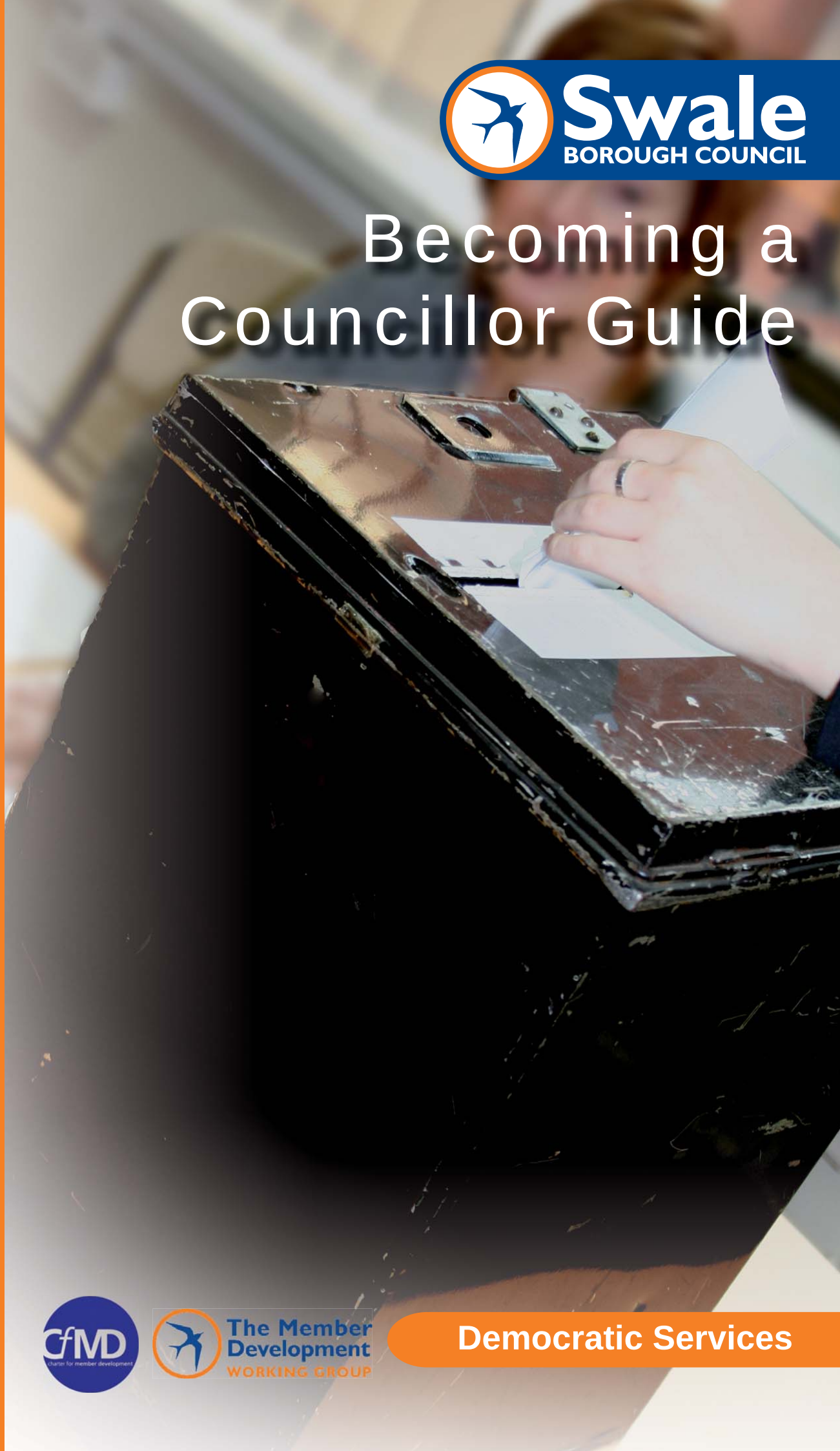
Swale BOROUGH COUNCIL

Becoming a Councillor Guide



CfMD charter for member development

The Member Development WORKING GROUP

Democratic Services

"Different people become Councillors for different reasons. Councillors represent everyone who lives in the area they are elected into. They may work with local schools, community associations, youth organisations and residents groups – all working to improve the community.

As a Councillor you would give a voice to each individual resident, to influence what the council does and how it does it – from providing services for children and older people to planning major developments; from emptying the bins to providing housing for local residents.

Councillors are unique in the range of issues they deal with and the positive impact they can have on both individuals and the local area." (Local Government Improvement & Development)

http://www.idea.gov.uk/makeadifference/

Swale Borough Council has 47 Councillors who represent 25 wards in the Borough. Depending on its population size each ward has between one and three Councillors and each Borough Councillor serves a four year term.

The next Borough Council election will be on Thursday 5th May 2011.

Political composition at Swale Borough Council 2010/2011

Party	Number Of Seats
Conservative	33
Labour	10
Liberal Democrats	3
Independent Member	1
Total Seats:	**47**

Candidates can stand for a political party or as an independent member. In order for a new political group to be recognised there must be a minimum of two candidates elected to sit on the Council.

A Councillor's Role in the Community - Community Leadership

As the main contact for Council issues within your Ward, it is essential that your residents know who you are and are able to contact you. The profile of Councils' and the degree of respect the public has for them, has been on the decrease, so a fresh focus on the community leadership role provides opportunities to give local communities more influence. Councillors need to be in touch with *all* parts of their communities, including parishes and neighbourhoods, local organisations and partners, young people and the elderly and minority ethnic groups.

Local people want to know that the people they elected to represent them are doing so. This can involve speaking out for local people on major issues that impact on the community - like planning applications and school closures and acting on behalf of specific groups or individuals.

The Council website (www2.swale.gov.uk/dso) has information on every Council Committee, agenda, minutes and reports, Parish Clerk information, Borough Councillors, Kent County Councillors and Member for Parliament's details and the Council meetings diary.

Casework

The problems and issues people raise with Councillors are known as casework. There are various ways to communicate with local residents including surgeries, letters, phone calls, e-mails, leaflets, door knocking and ward walks. The amount of casework will vary depending on the issues within different wards. The Local Government Improvement and Development has developed a workbook with advice on handling casework:
http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/10932283

What support will I receive as a Councillor?

If you wish to stand for a political party then you will receive help and advice from them. Once elected you will be provided with an Induction Guide and Democratic Services will also assist with completing forms and any general enquiries you may have. You will receive on-going support through regular member training sessions and one-to-one meetings with your Group Leader. Councillors have access to a Members' Room and can book any meeting room within the Council. If you are elected for a political party then you will also have access to a Group Room.

Members' Allowances

As a Councillor you would receive a yearly basic allowance, which is paid monthly. You are also able to claim a mileage and subsistence allowance for most Council meetings attended. The rates and criteria for Members' Allowances are found in the Members' Allowances Scheme in the Constitution. Allowances are designed to cover expenses incurred through your role as a Councillor; they are not intended as a salary.

If you would like any information on how claiming Members' Allowances could affect the receipt of any benefits please contact Democratic Services (contact details below). In addition, the following help lines will be able to provide detailed guidance on your particular circumstances.

General benefits advice – 0800 88 22 00 Income Support – 0845 608 8501

Members are also paid a yearly I.T. allowance to assist with the costs of computer usage. To qualify for the I.T. allowance Councillors must provide an e-mail address.

Time Commitment

This will vary between Councillors and it is up to the individual to decide how much time they can allocate to their duties as a Councillor. You will agree within your Group the committees on which you will serve at the start of the civic year. The majority of official Council meetings are held at 7pm, although you may be required to attend a number of meetings at different times depending on the committees you serve on and the types of duties you undertake.

Time off from work

You are allowed time off if you are a member of a local authority*. If you qualify**, you're allowed reasonable time off to go to meetings or to carry out your duties. The time must be agreed with your employer beforehand and your employer can refuse your request it if is unreasonable. A specific amount of time off is not laid down in law.

*For the purpose of this provision 'local authority' means: in England and Wales, a county or county borough council, a district council. A London borough council, or a parish or community council.

**Time off for public duties won't be available if you're an agency worker, a member of the police service or armed forces, employed on a fishing vessel or a civil servant whose public duties are connected to political activities restricted under the terms of your employment.

Whether your time off is classed as 'reasonable' depends on:

- what the duties are
- the time needed to carry them out
- the impact on your employer's business
- how much time off you have already had for public duties

Your employer doesn't have to pay you while you take time off for public duties, although many do. Your contract of employment will normally say whether you're paid for this time off. If you have public duties you should let your employer know how long you'll need off and what arrangements need to be made for cover in your absence. If your employer stops you taking time off for public duties you should first of all follow the grievance procedure outlined in your contract. For further information and useful links, please go to:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Employees/Timeoffandholidays/DG_10028529

Induction

On elections night elected Councillors will receive an induction pack containing lots of useful information and contact numbers.

A welcome meeting for all Councillors (new and re-elected) will be held on Wednesday 11th and Thursday 12th May 2011 at Swale House. At the welcome meeting you will be introduced to the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team; receive information on starting out as a Councillor; be given a guided tour of the building and will hear a short talk from a current Councillor on their experiences as a new Member, with plenty of opportunity for questions.

The Council's Constitution and Procedural Rules

The Council has a set of procedural rules which are contained within its Constitution, some of which are compulsory by law. They provide rules that Councillors must follow during Council meetings, regarding voting, speaking, acceptable behaviour and declaring interests. Once elected as a Borough Councillor you will be provided with a copy of the Constitution and training is provided on understanding the Constitution, including the Councillor's Code of Conduct.

Code of Conduct

As a Councillor there are a number of rules and guidelines that you must consider. The Members' Code of Conduct, which can be found at Part 5 of the Council's Constitution, outlines these protocols.

At the start of each civic year every Councillor is required to sign the Member's Interests Register. This form covers a range of personal interests, for example employment, ownership of property and membership of other organisations. This information is held by the Monitoring Officer and can be viewed by members of the public on request.

Councillors are required to declare at each meeting if they have an interest in any item on the agenda. There are two types of interest:

i) Personal - You have a personal interest if the issue being discussed in the meeting affects the well-being or finances of you, your family or your close associates more than most other people who live in the area affected by the issue. Personal interests are also things that relate to an interest you must register (see above - Members Interests Register).

ii) Prejudicial - Prejudicial interests are personal interests that affect you, your family, or your close associates in the following ways:

- their finances, or regulatory functions such as licensing or planning which affect them
- and which a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of the facts would believe likely to harm or impair your ability to judge the public interest

If you have a prejudicial interest you must not debate or vote on a regulatory or financial matter, but you do have the same right to speak as a member of the public e.g. at Planning Committee.

There are exemptions to both types of interests and when they must be declared. Advice can be sought before meetings from the Monitoring Officer or Democratic Services. Detailed guidance is also available from the Standards Board for England.

Gifts and Hospitality

Councillors are required to register any gifts or hospitality received worth £25 or over, in connection with their official duties as a Member, within 28 days of receipt. You automatically have a personal interest in a matter if it relates to or is likely to affect the source of the gift or hospitality that is registered; this applies for a maximum of three years from receipt.

Council Representatives on Outside Bodies

Various local organisations and groups request that the Council appoints a representative to sit on their Committees. As a Councillor you may be asked to do this, which would mean attending additional meetings and also producing an annual report to Council, regarding the work that you have done in relation to that Outside Body.

Outside bodies currently include, amongst others, Age Concern, Council for Voluntary Service, AmicusHorizon and the Local Government Association.

Applying to be a Councillor

To apply to be a councillor, you will need to submit a nomination form and a consent form. These can be obtained from Electoral Services from March 2011. There is no charge to stand as a Councillor in Borough Council elections.

The form will explain in detail the requirements that you need to meet to stand as a councillor. To summarise you need to meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Be on the electoral register in the Borough of Swale.
- For the 12 months before your nomination, have occupied as an owner, or tenant, land or other premises in Swale.
- For the 12 months before your nomination, your main or only place of work has been in Swale.
- For the 12 months before your nomination, you have lived in the Swale area.

You will also need to get your nomination paper signed by a proposer, a seconder and 8 other people who are on the electoral register for the area.

There are restrictions on the number of papers that an individual can sign, so it is important that you get your nomination papers in early to Electoral Services.

More information about standing as a candidate at local government elections can be found on the Electoral Commission website: http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/

For nomination papers and queries regarding the elections process, please contact:

Electoral Services
Swale Borough Council
Swale House, East Street
Sittingbourne, Kent
ME10 3HT

01795 417558

electors@swale.gov.uk

If you have any queries regarding this document, please contact either Katherine Bescoby (Democratic & Electoral Services Manager) or Jo Hammond (Senior Democratic Services Officer) at:

Democratic Services
Swale Borough Council
Swale House, East Street
Sittingbourne, Kent
ME10 3HT

01795 417330

democraticservices@swale.gov.uk

Further information on the role of a local Councillor and the elections process can be found on the following websites:

Local Government Improvement and Development: http://www.idea.gov.uk/
DirectGov: http://www.direct.gov.uk/
Electoral Commission: http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/

Contact details of current Swale Borough Councillors can be found at:
http://www2.swale.gov.uk/dso/

Copies of this document are available on the council website
www.swale.gov.uk.

If you would like further information, more copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact:

Customer Services,
Phone: 01795 417850
Email: csc@swale.gov.uk

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