



BLANDFORD FORUM TOWN COUNCIL

INFORMATION PACK

FOR

PROSPECTIVE

TOWN COUNCILLORS

Twinned with Preetz, Germany



Town Clerk's Office
Church Lane, Blandford Forum
Dorset DT11 7AD



Twinned with Mortain, France



Tel: 01258 454500 • Fax: 01258 454432
Email: admin@blandfordforum-tc.gov.uk
www.blandfordforum-tc.gov.uk

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INTRODUCTION

The Town Council comprises 16 Councillors who were elected for a 5-year term on 2nd May 2019 (to align with the new Dorset Council). Councillors who are elected at a subsequent by-election or are co-opted to fill a casual vacancy during the course of the 5-year term will hold office until the end of the 5-year term. The roles of Mayor and Chairman and Deputy Mayor and Vice Chairman of Council are filled by one Councillor and are elected from the 16 Councillors at the Annual Council Meeting in May each year.

A copy of the Town Council's Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and general guidance notes, etc will be supplied to all Councillors at the commencement of their term of office. A copy of the Code of Conduct for Town Councillors is available on request from the Town Clerk's Office or from our [website](https://blandfordforum-tc.gov.uk/town-council). The following information appears on the Council's website <https://blandfordforum-tc.gov.uk/town-council> and gives more detailed information on how the Council operates. If a prospective Councillor has any queries or would like further information, please contact the Town Clerk's Office on 01258 454500 between 9.30am and 12.30pm Monday to Friday.

THE TOWN COUNCIL - AN OVERVIEW

Blandford Forum Town Council is the parish authority for the town of Blandford Forum and has an estimated population of 11,013, is 409 hectares in area and has approximately 5,058 dwellings (2017 census).

It is the third tier of government after Parliament and Dorset Council (formed in April 2019) and its legal powers are granted to it and regulated by various government acts. Blandford Forum Town Council is the first council in Dorset to be awarded with Quality Gold Council Status.

The Town Council supplements the provision of local government services in Blandford Forum and provides a range of social and recreational facilities, while promoting and representing the town with other national and statutory bodies. For example, the Town Council acts as a consultee and lobbying force with the Dorset Council and regional and national government putting forward the wishes and needs of the local community. The Dorset Council, which covers the whole of the county except Bournemouth and Poole and whose main responsibilities include education, social services, highways, strategic planning, libraries, development control, environmental health, refuse collection, economic development, tourism and major recreational facilities such as the Blandford Leisure Centre consults with the Town Council on such subjects as the County Structure Plan, the Local Transport Plan, the Mineral and Waste Local Plan, the Local Plan, planning applications within Blandford Forum and the economic development strategy.

The Dorset (Electoral Changes) Order 2016 created the following five wards in Blandford Forum: Blandford Badbury Heights (One Councillor), Blandford Central (Six Councillors), Blandford Hilltop (Two Councillors), Blandford Langton St Leonards (Four Councillors) and Blandford Old Town Ward (Three Councillors). A map showing the area of each ward is available from this link <https://blandfordforum-tc.gov.uk/town-council>.

The Civic Year runs from May to April with the election of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Council, from the 16 Councillors at the Annual Council Meeting in May each year. These roles and those of the Chairmen of Committees are filled by Councillors who have been nominated and voted for by their Councillor colleagues. Town Councillors are voluntary although they can choose to receive the allowance that is now available to them to cover Council-related costs such as stationery, telephone bills, travel, etc.

MEETINGS & COMMITTEES

The Council operates on a Committee system according to the remits of the Committees and where necessary the Committees make recommendations to full Council. The Recreation & Amenities Committee (R&A) and the Town & General Purposes Committee (T&GP) occur four to five times a year, whereas the Town Council and the Town Council Planning Committee are on a 4-weekly cycle. In addition, there is a Finance & Staffing Committee which meets on a quarterly basis. Councillors can express a preference for a particular Committee but are voted onto Committees at the Annual Council Meeting along with the election of the Chairmen of Committees. Vice-Chairmen are elected at the first Committee meeting in the new civic year (with the exception of Planning).

Subject matters are brought before Committees and Council by means of the Agenda which is issued a minimum of three clear working days before a meeting and is posted on the various public notice boards around the town and on the website. The agendas are set a week before each meeting by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Council or Committees in liaison with the Town Clerk. At full Council meetings the Committees' minutes are received and any Committee resolutions involving major changes to Council policies are voted upon.

The press and public are welcome to attend all Council meetings and the public may put questions or make statements on any matter in the public period at the commencement of each meeting.

The minimum commitment expected of Councillors is that they will attend full Town Council and Planning meetings together with either R&A or T&GP Committees. There are no meetings held during August and Councillors with holiday commitments at other times are asked to notify the Town Clerk.

Meetings usually take place on a Monday evening at 7.00pm in the Corn Exchange, Market Place where there is access for the disabled. Town Councillors receive their agendas and papers electronically unless a paper copy is requested.

Covid-19: Please note that all meetings in the Corn Exchange are cancelled until further notice. However, the government has introduced legislation to allow for online meetings until May 2021.

HOW DO COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS OPERATE?

The following items appear on all agendas and in addition each Town Council/Committee agenda will detail the specific business relevant to that Committee.

Public Session (15 minutes)

Apologies

To receive any Declarations of Interest and Requests for Dispensations

Approval of minutes from the last meeting

Town Clerk's Report & Correspondence

Confidential

The Town Council agenda also covers recommendations from the Committees, reports from the Dorset Council Councillors and representatives to Community and Local Organisations plus any other Council business not covered by the Committees.

The Remit of each Committee can be found on our website, under each relevant meeting <https://blandfordforum-tc.gov.uk/town-council/meetingscommittees>.

Although agendas are set by the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Council or the Committees in liaison with the Town Clerk, any Councillor can request any item to be put on the agenda providing it is relevant to the Council. This can be done informally either through the Town Clerk or Chairman or formally by means of a motion. Each agenda item is discussed and voted upon by the Councillors.

The Minutes, which are not a verbatim account of the meeting, detail the decisions reached and are a record of the voting. The Minutes are usually available four working days following the meeting and are forwarded to Councillors and local media organisations by email and are also available to members of the public via the Town Council's website, from the Town Clerk's office or the library.

Once a decision has been passed by Council and a course of action identified, the work is organised and carried out by the Council's staff under the control of the Town Clerk.

REPRESENTATION TO COMMUNITY AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Blandford Forum Town Council appoints Councillors to act as representatives to organisations and groups within the town (see Appendix A for a list). Councillors' involvement as representatives in the local community develops the Council's greater understanding of the role of these organisations and groups. Representatives are nominated either at the request of a particular organisation/group or, if core funding has been granted, at the request of the Town Council.

The term of office for representatives is normally for a period of one year commencing from the Annual Council Meeting in May. Town Council representatives are expected to regularly attend meetings of the organisation they represent and take an active part in its operations. Annual reports are submitted by each representative to the Annual Council Meeting in May.

WORKING GROUPS

Membership of Working Groups is also voted on at the Annual Council Meeting or at the Council/Committee Meetings as appropriate. In addition, a number of Working Groups meet as and when required to discuss particular issues and report back to full Council or Committees as appropriate.

CIVIC EVENTS

Councillors are expected to attend various civic occasions throughout the civic year ranging from the Mayor Making Ceremony (usually held on a Friday morning in May) to the Remembrance Day parade and civic church services. Councillors wear civic robes supplied by the Council at such civic events.

NOTICE BOARD LOCATIONS

Town Clerk's Office, Church Lane
The Corn Exchange
Heddington Drive amenity area
Holland Way (opposite Stanton Close)
Salisbury Road (next to the bus stop)
Hunt Road
Langton Road
Balmer Road play area

Old Town Ward
Old Town Ward
Blandford Central Ward
Blandford Central Ward
Hilltop Ward
Hilltop Ward
Langton St Leonards Ward
Badbury Heights

There are also two community notice boards on the Tabernacle toilet building.

TOWN COUNCIL STAFF

The Town Council's executive officer is the Town Clerk who leads a team of 9 full-time and 6 part-time staff plus the honorary roles of Mace Bearer and Town Crier. The organisational structure can be viewed [here](#).

The Operations Manager leads a team of 4 groundsmen and 3 caretakers/grounds assistants and the office staff provide the financial, administrative, Committee and full Council support services plus the public reception, venues booking service and the administrative support for the mayoral role and civic events.

HOW IS THE TOWN COUNCIL FUNDED?

The Council Tax paid by Blandford Forum households includes the spending requirements of the Dorset Council, Dorset Police, Dorset Fire Service and Blandford Forum Town Council. The Dorset Council is responsible for collecting the Council Tax. Many people do not realise that the Town Council does not receive any revenue support from central government, unlike the Dorset Council, neither does it receive any funding from local businesses and retailers via their payment of the non-domestic rate.

Each year the Town Council calculates the money it needs to raise to provide its services. Then we deduct income which we expect to receive from fees and charges such as the hire of sports facilities, lettings of the various halls, etc, to leave the amount we require to spend on the services and any capital projects which are planned for the year ahead. This sum, called the precept, is the amount we levy on the Dorset Council and which is collected by them as a proportion of the total Council Tax paid by Blandford's households.

The Town Council's precept for the year 2020-21 was set at £801,180 which equates to £227.13 for a Band D equivalent property.

WHAT DOES A TOWN COUNCILLOR DO?

Most people's impression of what a councillor does is that they just attend council meetings, and nothing could be further from the truth. The duties and pleasure, of being a local councillor are many and varied, however it is the ordinary day to day contact with local people in their own community that is the most important part of being a councillor.

A Parish or Town Councillor signs a Declaration of Acceptance of Office and thereby undertakes to observe an ethical Code of Conduct when dealing with matters on behalf of the community.

Listening: One of the most important tasks of a Parish or Town Councillor is listening to and understanding the views of people in their community. Many public bodies or organisations acknowledge this is the hardest information for them to capture and they in turn use the skills and local knowledge of the parish or town council for advice to assist and inform their services.

Meetings: A councillor agrees to attend all meetings (reasonably possible) that he or she is summoned to. In a smaller council this may only require one meeting of full council a month (there are however a few small councils that still only meet once every two months). In medium and larger councils however, along with full council meetings, there are further committee meetings or working groups. Most meetings are held in the evening but some committees and working groups may be during the day.

Blandford Forum Town Council's committees include Planning, Finance & Staffing, Town & General Purposes and Recreation & Amenities. Where committees are used however the council usually consists of a larger number of councillors and therefore each councillor is only expected to serve on one or two committees.

Representation: Parish councils also need representation at other local government meetings or on local bodies/organisations and councillors may be asked to serve on certain groups or attend functions on behalf of the parish council. Councillors act as ambassadors for their community keeping everyone aware of local needs and concerns and reporting back on County and regional changes.

Councillors represent the voice of their community as a whole, whilst being aware of and considerate to, specific minority needs.

Ceremonial Duties: In some larger councils there will be times when councillors are asked to attend civic functions as part of their duty to the community. This may entail Remembrance Parades, civic dinners or attendance at public functions to name but a few.

Extra skills: Through all of these functions councillors will draw on their own skills and experiences and it is the sharing of these skills that makes a strong team. Parish and Town councils provide a focus for the community to identify concerns and projects and endeavour to solve them locally themselves. Councillors working as a team will need to deal with employment issues, budgeting, asset management, staff management, project management or grant funding and probably lots more if they are creative and involved. All councils must be aware and owe a duty to their community to manage staff considerately, whether it is employing one parish clerk or a whole host of office and grounds maintenance staff.

Accounts must be kept and whilst the clerk (or Responsible Financial Officer) will be employed to carry out this duty, councillors together as a team are responsible for the financial decisions made and implemented. A clerk is employed to advise and seek advice on behalf of councillors to assist them in their decisions. Councillors are there to consider the information gathered and make a group decision on all matters. No individual councillor is responsible for any single decision. This is democracy at its best.

Training and support: Training is available to any council, large or small. Legislation allows for councils to pay for training and ongoing training for councillors is sound business management. The County Secretary for the Association of Local Councils in your area will be able to provide details of professional training programmes designed specifically for councillors, see the useful contacts section in this pack for contact information.

Responsibility: All councillors are expected to abide by Blandford Forum Town Council's Code of Conduct pursuant to section 27 of the Localism Act 2011. This document is available to download free of charge from our [website](#). The responsibilities detailed in the code of conduct are designed to protect councillors as well as the people they serve and give clear guidance so that councillors may undertake their duties with confidence.

Prospective councillors may also be interested in the following links for further information:

- Dorset Association of Parish & Town Councils www.dorset-aptc.gov.uk
- National Association of Local Councils www.nalc.gov.uk
- Dorset Council www.dorset.gov.uk

**REPRESENTATIVES TO COMMUNITY AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS
AND TOWN COUNCIL APPOINTMENTS 2020 – 2021**

ORGANISATION	<u>REPRESENTATIVE 2020/21</u>
A350/C13 Stakeholder Group	Cllr Osborne
BFTC Commemoration Group	Cllr Quayle Cllr Stevens Cllr Cross Cllr Carter
Age UK (previously Age Concern)	Cllr Stayt Cllr Stevens
Allotment Society	Cllr Lindsay Cllr White (Chair of R&A)
Ancient Monuments Officer	Cllr Clark
Blandford + Neighbourhood Plan	Cllr White Cllr Carter Cllr Stayt Cllr Cross
Blandford & District Civic Society	Cllr Holmes Cllr Stevens
Blandford Area Youth Management Committee	Cllr Osborne Cllr Jacques
Blandford Fashion Museum	Cllr Holmes Cllr Quayle
Blandford Forum Charities (4 Cllrs) (Five year term)	Cllr Stayt Cllr Quayle Cllr Carter Cllr Clark
Blandford Leisure Centre Consultative Group	Cllr Lindsay Cllr Carter Vacancy (Deputy)
Blandford Literary Festival	Cllr Osborne
Blandford Museum Trust	Cllr Quayle Cllr Cross
Blandford Opportunity Group	Cllr Stayt
Blandford Public Transport Group Parish Transport Representative	Cllr S Hitchings Cllr Osborne
Blandford Town Team	Cllr Mieville
Blandford Yuletide Festival	Cllr L Hitchings Cllr Stevens Cllr White Cllr Holmes
Blandford Business Support Group	Cllr Stayt
Citizens Advice Dorset	Cllr Holmes Vacancy

Clean Up Blandford Campaign	Clr Quayle Clr Stevens Clr Cross
Cycling Officer	Clr L Hitchings
Diversity Representative	Clr Mieville
Dorset Association of Parish & Town Councils (DAPTC) Larger Councils and North Dorset	Clr Stayt Clr White
Flood Warden	Clr Clark
Foundation Governors Blandford Secondary School Foundation	Clr Carter Clr Mieville Clr Lacey-Clarke (Deputy)
Georgian Fayre	Clr L Hitchings
Great Dorset Steam Fair	Clr Lindsay
The Heritage Group (UNESCO World Heritage Site)	Clr Lindsay
Mortain & Blandford Twinning Association	Clr Cross Clr Carter
Pretz Twinning Association	Clr Quayle Clr Osborne
Remembrance Sunday Planning Group (5-year term)	Clr Lindsay Clr Carter Clr Holmes
Rights of Way Officer	Clr Cross
TIC Observer	Clr Stayt Clr Holmes
TREADS	Clr Osborne Clr Mieville
Tree Warden	Vacancy
William Williams Charity Representative	Clr White