

Guide to becoming a Parish or Town Councillor

What is a parish or town council?

What do Parish Councils do?

How can I make a difference?

What are parish and town councils?

Parish and town councils are the most local part of our democratic system, a part of local government and the closest to the public. They have statutory powers and some duties. They spend money raised from the community, through a precept on the council tax, on projects and services.

What do they do?

They have a variety of powers given to them by various Acts of Parliament. Some are rather old-fashioned for today's lifestyle, but most are up to date and important. For example, a parish council can provide CCTV or contribute to the installation of traffic control measures.

Attending a council meeting is the best way to find out what they do. Give your Parish or Town Council a call and find out when its next public meeting is scheduled to take place.

How do they make decisions?

A parish or town council is made up of a number of councillors who meet regularly to collectively make decisions on the work and direction of the council. As elected bodies, parish and town councils are responsible to the people they represent – the local community.

Where do they get their money from?

Each year a sum of money called a "precept" is collected through a council tax. This money is used by parish and town councils to improve facilities and services for local people. Parish or town councils can also apply for grants or loans and, if they own property, can receive money from rents or leases.

How are parish and town councillors' elected?

They are elected by people who live in a geographical area known as a ward – or mainly in smaller parishes – the parish or town council area as a whole. If the parish is divided into wards an election is held in each ward, the same way elections are held in district wards and in the county electoral divisions. If the parish does not have wards there is just a single parish election.

Who can vote in parish or town council elections?

To vote in any election you need to be registered. You can do this by contacting the electoral services at your local district or borough council or visit www.aboutmyvote.co.uk to download a registration form.

Anyone can register to vote when they are aged 16 years or over but you can only vote when you are 18. To vote in a parish or town council election you need to be a British citizen, Irish citizen, European Union citizen or a Commonwealth country (including Cyprus and Malta).

Who can become a Parish Councillor?

To stand for election, on the day of nomination, you must be 18 or over and a UK, EU or commonwealth citizen.

You must also meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Be registered, and continue to be, as a local government elector for the parish or town from the day of your nomination onwards, or
- Have occupied (as owner or tenant) any land or premises in the parish or town during the whole of the 12 months before the day of elections, or
- Your main or only place of work during the last 12 months, prior to the day of your nomination and the day of election, has been in the parish or town, or
- You have lived in the parish during the whole 12 months before the day of your nomination and the day of election.

Most people can. There are no formal qualifications required. However, there are a few rules, you have to be: British Citizen, or a citizen of the Commonwealth or the European Union, and ages 18 years or older on the day you become nominated for election.

Who cannot stand for election?

- Have been sentenced to a prison sentence (including suspended sentences) of 3 months or more within 5 years prior to polling day.
- Be subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order
- Have been disqualified under any legislation relating to corrupt or illegal practices or offences relation to donations.
- Hold a politically restricted post for another authority
- Is an employee of that Council

What does the day-to-day work of a councillor include?

Attending meetings of local organisations such as tenants' associations, bodies that affect the wider community, such as the police, the Highways Authority, schools and colleges.

Taking up issues on behalf of members of the public, such as making representations to the district or borough council.

Running a surgery or meeting residents to bring up or discuss issues.

What do Parish or Town Councillors do?

As a councillor you can become a voice of your community and effect real change. Councillors are community leaders and represent the aspirations of the public that they serve.

Councillors have three main areas of work:

Decision Making: through attending meetings and committees with other electors members, councillors decide which activities to support, where money should be spent, what services should be delivered and what policies should be implemented.

Monitoring: councillors make sure that their decisions lead to efficient and effective services by keeping an eye on how well things are working.

Getting Involved: as local representatives, councillors have responsibilities towards their constituents and local organisations. However, the time spent on this depends on what the councillor wants to achieve.

Where can I obtain further information?

Contact your local parish or town council.

You can make a difference

Your Parish or Town Council works for your community and to be fully effective it should represent, and be representative of, the **whole** community.

Do you:

- Want to work together with your =neighbours, friends or colleagues to achieve changes that make a real difference to the quality of the area where you live?
- Want to learn new skills?
- Want to get involved in making decisions that affect your quality of life?
- Have some spare time to get involved?

If you have answered yes to any of these questions then you should become a Parish or Town Councillor. You never know, it may open up a whole new career for you!

