

## **What is involved in being a Parish Councillor.**

As a parish councillor, your primary duty is to represent the views of all residents within your parish and ward.

Whether or not you were elected as part of the four-yearly cycle of elections (contested or uncontested) or were later co-opted into post (that is, chosen by councillors themselves at a public meeting), you retain the same status.

### **Legal basis**

If you were elected or co-opted, your appointment was made under the Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006. Importance to you Your position in the parish council brings legal boundaries as to how you may act or what you might say when discharging your duties as a councillor. If you are very passionate about an issue and intend to use your council position to promote that issue, then you should consider how that would work and take advice from the clerk before standing for election. The legal limits on the council's responsibilities may not be supportive of your issue, and you may achieve better results as a resident, independently of the council.

### **Key Points**

As a councillor, you must attend meetings when summoned to do so; the notice to attend a council meeting is, in law, a summons, because you have a duty to attend.

Consider, in advance of the meeting, the agenda and any related documents which were sent to you with the summons.

Take part in meetings and consider all the relevant facts and issues on matters which require a decision including the views of others expressed at the meeting.

Take part in voting and respect decisions made by the majority of those present and voting. Ensure, with other councillors, that the council is properly managed.

Represent the whole electorate, and not just those who voted for you.

Work within your Code of Conduct. What you must not do is to come to a meeting to make decisions where you have already made up your mind (this is called predetermination).

Issue an instruction to the Clerk or a Contractor (the Clerk takes instructions from the council as a whole body, not individual councillors, except for the Chair who has been elected to do this).

Never act 'on behalf of the Council' in the organisation of any function or service (unless you have been given authority by the Chair or council to do so).

Your duties will include having responsibility for running local services which may include open spaces, play areas, public toilets, community car schemes and potentially much more.

Deciding on how much to raise through the council tax in order to deliver your council's services.

Influencing and shaping the long-term development policy for the parish, and as part of the planning process, comment on planning applications in the parish. Improve the quality of life and the environment in their local area.

Working to identify issues which are important to the lives of the residents you represent. Working to bring about improvements through local projects, lobbying other service providers and working in partnership with other parishes and agencies.

### **Handling casework**

During your time in office, you will find that residents may approach you for advice or support. As well as looking for support, they will be looking for answers and solutions.

Understanding the nature and scale of the problem presented will often require you to use your judgement.

Some people may try to use you or may avoid telling you everything you need to know. Avoid promising to sort out every problem but do offer a sympathetic ear.

While you can use your knowledge, contacts and advocacy skills to assist people, it is best to try and get people to help themselves.

Having identified what the problem is, you should communicate with the Chair, Vice Chair or Clerk at the earliest opportunity so that the issue can be noted.

It may already have been raised previously by the same person or be a sign of a wider and more ranging problem.

You may want to put your concerns or questions in writing, although most councillors find that a quick face to face discussion, telephone call or email is quicker and easier in sorting out casework problems.

The parish council and its councillors have many years of experience and network contacts that can support you. Be ready to share your casework with them, and please do not act alone or on behalf of the council unless you have had prior permission.