

Council candidate approval (based on ALDC advice)

Approving council candidates before they are eligible for selection is crucial in ensuring the success of the Liberal Democrats. The process is not intended to be onerous, but it is a crucial quality check that a potential candidate is not going to be a liability, that they share the values of the party, and that they understand the work that they are expected to do.

Being a councillor is a responsible job and the approval process is in effect shortlisting people for a job that earns at least £10,000, (or sometimes even more), of public money. It is therefore vital that our council candidates provide value for money and are of a decent standard before we allow them to go forward for selection.

This approval process also applies to 'paper candidates' as all candidates may be subject to public scrutiny.

The Constitution of the English Liberal Democrats now makes it obligatory that all candidates standing for election to councils in England are approved before they are selected.

The purpose of candidate approval

Approving candidates is simply to ensure that people who stand for the party believe in the values of the party and will not bring the party into disrepute. It is not intended to be a gruelling process. It is simply a quality check on people who wish to stand for election under the party's name.

It is also there to check that candidates are aware of the burden they are taking on, both during the election campaign and as councillors, if elected. The process will also check all candidates are legally eligible to stand and that they are current party members.

The basic rules of the approval process

There are six key principles that the process must adhere to:

- The approval process must be organised by the local party that wholly covers the council area. It must not be organised by the council group.
- The process must be the same for all candidates standing for a specific council.
- Candidates can only be approved for a maximum of four years, although they can be approved for a shorter period if a local party prefers. This means that all sitting councillors must also be re-approved before they are entitled to stand again.
- Approval is only valid for a specific tier of local government.
- The approval panel must include at least one councillor*, and at least one person who is not a councillor on the council concerned (however they could be a councillor elsewhere). A non-councillor must chair the approval panel.
- All councillors must agree to make a contribution from their allowances towards party activities (this is usually 10% of post-tax allowance as per group standing orders)

** Due to the lack of Liberal Democrat councillors locally (as at March 2017) we reserve the right to appoint a former councillor to fill this position on the panel in order to enable the process to proceed promptly.*

What about sitting councillors?

All candidates must be approved in the same way, whether new or a sitting councillor, and for a maximum of four years. That means that all sitting councillors must also be re-approved before they can stand again.

Councillors defecting to the Liberal Democrats

Councillors who join the Liberal Democrat Council Group after having been elected for a different party or as an independent, must go through the same approval process as existing Liberal Democrat councillors. Ideally this should be done before they join the party, but if not then it must be done within ten weeks. This is important as it ensures that they are a fit and proper person to sit as a Liberal Democrat and to ensure they have properly joined the party. If a defecting councillor is not approved they must either undergo further training before going for approval once again, or alternatively they must leave the council group.

Any such approval should not normally exempt them from approval as a sitting councillor at the next election. However, when the next election is close, the approval procedure may be used to give the councillor approval for both joining and for the next election.

The Approval Process

The structure

The approvals and selection process is overseen by the GBLD Campaigns Committee (comprised of local party officers and key campaigners from across the borough).

Step One: Application for approval

All candidates (including sitting councillors) should be expected to complete an application for approval. This should include:

- **An application form**
- **Job specification:** This helps to ensure that potential candidates really understand what is expected of them. It also includes what support a councillor can expect from the group and the party.
- **Council group standing orders:** This is something that people should sign up to before they are approved.

Step Two: Approval Panel

As outlined above, the approval panel must consist of at least one councillor (or a former councillor), and one non-councillor, with a non-councillor chairing. Each individual panel is intended to be as impartial as possible, i.e. not too well known to the candidate.

Although the panel is a crucial part of the process, it will not be too formal, it shouldn't be a harsh grilling and all efforts will be made to put the potential candidate at ease.

When the panel meets the key things that it is trying to decide are:

- Whether a candidate shares the party's values.
- Whether they understand the work involved in being a candidate and councillor.
- Whether they have a knowledge of Lib Dem campaigning,
- Whether they are qualified to stand.
- Whether they agree to abide by council group standing orders.
- That they are prepared to make a financial contribution to the party (if elected).
- Whether they have an awareness of what is going on around them in the local community or council area.

What is less important is whether the person understands the minute detail of Liberal Democrat policy, a full knowledge of how the council functions or whether they have 50 years experience of Liberal Democrat campaigning.

A candidate will also be given the opportunity to ask the panel questions as well.

The panel will also seek to ascertain whether there are any past problems that may become a political issue if they are made public. These sorts of issues should not usually stop someone from being a candidate or councillor as most of them, if they are known about in advance, can be handled without causing too many problems. The only way it should affect approval or not is if the issue is so huge that it makes a candidate unelectable once the media is aware of it.

To approve or not to approve?

There are four potential decisions for an approval panel to make. Whatever decision is made however, a potential candidate will be given as much encouragement to become more involved and active within the party:

- **Approval:** this is straightforward, but even in these cases the panel may wish to make recommendations on improvements the candidate could make.
- **Deferral:** this is an option when the panel feels a candidate has all the potential and correct attributes, but they need to gain further experience of campaigning before being able to stand.
- **Limited or Conditional Approval:** this is an option where the approval panel has doubts about particular aspects of a potential candidate. It may be decided to allow them to stand in a non-target ward to allow get them more involved in campaigning before allowing them to be fully approved.
- **Rejection:** this is a difficult decision to make, but for the sake of the party's reputation and council group unity, is one that sometimes needs to be made.

The approval panel will make a decision on whether a potential candidate should be approved as soon as possible after the panel interview.

Candidates will be informed as soon as possible after the interview by the panel and this will be followed up by written confirmation.

The panel will agree which member of the panel will tell each candidate, and what feedback they will give him or her. No other member of the panel will discuss the decision with the candidate.

The approvals process is strictly confidential. Generally, if a candidate is not approved no one outside the panel should ever know they have applied.

Appeals process

There is always an opportunity for candidates to appeal against any decision to not approve them. This will be done through a full re-sit of the approval panel part of the process, with a new approval panel (preferably with at least one member of the panel being someone they know).

The new panel will be made aware of the reasons for non-approval, and the candidate will be given the opportunity to submit a written response to the grounds for non-approval.