

Embargo: 00.01hrs Friday 16 July 2021

Bexhill-on-Sea teenager becomes one of England's youngest councillors

- **18-year-old Connor Winter was elected to Bexhill-on-Sea's new town council in May**
- **He is the second youngest councillor in England**
- **Cllr Winter calls on other young people to get involved in local democracy as we emerge from the pandemic**

The youngest councillor in the South East – and the second youngest councillor in England – has started carrying out his work for Bexhill-on-Sea's first town council since 1974.

Cllr Connor Winter, aged just 18, was elected as an independent local councillor for the St Mark's ward of Bexhill-on-Sea in May 2021.

St Mark's ward covers Little Common, Cooden and Norman's Bay. Cllr Winter shares local governance of the ward with councillor Tim Fenner. The two were among 18 new councillors elected on to Bexhill-on-Sea's first town council for nearly 50 years.

Average age of a councillor

There are around 100,000 councillors on parish and town councils and nearly 18,000 on principal councils. According to the Local Government Association, the average age of a councillor on a principal council (such as a district or county council) is currently 59. Data from the National Association of Local Councils shows the average age of parish and town councillors is fractionally higher, at 61, some 43 years older than Cllr Winter. Just 11% of councillors are aged under 45.

As the role of a councillor is voluntary, many councillors tend to be retirees while younger people are likely to be juggling educational, working and caring responsibilities.

Informal research carried out by Bexhill-on-Sea Town Council suggests Cllr Winter is the second youngest councillor in England – only a councillor in Shropshire appears to be younger.

Key worker

Cllr Winter has worked throughout the Covid-19 outbreak on the front line as a key worker, in his full-time role in the bakery of a local supermarket.

He has seen first-hand the challenges the local community faces as we emerge from the pandemic.

Cllr Connor Winter said: "I was born and bred in Bexhill. I have been keen to serve my local community for a long time, and I was inspired to stand in this election by a former friend and much-respected councillor who sadly passed away a few years ago.

"As we emerge from the pandemic, I want to get things done for the residents of St Mark's, and for Bexhill more widely. I want to help to encourage businesses back to the area and to rejuvenate the local environment. And I'm already enjoying working with a variety of different people and listening to and helping residents with their concerns.

"Young people are underrepresented in local democracy. It can be hard being a young person in politics. Older people might think they know better than you and assume that you have not had enough life experience to do the job, but I aim to bring a fresh and important perspective to the role.

"The best councils are those that are truly representative of their local communities. I'd encourage young people to stand up and be counted, and to have their say on how their communities are managed. We have a lot of energy and new ideas to bring to the table."

Cllr Sue Baxter, chair of the National Association of Local Councils "Local (parish and town) councils play an important role in building strong communities and work hard to engage with and reflect the diversity of their areas. However, our research into the 2019 local council elections showed that young councillors are in a minority, with 70% of councillors aged between 55 and 75.

"That is why through our Make A Change campaign, NALC is working with local councils and county associations to turn these statistics around so our most local councils feature young councillors who want to contribute to their communities and have their opinions considered on matters that affect them and other young people.

"Local councils should be listening to young people in their local areas and representing their interests, strengthening not only local democracy by involving the future electorate but also the opportunity that a young person may one day step up to become a councillor.

"I'm thrilled that Cllr Winter has been elected to serve the community and hope he and other young councillors across the country will in turn inspire more young people to get involved in their community including as parish and town councillors."

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- According to LGA research, the average age of a local councillor is 59 (2018):

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Councillors%27%20Census%202018%20-%20report%20FINAL.pdf>

- NALC's research report into the 2019 local elections:

<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/our-work/elections-1/3256-local-councils-elections-2019-report/file>

- It is believed that 18-year-old Cllr Jess Michie is currently the youngest councillor in England. She is 4 months younger than Cllr Winter:

<https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/politics/2021/05/20/oswestry-teenager-becomes-one-of-the-uks-youngest-councillors/>

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