

SECTION 3

MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

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3.1 Composition of the Council

3.1.1 The Council is made up of 47 elected members, also called councillors (this number may vary from time to time as a result of recommendations made by the Boundary Committee for England or another body). Each councillor represents a specific area of Mendip District (called a “ward”). Some wards with larger populations have more than one member to represent them.

3.1.2 Full details of all current Mendip councillors and the wards which they represent are available on the Council’s website at www.mendip.gov.uk or by contacting the Council offices or a Council Information Point.

3.2 Elections and terms of office of councillors

3.2.1 Councillors will normally be elected on the first Thursday in May every four years. The term of office of a councillor will begin on the fourth day after being elected and will end on the fourth day after the date of the next election.

3.2.2 Only registered voters of Mendip District or those living or working in the District are eligible to be councillors.

3.3 Responsibilities and duties of councillors

Main purpose of the job of councillor

- a) To represent the needs, priorities and aspirations of the electorate and the people of Mendip by being known within their ward, being accessible and liaising/consulting extensively with local communities, organisations and businesses
- b) To promote the Council’s Vision:

“Mendip – a place to be proud of – where people, communities and businesses are encouraged to achieve their potential”

Main responsibilities and duties of a councillor within the community

- (a) to seek ways of improving the quality of life for people in Mendip now and for the future by promoting the economic, social and environmental well-being of the local community, having regard to the effects on other communities and the District as a whole
- (b) to ensure that they are accessible to constituents in order that they can raise issues of importance, or personal concern and to take the appropriate action
- (c) to find ways of effectively and regularly communicating with the electorate and the people of Mendip
- (d) to explore new ways of being accountable to the electorate and the people of Mendip
- (e) to liaise with other levels of government, Parish Meetings, Parish and Town Councils, Somerset County Council, agencies or bodies which influence the well-being of their ward and to work in partnership with their communities and other agencies
- (f) to campaign actively for measures that will support the Council's adopted priorities

Main Responsibilities and duties of a councillor to Mendip District Council:

- (a) to develop and maintain a working knowledge of the Council's services, management arrangements, resources, powers / duties and constraints thus ensuring value for money
- (b) to assist the Council in promoting a high level of understanding by people in Mendip of its role, work and functions and to promote its desire to improve access to information and services
- (c) to participate in the decision making process of the Council by ensuring attendance at full Council and (unless the Chairman of the Council) participating in the business of the Council as a member of at least two of the following:-
 - (i) the Cabinet
 - (ii) the Scrutiny Board
 - (iii) the Community Partnerships
 - (iv) the Planning Board
 - (v) the Licensing Board
 - (vi) the Standards Committee
 - (vii) the Complaints Panel

- (d) to represent the community and bring the views of the electorate and the people of Mendip into the Council's decision-making process, balancing individual interests identified within the ward and the ward as a whole
- (e) to be an active member, gaining experience of chairing Boards and Committees, participating in working groups and other meetings as may be required from time to time
- (f) to ensure that for matters concerning the member's ward, a deputy is appointed where the member is either unavailable or has a conflict of interest
- (g) if requested or invited, to undertake other official duties including liaison with other levels of government, agencies or bodies which influence the well-being of the District
- (h) to ensure attendance at all mandatory training sessions and to undertake such training and development as the Council or the Monitoring Officer / Standards Committee may recommend
- (i) to maintain a register of their interests and to declare those interests at all relevant meetings
- (j) to liaise with planning officers on planning applications in their ward and to respond promptly to any request under the delegated decision procedures

3.4 Political balance and rules for whipping

3.4.1 In addition to those committees of the Council which are required by law to be politically balanced, membership of the Scrutiny Board and the Licensing Board will also be politically balanced.

3.4.2 The Council views the use of the party whip as incompatible with the functions of the Scrutiny Board and Standards Committee, and with the regulatory functions of the Council such as planning and licensing.

3.5 Rights and obligations of councillors

3.5.1 All councillors are entitled to access to all Council agenda reports and other information in the possession of the Council unless disclosure of that information would breach:

- a) the Data Protection Act 1998; or
- b) any obligation of confidentiality owed to any third party; or
- c) any other restriction on disclosure imposed by law or court order.

- 3.5.2** Councillors will not make public information which is confidential or exempt without the consent of the Council or divulge information given in confidence to anyone other than a councillor or officer entitled to know it. (For these purposes, "confidential" and "exempt" have the meanings defined in the Local Government Act 1972: see also the Access to information Rules in Section 16).
- 3.5.3** Councillors will at all times act in accordance with the highest standards of probity, upholding the Council's Constitution and ethical standards, and observing the Members' Code of Conduct, the Code of Good Practice for Planning, the Protocol on Member / Officer Relations and any other codes or protocols adopted by the Council. Councillors will also promote the principles of equality in the community.
- 3.5.4** Councillors will be entitled to receive allowances in accordance with the Member' Allowances Scheme set out in Appendix G.
- 3.5.5** Councillors have the right of access to all Council premises as reasonably necessary to carry out their duties and responsibilities as councillors. They are also entitled to use Council resources and facilities for this purpose in accordance with any terms set or protocol adopted by the Council.
- 3.5.6** Councillors are entitled to attend formal meetings of any Council body of which they are not a member, except where information is likely to be disclosed to which they would not be entitled under 3.5.1 above. They may speak at any such meeting in accordance with the rules for public participation applying to that meeting.

3.6 Specific roles of Councillors

Individual councillors carry out specific functions, such as serving as the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Leader or Deputy Leader of the Council, or as a Portfolio-Holder. They also serve on particular Council boards and committees, as described in Section 1. More details about these roles can be found in the relevant section of this Constitution dealing with the particular role or Council body; see the Contents List.