

1: Democracy

Democracy means that we can all have a say in the big decisions that affect our local area or the country.

In most countries, people choose someone that they trust to make the decisions. This is a **representative democracy**. The people who are chosen are representatives.

Once you are **18**, you can vote. You just have to fill in the form that is sent to you every year

Your local area is known as a **ward**.

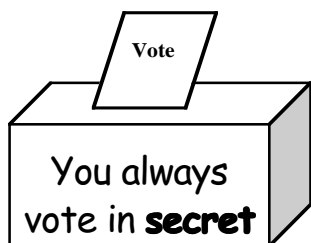
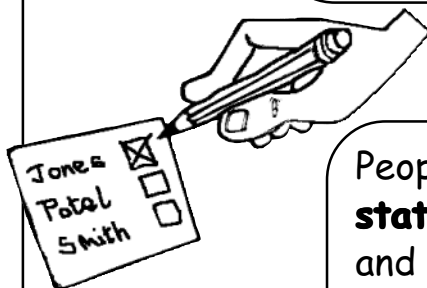
- Each ward votes for two or more Councillors.
- A group of wards makes up a **constituency** which chooses an MP.

A group of constituencies elect a Member of the European Parliament.

People vote in **polling stations**. Schools and village halls are often used as polling stations.

You can vote in elections for

- the local Council,
- a Regional Assembly,
- Parliament
- the European Parliament.



Remember - they represent you if you live in their ward or constituency even if you did not vote for them.

Get in touch with your Councillors, MPs and MEPs by writing, phoning or sending an email to them at the Council or parliament. They also hold local 'surgeries' where you can talk to them. Find out all the details from your local public library.

2: Who represents you?

Your local **Councillor**, **Member of Parliament** and **Member of the European Parliament** represent you, even if you didn't vote for them.

Most of them are members of one of the main **political parties**: Labour, Conservative and the Liberal Democrats. Some represent smaller groups like the Greens or people who are campaigning on a local issue.

Each party has a list of plans, it's **manifesto**, which it will put into practice if it wins the election. When you vote, you chose the party which has plans you agree with.

Your local Councillor will be on several different Council committees - planning, education, leisure or one of the others. They will still advise you and help to find the right people to talk to.

There are different levels of Council. In cities, there are **unitary authorities** which run everything. The rest of the country has **town or district Councils** which look after local matters. The County Council is responsible for bigger issues.



Your MP may have a job in one of the government's departments. If so, they will be working with civil servants who carry out the government's plans. Other MPs are known as **back benchers** - because that is where they sit in parliament.

If you want something to happen, it is worth talking to people on the Council at an early stage, so they know about your plans and can give advice.

3: Running your local area

Every part of the country elects a representative for the Council. Most Councils are a mix of **political parties**. The party with most **Councillors** takes control. It elects a **leader** and the members of the **Cabinet**.

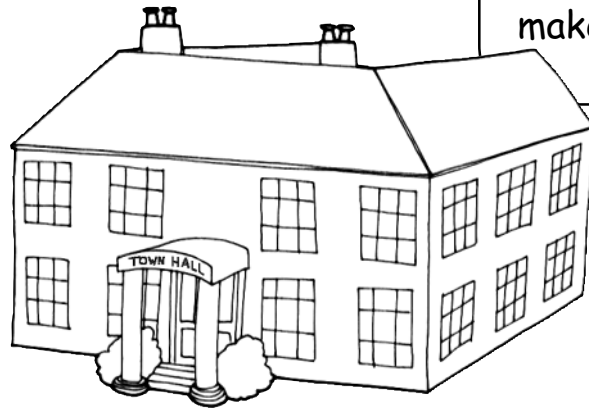
Each member of the Cabinet has responsibility for one area of the Council's work. These include education, leisure, social services and finance.

The whole Council puts together the plan for the year. It must fit into the Council's '**ten year strategic plan**'.

It sets the **budget** for each area of spending. It also elects **Overview and Scrutiny Committees** to make sure that the Cabinet's decisions are in the plan for the year.

Being a Councillor carries a lot of **responsibility** but the role is mainly **voluntary**. They are paid expenses and a fee for going to meetings.

Central government makes planning laws. The Council sets up a committee to make sure that the rules are followed.



As most of the people on the Council have full time jobs, they cannot run the services as well. A **Chief Executive** is appointed to take responsibility for running the services. In each department, people who are **experts** in their field are employed to make sure it all runs smoothly.

Get in touch with your local Councillor or make an appointment to see an expert. Your local library or www.tagish.co.uk/tagish/links has contact details.