this does not preclude them from standing or from having involvement in that political party. Additionally, a parish councillor is not precluded from joining a political party during their four-year term.

It is also perfectly acceptable to be a party political councillor on other levels of government whilst simultaneously serving as a parish councillor, providing you are able to dedicate enough time to each role successfully.



HULLBRIDGE PARISH COUNCIL

Who Can Become A Parish Councillor?

To be able to serve as, and stand for election to be, a parish councillor, an individual must:

-  Be at least **18 years of age** on the day of their nomination
-  Be a **British citizen** or an **eligible Commonwealth citizen**
-  Live within **3 miles** of the parish they wish to represent
-  Meet **at least one** of these three qualifications:
 -  They are, and will continue to be, registered as a Parish Council elector for the parish in question from the day of their nomination onwards
 -  They have occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the Parish area during the whole of the 12 months before the day of their nomination and the day of the election
 -  They have lived in the designated parish area during the whole 12 months before the day of their nomination and the day of the election

A prospective candidate will be **ineligible** to stand if, at the time of their nomination and on the day of the election, they:

-  Are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or an interim order
-  Have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment of three months or more (including a suspended sentence) without the option of a fine during the five years before polling day
-  Have been disqualified under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (which covers corrupt or illegal electoral practices and offences relating to donations) or under the Audit Commission Act 1998.

How Are Decisions Made By Parish Councillors & Full Council?

The 13 Parish Councillors of Hullbridge Parish Council meet monthly (excluding August) at meetings of Full Council, typically held on a Monday. The details of time, date, and location will be available on request from the Parish Office, are distributed to Councillors via a calendar of meetings both as a paper copy and digitally every six months or so.

Full Council meetings are open to the public, as are all committee meetings, and are chaired by the Chair of Hullbridge Parish Council. The Chair and Vice Chair are appointed at the Annual Meeting in May each year. All matters are discussed in some form either at Full Council or at Committee and are then put to a vote of Full Council to be ratified and implemented. No decisions can be made without Full Council's approval, apart from when that power is delegated to the Clerk.

Every councillor is a member of Full Council and will also sit on some of the Committees and Working Groups to debate and approve council business. Most meetings are open to the press and public, but all are governed by written 'procedure' rules that must be followed by all councillors on those committees. Each committee will have a Chair and Vice Chair, elected at the first meeting of that Committee after May. The Chair of Hullbridge Parish Council is eligible to sit on all committees with full member privileges as an *ex officio* member.



HULLBRIDGE PARISH COUNCIL

What Are A Parish Councillor's Responsibilities?

A good deal of time will be taken up in regular monthly and occasional extraordinary meetings; dealing with local concerns and casework, as well as following up with these lines of inquiry; carrying out and attending volunteer working groups within the parish; carrying out a specific role on the Council as Chair/Vice Chair/Committee Chair/Committee Vice Chair etc.; attending local public events on behalf of the Parish Council, especially the Hullbridge Christmas Lights Switch On event which all councillors are encouraged to attend and assist with.

The best way to outline a Parish Councillor's responsibilities is to compartmentalise these responsibilities into four areas: The Parish, The Council, The Community, As Advocates.

The Parish

-  Represent the views of the community
-  Ensure services are provided in the parish
-  Help out individual residents on specific issues

The Council

-  Help develop the budget and set the Hullbridge Parish Council annual precept
-  Make and scrutinise decisions
-  Work with and alongside the Parish Office and staff, including the Clerk and Assistant Clerk, with respect and candour

The Community

-  Listen to their communities and bring partners together to implement a shared vision of how they can help to improve their areas
-  Become actively involved, by offering personal time, in a wide variety of community projects
-  Attend regular councillor surgeries and ensure the continuation of accountability

As Advocates

-  Speaking up for and on behalf of residents and groups
-  Encouraging residents to engage and participate
-  Taking part in plan creation and planning decisions
-  Communicating individual concerns to the council and other interested/relevant parties, including higher levels of government and community stakeholders



How Much Time Is Involved?

Each councillor will decide their own level of commitment to the role, as well as whether they feel comfortable taking on some additional responsibilities. For prospective and newly elected councillors, some of the issues to consider before committing are:

-  How being a councillor will impact on family and personal relationships – their support will be needed as some free time will be occupied with council matters
-  Hullbridge residents will look to their councillors for help, advice, and information
-  There are eleven monthly Parish Council meetings a year which all councillors are expected to attend the majority of - meetings start at 7.30pm and generally last for up to two hours
-  Members of committees and outside groups will need to attend the relevant meetings, generally held in the evenings. For Parish Council committees, these meetings are usually held on Wednesday evenings at the Parish Office.
-  If elected as Chair or Vice Chair of either the Council, or of any committees, then additional responsibilities will result

Probity & Integrity

Councillors' conduct is formally governed by the Code of Conduct adopted by every local government authority. It sets out the rules members should work to. Councillors **must not** behave in a way that brings the council into disrepute, and they **must not** misuse their official position to their own advantage or the advantage of others. Certain interests, such as land owned in the district, must be registered in the official Register of Members' Interests.

Councillors are expected to follow certain principles, defined as the Seven Nolan Principles of Public Life as set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in their first report published in 1995:

-  Selflessness
-  Integrity
-  Objectivity
-  Accountability
-  Openness
-  Honesty
-  Leadership

Any councillors falling below expected standard, or miss six consecutive Full Council meetings, will be subject to dismissal from the Parish Council. If a councillor is likely to face dismissal, it is likely they will be informed beforehand and given the opportunity to address the issue at hand – at any occasion, all procedures on this will be actioned by the Clerk of the Council in liaison with the Monitoring Officer at Rochford District Council.



How Do I Become A Councillor?

Every four years, elections to the Parish Council are held. When there is to be an election, Rochford District Council publishes a 'Notice of Election' and gives details of the electoral areas, date and time of election, the number of councillors to be elected, and the timetable for proposing a candidate – known as submitting nomination papers.

A copy of the election timetable and a nomination pack can be obtained from the Electoral Services team at Rochford District Council at the start of the formal election period. The pack will contain all the forms and information you will need to become a candidate. After the close of nominations, if there are more candidates than vacancies then an election will be held; if 13 or less nominations to the Parish Council have been received, these individuals will be automatically elected to the Council.

How Do I Get Nominated To Become A Councillor?

Nomination packs are available from the Electoral Services team at the start of the formal election period. To be nominated a prospective candidate will need a:



'Proposer' - someone who will put your name forward as a candidate



'Seconder' - someone who supports the proposal

Candidates must also complete a 'consent to nomination'. The Notice of Election will state the date by which the papers must be submitted to the Returning Officer at Rochford District Council.

Although it is unusual for a Parish Council election, candidates can either appoint an election agent to manage their election campaign or, alternatively, they can act as your own agent. It is the candidate's responsibility - or that of the agent – to present nomination papers to the Returning Officer before the closing deadline.

It is worth noting, that each candidate is responsible for their own publicity whether it be by themselves, an agent or friends. For example, the voting cards when delivered to households will not list the candidates. The Electoral Authorities are only obliged to list the candidates on the voting paper in the polling booth.

The election process, including what candidates may spend on their campaign, is set out in legislation and it is the responsibility of candidates to ensure that they comply with the law. The nomination pack will contain guidance notes for candidates. The legislation relating to elections is extensive. Candidates and election agents are advised to familiarise themselves with these provisions. The Returning Officer and their staff are available to give general advice to candidates and election agents. If you require advice, please contact Electoral Services at <https://www.rochford.gov.uk/elections>. Please note however, that the team will only provide generic advice. For detailed advice on individual matters, candidates and election agents should use other sources.



Important Tips

-  Don't leave it until the last minute - papers will need verifying so candidates should give themselves enough time to correct any mistakes.
-  Read the nomination paper and supporting material carefully
-  Candidate needs to find their proposer and seconder's respective Election Numbers (these numbers could be made available from the Parish Clerk, or the Electoral Services at Rochford)
-  Candidate needs to make sure the people nominating and seconding them are only backing that one candidate

Full Details Of The Nomination Process Are Available From:

Council Offices
South Street
Rochford
Essex
SS4 1BW

The Mill Arts and Events Centre
Bellingham Lane
Rayleigh
SS6 7ED

Rochford District Council is split between two locations, the main Council offices are located at South Street in Rochford. The Council Chamber and Information Centre are located at The Mill Arts and Events Centre in Rayleigh.

Rochford Reception opening hours are:
Monday - Thursday 08:30am - 5:00pm
Friday 08:30 - 4:30pm

The Mill Arts and Events Centre opening hours are:
Monday - Thursday 09:00am - 5:00pm
Friday 09:00 - 4:30pm