

# Understanding local politics

Democracy here on the fjord



The City Council is the political representation and is elected by all eligible voters in Kiel. It makes all the important decisions for the city – and is therefore an important component of a living democracy.

In accordance with local government regulations, the City Council has 49 members. However, this number can also increase due to overhang seats and levelling seats, depending on the election result.

The Council Members lay down the objectives and principles for the administration of the city. For example, municipal kindergartens, facilities for senior citizens, building projects, schools, roads, sports facilities and cultural facilities, climate protection – these are all issues that the City Council publicly debates and votes on. The City Council also decides on the city's budget.

The Council is chaired by the President of the City Council.

## Free elections

After the Second World War, an initial City Council was appointed (by the British occupation) in December 1945. In the first free elections legitimised by the German Basic Law, Kiel's citizens elected their own first representative City Council in October 1946.

The Basic Law now enabled the local authorities to take responsibility for their own fate: the right to self-government is anchored in Schleswig-Holstein's local government regulations.

The minimum age for voters in local elections has been 16 years since 1998 – even minors have been able to actively participate in the democratic process as from then.

In addition, the participation of children and young people is stipulated in Section 47 of the local government regulations.

EU citizens living in Kiel can also cast their votes in the City Council elections, which are held every five years.



# The City Council

In the main entrance, up two flights of stone stairs, through the venerable rotunda of City Hall, along the passage on the left hand side is where you can find the City of Kiel's Council Chamber (Ratssaal), the place where the political fortunes of the city are decided. The Council Members generally meet here once a month.

They are all citizens of Kiel, who serve the city in an honorary capacity. They make decisions on many matters which directly affect the daily lives of almost 250,000 residents of Kiel.

Their most important task is approving the city budget, which is the financial budget for the city administration. As in all German parliaments, all members of the City Council are not bound by party instructions, but act freely according to their convictions in the interests of the public.

Council Members may join together to form a parliamentary group.

City Council meetings are always open to the public. All those who are interested can follow the meetings, for example live on the platform of the Council Chamber, or via the public broadcaster Offener Kanal Kiel.

The City Council only meets behind closed doors when dealing with confidential issues such as personnel, property or contractual matters.

In all other matters, the City Parliament always strives for transparency: the respective topics and advisory documents are published on the internet in good time before the corresponding meetings ([kiel.de/ratsinfo](http://kiel.de/ratsinfo)). In addition, the Offener Kanal Kiel broadcasts the meetings live on television and via the internet. Recordings can be accessed at [www.kiel.de](http://www.kiel.de) after a meeting. In the City Council itself, the motions of the parliamentary groups, Council Members or also local advisory councils and other advisory councils are voted on; the Mayor provides information about new developments and introduces important decisions by motion of the administration.

Every time a substantive vote is held in the Council, the majority decides. The Council Members usually vote by a show of hands. In addition, each Council Member is able to address small requests to the Mayor. Lengthy requests can only be posed by parliamentary groups, or with the support of at least one-third of all Council Members.



# The President of the City Council

The President of the City Council is the head of the Council, and at the same time is also the city's highest representative, along with the Mayor. He or she, together with two deputies and the chairpersons of the parliamentary groups, constitute the Council of Elders. The Council of Elders meets in non-public sessions to discuss parliamentary matters. The Mayor is also represented in an advisory capacity.

Kiel is a cosmopolitan and internationally-networked city. The President of the City Council maintains the international relationships with the partner cities of Aarhus (Denmark), Brest (France), Coventry (UK), Gdynia (Poland), Hatay and Samsun (Turkey), Kaliningrad and Sovetsk (Russian Federation), Moshi District (Tanzania), San Francisco (USA), Stralsund (Germany), Tallinn (Estonia) and Vaasa (Finland).

# The Central Committee

The City Council elects a Central Committee from among their number, with a chairperson. Although legally this Central Committee is on an equal footing with the other committees, it has a prominent position because it is assigned specific key tasks in the local government regulations.

As such, the Central Committee monitors the work of the other committees and the implementation of the objectives and principles laid down by the City Council.



# Committees, Local Advisory Councils and other Advisory Councils

In order to be able to carry out its manifold tasks, the City Council forms numerous specialist committees, whose members are elected by proportional representation. In addition to the Council Members, other citizens can be elected to the committees by the City Council – for instance, Kiel residents who can offer special expertise. Thus, for example, the youth assistance committee includes experts who belong to prominent youth welfare organisations.

The positions and views expressed in the specialist committees are mostly the result of a long process of opinion formation in which the pros and cons of a project are discussed.

Ideas are shared and proposals are made, discussions held, compromises reached – and finally decisions are taken.

Local advisory councils – whose members are also elected by the City Council – serve a coordinating role between residents and the city. The composition is based on the results of the local elections in the respective city district.



Local advisory councils act as non-partisan bodies in all matters relating to their city district. They are informed and consulted by the city administration regarding all important projects. Concerned citizens have the opportunity to express their views, suggestions and criticisms in the local advisory councils, for example in public hearings on development plans. The local advisory councils can table motions that specifically relate to their district to the City Council and to the committees.

In addition, other advisory councils can be formed for socially-important groups and issues, to provide expert support for the work of the committees and the City Council – these include the advisory council for senior citizens and the advisory council for people with disabilities, whose members are also elected by the City Council.

The special representatives for children and young people in Kiel, the Youth Council, is elected every two years in a direct election open to all Kiel residents from 12 to 19 years of age.

Committee and advisory council meetings are always open to the public.



# The Mayor

The Mayor of Kiel has been directly elected by the citizens since 1997.

The term of office is six years.

The Mayor is the legal representative of the city to the outside world.

The Mayor of Kiel

- leads and organises the administration
- is the hierarchical superior of all employees, including the City Councillors
- executes the laws
- prepares the decisions of the City Council and the committees, carries them out, and reports on the status of implementation
- makes all personnel decisions within the framework of the staffing plan adopted by the City Council
- organises the administration into departments, and assigns them to the City Councillors.

Candidates for the office of the Mayor must be over 18 years of age on election day. Election proposals can be submitted by any political party or electoral group of the City Council. Candidates can also nominate themselves – provided that their candidacy is currently supported by at least 295 people who are entitled to vote.

The person elected is appointed as a temporary civil servant.

The Mayor also heads the following areas of responsibility: central management, guidelines and economy.



# Local Mayor City Councillors

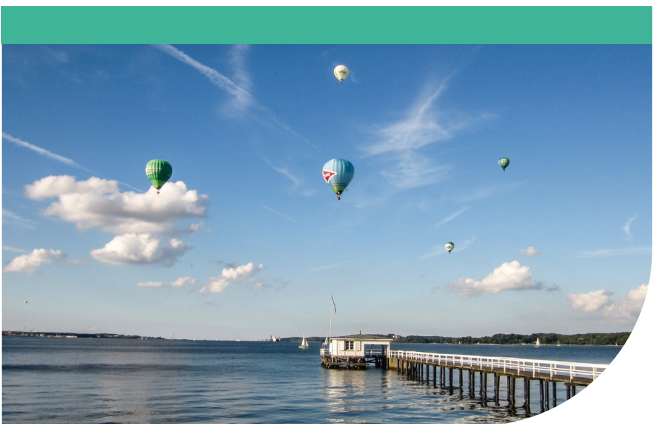
The City Councillors elected by the City Council are also temporary civil servants.

Their term of office is six years. They each lead a department consisting of several authorities, offices or also businesses.

One City Councillor also acts as deputy and representative of the Mayor. This individual is officially designated as the Local Mayor.

The four Kiel City Councillors are responsible for the following departments or areas of responsibility:

- Urban development, construction and the environment
- Finances, human resources, order and fire services
- Social affairs, housing, health and sports
- Education, youth, culture and the creative city



# The Equal Opportunity Commissioner

Men and women have equal rights. The state supports the effective enforcement of this equality, and works – as prescribed in the German Basic Law – towards eliminating existing disadvantages.

Each local authority in Schleswig-Holstein with its own administration appoints an Equal Opportunity Commissioner. So does the City of Kiel.

The Equal Opportunity Commissioner is appointed by the City Council, and is subject to the supervision of the Mayor.

He or she is not bound to follow specialist instructions, however.

All of Kiel's offices and businesses are required to involve the Equal Opportunity Commissioner in all projects at an early stage.

If the Equal Opportunity Commissioner is not involved on time, he or she can invalidate the relevant decisions. He or she also has a right to participate in the meetings of the City Council and the committees. He or she has the right to be heard in all matters related to his/her areas of responsibility. Once a year, the Equal Opportunity Commissioner presents an activity report to the City Council.

## Citizen participation

The citizens of Kiel have numerous opportunities to influence projects in politics and administration. The city involves the residents of Kiel more than ever before in urban planning: many voluntary participation processes enable the contribution of individual ideas, opinions and proposals.

As a matter of principle: every local politician and administration is open to suggestions and criticism.

In many cases, suggestions and impulses also come from citizens' associations and initiatives. Their commitment is important and indispensable for the city.

In recent years, the opportunities for participation in local political decisions have been considerably expanded once again. Meetings, question sessions, public petitions and referendums – there is a wide range of possibilities in Kiel to actively speak out and participate.

Kiel has had a guideline for participation since 2018.

More information on this can be found under [www.kiel.de/mitwirkung](http://www.kiel.de/mitwirkung)

The President of the City Council may convene residents' meetings in city districts in order to inform the local residents and consult with them about important matters. The proposals and suggestions expressed by the citizens in such meetings must be dealt with by the City Council and the committees within a reasonable period of time. In addition, all residents have the right to address suggestions and complaints to the City Council in writing.

The City Council must give residents the opportunity to pose questions during the public meetings, either about points on the agenda or other local matters. Residents must also be able to make proposals or suggestions.

On the one hand, the City Council can transfer a decision directly to the citizens eligible to vote. On the other hand, citizens can use a petition to demand to be allowed to make a decision on topics related to self-government tasks (referendum).



---

**Published by:**



Landeshauptstadt Kiel

**Address:** Press Department,  
Postfach 1152, 24099 Kiel, **Edited**

**by:** Büro des Stadtpräsidenten,

**E-Mail:** stefanie.skuppin@kiel.de,

**Photographs:** Alexander Brecht,

Christina Fischer, Sabine Gerchow,

Martina Hansen, Carmen Kelbch,

Wolfgang Okon, Bodo Quante,

Kai Teichmann, **Layout:** schmidt-

undweber, Kiel 05/2023

**Information:** Duplicating, saving

or reprinting this document, in

part or in full, is not permitted

without the written consent of

the publisher and editor.