

Local government

Mayors and councillors

The Parliament in Westminster in London is the home of the British government. But in fact, many of the decisions that bring changes to people's day-to-day lives are not made in Westminster at all. They are made in each town or country district by the many local government "councils". There are two kinds of council. Large areas of the country are run by "county councils". They look after the police, the fire service, the roads, the buses, the schools, the libraries and the welfare Services. Each large "county" is divided into smaller "districts". The "district councils" look after more local matters, such as building and renting houses and flats. They clean and light the streets, take away the rubbish and provide car parks.

Local government is an important part of British democracy. The decisions on how local money should be spent are made by "councillors". These men and women are elected every four years. A new chairperson, or "mayor" is elected every year. It is hard work being a local councillor. There are meetings to go to and large piles of papers to read. Mayors also have to go to a large number of lunches, dinners and other social events. But the

councillors and mayors are not paid. They do this work for nothing. Usually, they are people who are interested in politics, or who just want to work for the good of their town.

The local councillor's job is to make decisions on how local services should be organized. These decisions are carried out by 2.5 million local government workers. Nearly half of this big army of people work in schools, which are organized by local governments. Where does the money come from to pay for all these people? This is the question that the Westminster government is always asking. Some of it comes from local taxes or "rates" on land and houses. The Westminster government has to pay the rest. And as the bills have gone up, the government has been asking more and more questions. there are many fights between Parliament in London and local councils. Parliament wants to spend less money. But local councillors don't want to stop providing the Services that people need. It's one of those arguments that will probably go on, and on, and on...