

**WHO
STANDS
FOR THE
COUNCIL**

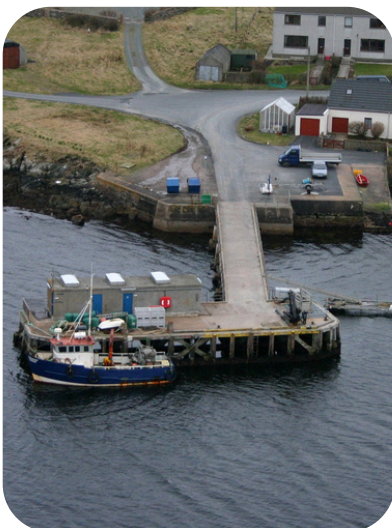


**IT'S
PEOPLE
LIKE YOU**



SHETLAND
ISLANDS COUNCIL





Our Values

Excellent service
Taking personal responsibility
Working well together
Climate and Sustainability



Introduction

In May 2027, we'll return to the polls to elect our next councillors. Do you know someone you think might make an ideal candidate? Perhaps your neighbour, a relative - or maybe it could be you?

With the election not that far away, we've produced this handy guide to help you (or the person you're thinking of) find out more about what's involved.

So - why become a councillor?

Councillors play a vital role in shaping the future of their communities. It's a unique opportunity to represent local people, influence important decisions and help improve the services and facilities that matter most to residents.

People choose to become councillors for many different reasons. Some want to be a strong voice for their community, some want to make a difference on issues they care about, and others want to make sure a wider range of experiences and perspectives are represented in local decision-making.

“We need life experience and we need all different types of people to best reflect our communities.”

(from a current councillor)

Whatever your motivation, being a councillor gives you the chance to make a positive contribution to the future of Shetland.

What skills do you need?

There is no single set of qualifications or experience needed to become a councillor.

Councils benefit from people of all ages, backgrounds and professions, and many of the most important qualities are skills that people develop through work, volunteering, family life and community involvement. Listening to others, communicating clearly, working with a range of people, solving problems, making balanced decisions and having a genuine interest in your community are all valuable attributes.

Training and support are provided throughout your time as a councillor, so you don't need to be an expert before you stand for election. What matters most is a willingness to learn, represent others fairly and help make a difference.

“There is no such thing as the ‘right person’ to be a councillor, if you care about your community then you are qualified!”

Who can stand for election?

There are a few formal requirements to become a council candidate. In general, you must be at least 18 years old, meet the citizenship requirements for standing in Scottish local government elections, and have a qualifying connection to the council area through residence, work, property ownership or voter registration.

You don't need any particular qualifications, previous political experience or specialist knowledge to stand for election. If you're unsure about your eligibility, the elections team can provide advice, or you can go here -

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-guidance/candidate-or-agent/council-elections-scotland>

If you work for the Council you may stand for election, but if you're elected you would need to resign immediately from your Council employment in order to take up office as a councillor.

The wider picture

Scotland's 32 councils were created by the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994. Shetland Islands Council dates from 1975, when it became a Unitary Authority and replaced the Zetland County Council.

Councils have a wide range of responsibilities, such as setting annual budgets, providing education services, supporting economic development, maintaining roads, etc. Most have similar functions, but there are vital differences for an Islands Council – usually around geography, or population. For example, very few councils are responsible for interisland ferry services.

Each council is divided into electoral 'wards', with boundaries designed so each councillor represents roughly the same number of voters. In Shetland, we have 23 councillors, in seven wards. While many candidates live in the ward where they stand for election, this is not a requirement.

Council elections take place every five years.

How it works in Shetland

Following each election, all Councillors meet as Shetland Islands Council and appoint a Convener, who chairs full Council meetings and acts as the civic figurehead. The Council also appoints to the position of Council Leader to provide political leadership. Chairs and Vice Chairs are also appointed to the main committees, the smaller Boards and other groups.

In terms of how it does its business, the Council is organised into directorates which oversee all the Council's services. Some involve the direct delivery of services to the public (such as refuse collection, ferry services etc.), and others provide support to the wider organisation (such as finance, procurement and legal services). Councillors sit on a variety of committees and boards to make policy and spending decision and oversee performance.



How do decisions get made?

The Council's business works on a quarterly cycle – essentially a series of committee and board meetings, followed by a meeting of all Councillors sitting as Shetland Islands Council. (Additional meetings can be called; for example if there is too much business to be covered in one day, or if a decision is quickly required to meet a government deadline.) Committee meetings cover a range of functions such as education, environment and transport, finance, economic development, planning, housing, etc.

The Council and NHS Shetland also work together as the Shetland Health and Social Care Partnership, and the Integration Joint Board (IJB) has responsibility for decision making about delegated functions related to health and social care – that includes adult social care services - and plans how health and social care work together

There are also other committees and boards which conduct legislative and regulatory business or oversee the work of the Council, such as Planning, Licensing and Harbours.

Committees and Boards have fewer members than the full Council and typically include representatives from each ward.

Councillors may also be nominated or appointed to external bodies - for example, Orkney and Shetland Valuation Joint Board.

If you are elected and chosen to serve on a committee, you will need to familiarise yourself with what that committee is responsible for, and your role as a committee member. Training and support are available on your role and responsibilities, especially in sensitive areas such as Planning, where there are very strict rules around individual Councillors' involvement in decisions.

Most meetings of the Council and its committees are held in the Council Chamber, Lower Hillhead, Lerwick, and are open to the public. They can also be watched live online, or later, at <https://shetland.public-i.tv/core/portal/home> and if Councillors are unable to attend meetings in person there is an option to attend remotely via Microsoft Teams.

Some Council reports contain sensitive or confidential information (e.g. personal or commercial details) and are marked 'exempt'. This means that that part of the meeting must be held in private, excluding the public and media, under rules set out in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. It's extremely important that Councillors do not discuss or share any exempt information at any time. Training is provided on the handling of confidential information.

How are decisions made at Council meetings?

Every meeting has an agenda, which will include a number of reports on a range of different topics.

Each focuses on a single issue, project or topic. There will be information in the report on what's required from Councillors – it may be a decision at the meeting, simply to 'note' the information included, or pass it forward to the Policy and Resources Committee or the full Council.

Reports are written by officers and cleared through the 'agenda management system', which means their content is finalised for including on the meeting agenda, and they're checked for any e.g. legal or financial implications. Agendas are published online seven days before a meeting is held and sent directly to Councillors.

You can find all committee reports online at <https://coins.shetland.gov.uk> along with lots of other information including committee membership, a meetings calendar, etc.

Councillors are given a short presentation on a report by the relevant officer, and can ask questions to clarify any issues they may have. Councillors then debate between themselves before deciding how to move forward. If a decision is required on the day, the meeting may decide to approve the recommendations in the report, or Councillors may propose an additional or alternative decision (an 'amendment'). A vote may be required, which is generally a simple show of hands.

Officers then act on the decision taken by Councillors, which may then lead to specific actions, and/or further reports to update Councillors, or to seek guidance through further decisions.

Not all council activities need a council decision – officers can handle many day-to-day services through delegated powers, and committees can actively give senior staff delegated powers to pursue specific issues on the Council's behalf.

Chairs and Vice Chairs will meet regularly with the appropriate Director(s) to get updates on projects or business in their committee's area of responsibility. Councillors can ask officers for updates on ward matters at any time.

“I think explaining the importance of good working relationships between members and officers is key, and that you also have a corporate responsibility to the council as well as the role you play representing your community.”

Things to bear in mind...

One of a councillor's key roles is to act as a community leader – being visible, accessible and responsive to local concerns – and most will, for example, attend Community Council meetings in their area to give updates on Council business and hear about local concerns.

Another key role is to help residents access services and support when required.

Councillors when attending Council and Committee meetings take key decisions, such as setting the Council's budget and agreeing policy proposals that determine how the Council's resources are used. There will be a significant amount of time needed outside formal meetings to attend briefings and read papers on the issues that will be put before you.

Councillors collectively set the strategic direction of the Council. If elected, you will play a role in shaping strategy and policy through committees, or discussions with officers and councillors.

Scrutiny is a vital part of good governance by councillors and includes monitoring the performance of services, making sure public money is well spent, and checking that policy decisions deliver the intended results. If elected, you may find yourself sitting on the Council's Audit Committee. Even if you do not, you will still have a responsibility to question, challenge and evaluate the Council's work.



Partnership working

Councils are expected to work with partner organisations to deliver services more effectively for local people. Collaboration and joined-up working are key, as decisions taken by one body may have an impact on the work of another.

Councillors help shape and scrutinise these partnership arrangements, making sure that collaboration is effective, transparent and focused on the needs of the community.

Planning, Licensing etc.

Some councillors will serve on regulatory or quasi-judicial committees such as Planning or Licensing. These roles are bound by legislation and require impartiality, training and adherence to the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

If you are elected and find yourself having to make decisions on planning or licensing applications, you will have to undertake mandatory training to understand the specialist requirements of these regulatory functions.

“Candidates need reassurance that there will be a long list of things to take responsibility for, but a significant level of induction and onboarding is in place to support that process.”

Your ward and the wider community

It is natural for councillors to focus on how a policy or decision will affect their ward. Through debate and discussion, a councillor may be able to influence those policies or decisions to reflect the specific needs of the individuals and communities in their ward.

However, councillors are expected to take a decision collectively in the best interests of people across the whole council area, and not just those in their ward. The reason for this is simple: if all councillors simply advocated and voted for what was best for their ward, or a few individuals within it, it could be very difficult to develop and agree on effective strategies and policies that use the Council’s powers, duties and resources effectively across Shetland – ultimately resulting in poorer services for everyone.

If elected, you will need to learn to navigate these tensions and find a balance between the various roles and responsibilities.



***“The Council
is the biggest employer in Shetland
and has an incredible
level of responsibility
for the wellbeing
of our communities.
We need to have people
with energy and drive
to take on
these responsibilities
and to think about the
long term needs of our islands,
not just the immediate focus
of the next 5 years.”***

Standing as an independent or party candidate

In Scottish local government, councillors can stand for election either as a member of a political party or as an independent candidate. Both have exactly the same legal powers and responsibilities once elected.

If you stand as a party candidate, you will usually be selected by your party and campaign under its name and policies. Party councillors often work together as a group and may receive support and guidance from their party organisation. Independent candidates stand without being affiliated to a political party. They develop their own priorities and views on local issues and are free to make decisions without reference to a party position. Shetland has a long tradition of independent representation, and the majority of councillors currently serve as independents.

So I've decided to stand – how do I do it?

The Improvement Service has a website dedicated to supporting local councillors in Scotland – <https://www.localcouncillor.scot/> - here you'll find a wide range of clear, useful information.

If you want an informal chat with someone at the Council, you can contact the Chief Executive by emailing chief.executive@shetland.gov.uk or by calling 01595 744501.

In the meantime, you can watch meetings, either live or recorded, online here - shetland.public-i.tv/core/portal/home or read reports and decisions here - <https://coins.shetland.gov.uk>

Ahead of the election on 6th May 2027, there will be public notices announcing the deadline for nominations. Information for candidates is available on the Electoral Commission website, <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-guidance/candidate-or-agent/council-elections-scotland>

***“If you want to be a voice for your area,
and help your community
to become stronger and more successful,
think about standing to represent them.”***



FAQs

Is there any training?

As in most new jobs, you will take part in an induction, which covers key things you need to know right from the start. Making sure councillors have the skills and knowledge to fulfil their roles is a key priority for us, and we're committed to working with all Councillors to understand their personal development needs and interests, and then highlighting helpful learning opportunities and resources. This will include any specialist training, along with sessions like media skills, how to chair a meeting, local government finance and 'building better business cases'.

The Improvement Service is the national improvement organisation for local government in Scotland. It was set up to help Scottish local authorities provide effective community leadership, strong local governance and deliver high quality, efficient local services. It provides some very useful online information, advice and training for Councillors – take a look at the 'Useful Links' section at the end of this handbook.

Will it take up a lot of time?

Unlike a normal job where your contract sets out how many hours you're expected to work, when it comes to being a councillor, it's definitely true that 'you get out exactly what you put in'. The number of hours you need to spend will be determined by:

- The position you assume when you join the Council – whether you take on the role of chair or vice-chair of a committee, the Convener or Leader, or you decide that being an ordinary councillor is fine while you find your feet.
- The number of committees you're appointed to. Please remember you do have a choice and you don't have to agree to join every committee you're asked to.

Information about the appointments and positions available will be provided to you before the first meeting of the new Council, giving you time to discuss these with other councillors.

Core duties include reading meeting papers and taking part in meetings, as well as attending Community Council meetings, and being present at local events.

Many councillors are approached for help in informal settings - everywhere from the supermarket to social events – so you may find it useful to think about how to keep boundaries clear between your private life and your role as a councillor.

Will I be supplied with IT equipment, and is there a place for me to work?

Yes, you'll be supplied with a phone and laptop which you can use from home, along with training if necessary. The cost of this equipment is paid directly by the Council. There are offices and rooms for councillors at Lystina House, behind the Town Hall - a good space to get together with your colleagues, or have meetings with officers, etc.

Can I be a councillor and have a job?

If you work for the Council, you should read the Special Leave Policy, which gives you information about what the Council may permit during campaigning, but also explains the rules about resigning from your job if you get elected.

Many councillors past and present do have another job (or other commitments) and the key to making this work is flexibility. In your current employment, would it be possible to move hours or shifts around, and are your employer and other colleagues able to adapt to accommodate you?

If you're an employer reading this and you have a member of staff you think would make a great councillor, could you make some changes to help them fit in both roles?

I have a disability – is there extra support available for me?

You may be entitled to support through 'Access to Work', a UK government programme which can help cover the extra costs of being a councillor that relate to your disability or health condition. You can apply for support once elected. That can include a personal assistant, specialist equipment or software, and adaptations to help you carry out meetings, casework and community engagement.

You can find out more here - <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

A separate fund, the Access to Elected Office Fund Scotland, could support you during your campaign – for more information, go here - <https://inclusionScotland.org/our-work/>

What other support is there to help me?

One of the things we know worries some people thinking about standing for election is the fact that they will suddenly be in the public eye, and may have to speak to the local media. Don't worry – we have staff who will support you, if needed.

You'll also get invaluable administrative support from our Members' Support Team, who are based in the front office of the Town Hall. They can help you with your day-to-day councillor duties by providing reception facilities, clerical support (including looking after your diary), arranging any travel and processing any expense claims. You'll have access to Council officers who can provide objective expert advice and information, and this can take many forms including briefings on various topics that can help you make decisions.

How much would I get paid?

Your pay is set by Scottish Ministers, not by the Council. As you would expect, certain Councillors receive more because of their position and additional responsibilities

With the exception of the Convener and Leader of the Council, whose remuneration is prescribed in the Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 (Remuneration) Amendment Regulations, certain Senior Councillors as set out below receive remuneration in terms of arrangements approved by the Council, subject to the provisions of the Regulations which are normally reviewed annually. From 1 April 2026 the amounts are:

- Councillor – Basic remuneration - £26,839.00
- Leader - £51,715.00 (Depute £31,106.00)
- Convener - £38,787.00 (Depute £31,106.00)
- Chair – main Service Committees - £35,372.00
- Chair – Boards and Regulatory Committees - £31,106.00

Only one payment of any remuneration is allowed, so where a councillor carries out more than one responsibility, the higher value will be paid. You'll be reimbursed for all travel and subsistence expenses you incur on Council business, and as a councillor, you are also eligible to join the Local Government Pension Scheme.

How long would I be a councillor for?

This council term is five years. So, you will be a councillor from the date your sign your acceptance of office – expected to be the Monday after the election – until the next election in May 2032.

Are there rules on standards and ethics?

Yes – the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, approved by the Scottish Parliament, applies to every councillor in Scotland. According to the Standards Commission for Scotland, “the Councillors’ ‘Code of Conduct’ continues to play a vital role in setting out, openly and clearly, the standards councillors must apply when undertaking their council duties. It is vital that the Code continues to give assurance to the public that their elected members are acting in accordance with high ethical standards.”

You can find more here - <https://www.standardscommissionscotland.org.uk/codes-of-conduct/councillors-code-of-conduct>

How can I find out more about how meetings are run?

Our committee meetings are open to the public, unless when exempt reports are being discussed. We livestream our meetings, and these are available to watch live, or on playback here - <https://shetland.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

We’d suggest you take a look at the online meeting calendar here – <https://coins.shetland.gov.uk/calendar.asp> and pick a few meetings to watch. If you choose ones with a full agenda, you’ll get a good idea of how meetings work, who speaks when, and how and when a decision is made.

Useful links

Shetland Islands Council - [Shetland Islands Council – Shetland Islands Council](#)

To watch Council meetings live or on demand - <https://shetland.public-tv/core/portal/home>

Information on meetings, reports, calendar, etc. - <https://coins.shetland.gov.uk>

Improvement Service, website with lots of information about being a councillor - <https://www.localcouncillor.scot>

Access to Elected Office – support for those with disabilities to run for elected office - [Access to Politics - Inclusion Scotland](#)

Access to Work – support for councillors with disabilities - <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Councillors' Code of Conduct - <https://www.standardscommissionscotland.org.uk/codes-of-conduct/councillors-code-of-conduct>

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), the national representative body for Scotland's Councils - [COSLA](#) | [COSLA](#)

Audit Scotland – the independent public body which audits councils to make sure public money is spent efficiently, effectively and transparently - [Home](#) | [Audit Scotland](#)

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