

B L A C K P O O L C O U N C I L



L E G A L A N D D E M O C R A T I C S E R V I C E S

Becoming A Councillor

A brief guide for potential candidates for local elections



Blackpool Council

BUILDING A BETTER COMMUNITY FOR ALL



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



North West
Member Development Charter Authority

Building a better community for all

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Foreword

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Blackpool councillor. This guide gives a brief insight into the role of councillor and what it means to represent Blackpool.

By standing at the local elections you will make an important contribution to community life as well as influencing decisions that affect everyone who visits, works or lives in Blackpool.

The role can be tremendously challenging but rewarding, and offers a great opportunity to be at the heart of local democracy.

I hope you find this guide useful and wish you every success for the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Weaver". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Steve Weaver
Chief Executive

About Blackpool

- Blackpool is a highly urbanised coastal resort in the west of Lancashire.
- The population is 142,000, making up 10% of the Lancashire population.
- Tourism provides a major source of industry.
- There are high areas of deprivation in the town and key issues include health, disability, unemployment and educational attainment.

Services provided by the Council

As a unitary authority the Council is responsible for providing a wide range of local services including:

- environmental services such as waste collection, street lighting and cleaning
- parks, sports centres and other leisure facilities
- wide range of services for children and young people including schools
- social care for adults
- housing and benefit services
- libraries
- economic development and tourism
- regeneration and transport

The Council's priorities

A new Blackpool

- renewing and regenerating the town
- improving the economy, jobs and pay
- making people proud to live in Blackpool

Quality services

- improving the lives of vulnerable adults, children and young people
- developing a clean, green, safe and health town
- providing high quality and high performing Council services

Stronger communities

- providing attractive, secure and sustainable neighbourhoods
- cutting crime and antisocial behaviour
- improving the health of Blackpool's residents

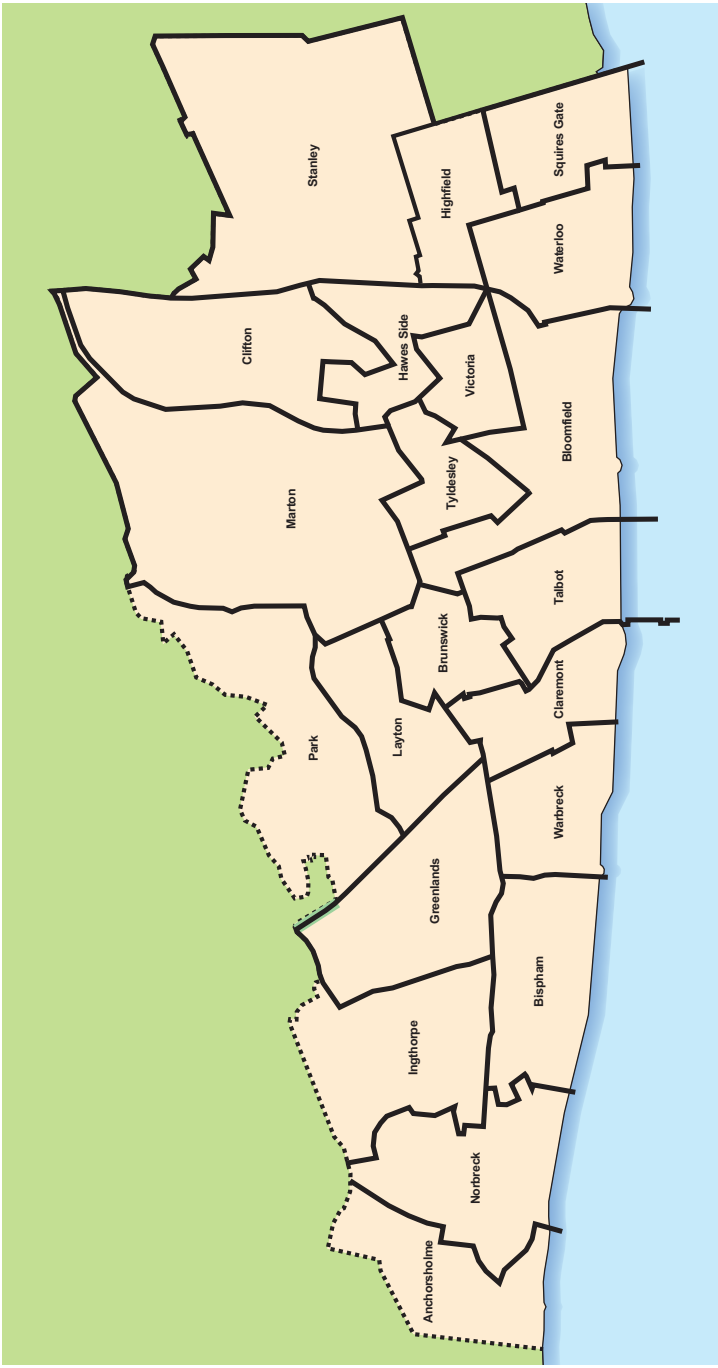
Organisational Change

- developing a skilled workforce with a shared purpose
- putting the customer first
- improving communication with the public, employees and Council partners

The Council produces a Corporate Performance Plan each year that sets out its priorities and how progress towards these will be measured.

How the Council is made up

Blackpool Council is split into 21 smaller areas known as wards as the map below shows:
Each ward is represented by two councillors who each serve for four years.



Councillors and their work

Councillors (also referred to as ‘members’ or ‘elected members’) can represent political parties or may be independent. They all have one common interest – to see their community improve and develop a better quality of life for local residents.

Councillors are elected by the community to represent the interests of local people. Their work normally involves:

- › representing residents of their ward and helping with local issues
- › attending Council and committee meetings to make or help shape decisions on local services
- › representing the Council on other organisations, for example the police and fire authority.

Being a councillor requires you to care about your local community, be willing to give up some of your time and also be keen to learn. Councils are large and complex organisations providing many services – there will be a lot to learn and you will need to be prepared to give up your time to the role.

Further information can also be found in the ‘Frequently asked questions’ section of this guide.

Council Officers

Council officers are professionally trained staff employed to carry out the wide range of functions and duties of the Council. They are also available to advise councillors on the work of the Council.

Meetings and decision making

The full Council

There are 42 councillors who make up the full Council, which meets approximately 7 times per year. Their responsibilities are to:

- meet to discuss and agree major policies to determine how services are run
- agree how much will be spent by the Council each year
- agree how much you pay in Council tax
- listen to the views of other councillors and their constituents

The Executive

The Executive is made up of the Leader of the Council and five leading councillors, called 'Cabinet Members'. Each member of the Executive has an area individual area of responsibility, covering:

- business services
- tourism and regeneration
- children's services
- adult social care, housing and health
- culture and communities

Members of the Executive can take individual decisions or meet to discuss and agree on issues.

Overview and scrutiny

There are six Overview and scrutiny committees in Blackpool – their role is to:

- review and monitor Council services
- examine decisions of the Executive to see if they have been made in the right way and if they are the right decisions for Blackpool
- comment on and help to develop Council policies.

Regulatory committees

The Council has other committees often known as ‘regulatory committees’ which include:

- Development Control – to consider planning applications and development plans in Blackpool
- Licensing (and its sub-committee and panels) – to consider licensing applications such as those for taxis and liquor licences
- Employment and Appeals – to consider staffing matters and other appeals
- Standards – to monitor and promote good conduct of councillors.

Area Forums and other partnerships

There are six Area Forums in Blackpool which meet four times a year in community venues and whose membership is open to all residents living in the area.

The Council also has partnership bodies with other local interest groups for their views and input into policies and decision-making.

How to find out what’s going on

You can find out what is being discussed (including the agendas and minutes of committee meetings) by logging onto the ‘Council and Democracy’ area of the Council’s website at www.blackpool.gov.uk.

You can also attend any public committee meeting to hear councillors discussing local issues. Member of the public can also ask questions at some meetings – further details can also be found on the website.

How do I become a Blackpool Councillor?

Local elections in Blackpool are held once every four years, on the first Thursday in May. The date of the next local elections is May 2011.

Criteria for candidates

You can be a candidate if:

- › you are 18 years or over
- › you are a British, Irish, Commonwealth or other European Union citizen

and you fulfil at least one of the following:

- › your name is on Blackpool's electoral register
- › you have lived in Blackpool during the whole of the last 12 months
- › you own land or have been a tenant in Blackpool for at least 12 months
- › your main or only place of work during the last 12 months has been in Blackpool

There are a number of reasons which mean you are disqualified from standing as a candidate. These include if:

- › you are bankrupt
- › you have been sentenced to a prison term of three months or more (including a suspended sentence) within the last five years
- › you work for Blackpool Council or hold a politically restricted post with another authority

Choosing a ward

Blackpool is divided into 21 wards. You are able to stand anywhere in the borough but you need to decide which ward you want to stand for when submitting your nomination form.

Nominations

To become a candidate you need to be nominated by ten people (whose names appear on Blackpool's register of electors for the ward) and declare that you accept the nomination. The forms for this are available from the Council offices a few weeks before polling day.

Most candidates are nominated through a political party. However individuals may stand in their own right as independent candidates.

Candidates' agents

Every candidate must appoint an election agent, although you can choose to act as your own agent. Amongst other things, your agent sees that the election campaign is conducted in accordance with the law, deals with expenses and generally organises the campaign's activities.

Polling day (election day)

Candidates are usually very busy on polling day and the few weeks beforehand, for example, campaigning in their local area to let residents know about the policies they stand for.

Every candidate is also entitled to attend the counting of the votes on polling day (known as the count) and the opening of postal votes. You can also appoint other people, known as polling agents, to attend the polling stations and the count.

After the election

If elected, you will need to sign to accept your position as councillor and agree to abide by the Code of Conduct for councillors (see also Frequently Asked Questions section). You will also be asked to attend an induction programme which will help you during your first few months as a councillor. Ongoing training and support will also be provided.

Frequently asked questions

Have I got time to be a councillor?

Council work can take up a lot of time on top of work, families and other interests. It is important to make sure that you can fit meetings into the pattern of your normal domestic and work arrangements.

In Blackpool, most committee meetings take place early evening, although there are one or two that meet during the day. Remember you may also be asked to represent the Council on other organisations.

Employers are required to provide reasonable time off but there is no obligation to pay for that time off.

Do councillors get paid?

Councillors do not get paid as the work is voluntary, although they do receive a basic allowance. You are also eligible for other payments, such as travel and subsistence allowances for approved Council duties. Some councillors, such as members of the Executive and committee chairmen may receive additional payments, known as special responsibility allowances.

Do I know enough to stand for election?

The main reason for candidates to stand is an interest in helping your local community and a keenness to learn. Everyone has something to offer.

As well as receiving a full induction programme in your role as councillor, you will receive ongoing training and support to help develop your skills and knowledge - for example in chairing meetings, public speaking, IT skills and knowledge of Council services etc.

What other support will I receive?

All of the Council's officers will be on hand to offer information and advice. The Democratic Services team in particular will work closely with you in your role as councillor and provide you with support.

You will also be offered an IT package or financial support for IT at home and the town hall contains fully equipped work areas.

What kind of enquiries will I get from local constituents?

You can be asked about anything ranging from a faulty street lamp to a major planning development in the town. Remember – officers of the Council are available to provide help and advice and will look at any queries you may get from your constituents about Council and related services.

What is the Code of Conduct?

The Code of Conduct is a set of rules that governs the behaviour of members in areas such as not abusing their position or misusing the authority's resources. In addition, there are rules governing disclosures of interest and withdrawal from meetings when certain interests are declared. When elected, councillors have sign to say that they agree to abide by the Code, as well as recording on the public register their financial and other interests.

The Standards Board for England works with local Councils to help promote ethical behaviour of councillors and assists in dealing with complaints.

Key contacts

Council main reception: Tel: 01253 477477

Elections office: 01253 477161

(Democratic Services) E-mail: democracy@blackpool.gov.uk

Useful website links

www.blackpool.gov.uk - the Council's website including information on Council services, decision making, current councillors and local elections.

www.blackpool4me.com - a Blackpool community site containing pages of local interest including councillors own web pages.

www.electoralcommission.org.uk - an independent body with further information on elections, nominations and setting up political parties.

www.aboutmyvote.co.uk - includes information on elections and how to register and vote.

www.standardsboard.co.uk - information on the Code of Conduct and the ethical framework for councillors.

The next local elections will be

MAY 2011

To ensure our services are accessible to all, documents prepared by Blackpool Council are available in large print, Braille, on audio-cassette or computer disk upon request.

We can also provide help for British Sign Language users and provide information in other languages. Please ask for details or telephone 477477.

By becoming a councillor YOU can make a difference.

