

ABOUT US

The Conservative Political Officers' Network – CPON for short – is the independent, national network for Conservative Political Assistants.

Our members work for local authorities and Conservative Groups in cities, districts, boroughs, and county councils across the country.

As well as providing legal and professional support, CPON helps Conservative political officers pool resources and information in many areas of governmental work, such as:

- Democratic good practice,
- Council Tax,
- Audit,
- Education,
- Social care,
- Community safety, and,
- Transport and the environment.



CPON WORKS CLOSELY WITH OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

CPON members have their fingers 'on the pulse' of local and national government issues. Our collective knowledge and experience of administration and opposition, combined with local knowledge and excellent media skills, makes CPON, and its members, essential cogs in the local government machine.

CPON also provides legal and practical advice for local authorities and Conservative Groups wishing to appoint political officers.

In addition, the network is routinely consulted on local government matters by organisations such as the Local Government Association, IDeA, LGIU, the Conservative Councillors' Association and London Councils.

In the fast moving world of local government politics today, CPON has proved itself to be an essential part of the democratic process.

TESTIMONIALS

"I am most grateful to you for all the work you do for the Party."

David Cameron MP, Prime Minister & Conservative Party Leader



"Councillors and local government are vital to the modern Conservative Party and by giving them the support they need, CPON is providing a valuable service to the Party."

Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government



"I value the job the network's young membership is doing to support Conservative Groups across the country."

Boris Johnson, Mayor of London



"Political Assistants are doing the most incredible job across the country, and I want to thank them for all their hard work."

Theresa May MP, Home Secretary



"Having a political researcher was one of the reasons we took control of Gloucestershire County Council for the first time in 20 years – and one of the key reasons was the first class support, backup and assistance that CPON provided."

Cllr. Barry Dare, Former Conservative Leader of Gloucestershire County Council



"Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference."
Sir Winston Churchill

The Conservative Political Officers' Network

Research Administrations Communications



Research Administration Communications

“What is a Political Assistant?” “Why do we need a Political Assistant?” and other questions...

WHAT IS A POLITICAL ASSISTANT?

A Political Assistant is a local government officer, employed exclusively to support a local political group in its day-to-day council duties.

Political Assistants are ‘politically restricted’ as per the Local Government & Housing Act 1989, meaning they are not allowed to voice their political opinion in public, nor publicly canvas for a particular political party, although they are allowed to convey their political opinion and advice to the group they support.

The duties of a Political Assistant cover a vast spectrum of professional roles, and cannot be pigeon-holed into a particular category. However, their work primarily functions around three core elements, namely;

- * Research support;
- * Group administrative duties; and,
- * Public relations & media liaison.

ISN'T EMPLOYING POLITICAL ASSISTANTS USING TAXPAYERS' MONEY FOR PARTY POLITICS?

The vast majority of local government employees are employed to implement the policies of the political group in charge of their respective local authority.

In comparison, Political Assistants are politically restricted, unlike the vast majority of other local government officers, who are free to pursue their political ambitions if they so wish. Furthermore, their salaries are capped, and a local authority may only employ a maximum of three Political Assistants - one for each main party represented on their council that holds more than ten per cent of the council's seats.

WHY DO WE NEED A POLITICAL ASSISTANT?

Beyond their research, administrative and communication duties, one of the main benefits sited by councillors who employ political assistants, is that they provide the most cherished commodity – that of ‘time’.

Political Assistants exist to ease the burdens placed on councillors, and by doing so allow them the time to get on with serving their communities – the job they were elected to do.

IS EMPLOYING POLITICAL ASSISTANTS REALLY A CONSERVATIVE THING TO DO?

The Local Government Act which introduced Political Assistants, has been in place for over twenty years, and both Labour and the Liberal Democrats use it to great effect up and down the country. It therefore seems curious that the Conservative Party would not wish to use every available means to support the interests of communities to the best of its abilities.

Whilst a small number of Conservatives may argue against the employment of Political Assistants, they are generally unaware of the actual role Political Assistants play. Very few opponents come from within Conservative Groups who enjoy the services of Political Assistants.

There are also those who, whilst originally opposing the recruitment of Political Assistants, now wholeheartedly support their continued employment.

In reality, a growing number of local Conservative Groups across the country enjoy the benefits of Political Assistants. The membership of CPON has never been higher, and the work of our membership has received praise from many leading Conservative politicians including David Cameron, Boris Johnson, Eric Pickles and Theresa May.

WHAT BENEFITS DO POLITICAL ASSISTANTS PROVIDE TO LOCAL TAXPAYERS?

Political Assistants enable councillors to react quicker to the pressures of governing and scrutinising, as well as the growing ability to set the national agenda.

Paper work, constituent case work, media relationships, and scrutiny of legislation all prove time consuming for elected members, who are now expected to undertake full-time duties in roles which are still resourced like part-time jobs.

Good Political Assistants empower their councillors, and maximise their effectiveness for the benefit of the local community.

Furthermore, Political Assistants up and down the country are able to spread good practice. There is no reason to reinvent the wheel, and what works in one area may very well fit the needs of another.

With membership of CPON, Conservative Political Assistants are able to access the thoughts, policies and experiences of local authorities across the country.

By spreading good practice, the work of a Political Assistant can provide savings and improved services, thereby benefitting local taxpayers.

Many local authorities have been able to cut, freeze or keep Council Tax low, thanks to the hard work and research provided by Political Assistants.

So then the benefit of a Political Assistant to the taxpayer could not be clearer. The work of a Political Assistant leads to more effective, efficient, well-informed, and well-briefed local councillors,

