



**GUIDE
TO BECOMING A
PARISH OR TOWN
COUNCILLOR**

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 to achieve changes that make a real difference to the quality of the area where you live?**
- **Want to learn new skills?**
- **Have some time to spare to get involved?**

If you have answered 'yes' to any of these questions then you should consider becoming a parish or town councillor.

What are parish or 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 people. They have statutory powers and a few 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 but most are up to date and important. For example, a parish council can provide a wash house! But it can also provide CCTV or contribute to the installation of traffic calming measures.

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 or 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 or 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 county electoral divisions. If the parish does not have wards there is just a single parish election.

Who can vote in parish and 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 citizen or a citizen of a Commonwealth country.

Who can become a parish councillor?

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

Who cannot stand for election?

Anyone who is the subject of a bankruptcy restriction order or interim order; has within five years of the election, been convicted in the UK of any offence and has had a prison sentence (suspended or not) for a period of over 3 months without the option of a fine. Also, employees are not eligible to stand for election to the council which employs them.

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 for 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 elected 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 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, have a look at their website, or contact the Nottinghamshire Association of Local Councils via their website: www.nottsalc.org.uk