

Becoming a Parish Councillor

What is a Parish Council?

A parish council is a local authority that makes decisions on behalf of the people in the parish. It is the level of local government closest to the community, with the district authority above it in the hierarchy.

Why become a Parish Councillor?

By becoming a parish councillor you become someone your community can look to for help, guidance and support with the possibility of influencing decisions for the benefit of the people you serve.

What decisions do Parish Councils make?

Parish councils make all kinds of decisions on issues that affect the local community. Probably the most common topics that parish councils get involved with are planning matters (they are statutory consultees), crime prevention, roads and highways.

Parish councils have limited powers to make decisions but they do have the ability to negotiate with, and the power to influence, those other organisations that do make the final decisions (such as the district council, health authorities, police etc). In this respect parish councils are extremely powerful. The organisations that make the final decisions know that a parish council gives the best reflection of how a community feels about something and its views will be taken seriously.

How much time does it take up?

Councils usually meet once a month for the council meeting to which members of the public are also invited. Meetings may last one or two hours, depending on what's on the list of items to discuss. Some councils may also have sub-committees to deal with specific subjects, such as finance or planning matters.

In addition to the regular meetings Councillors are required to give time for 'ad hoc' meetings – for example with architects or agents to discuss planning applications that the council must give its opinions on.

How long does a Parish Councillor serve for?

Once elected, parish councillors sit on the council for a maximum of four years. If they then want to stay in the post they can stand for re-election.

This does not mean that you have to stay for four years. If you find it's not for you, or you can no longer meet the commitment, you can stand down.

Am I eligible to be a Parish Councillor?

To stand for election on a parish council, you must:

- be a UK or Commonwealth citizen; or
- be a citizen of the Republic of Ireland; or
- be a citizen of another Member state of the European Union; and
- be at least 18 years old.

To be eligible to stand for an election for a particular parish, you must:

- be an elector of the parish; or
- in the past 12 months have occupied (as owner or tenant) land or other premises in the parish; or
- work in the parish (as your principal or only place of work); or
- live within three miles of the parish boundary.

You don't have to be connected to a political party.

If you do become a parish councillor you will have to sign up to the Code of Conduct.