

## Introduction

### What are community, parish and town councils?

There are around 10,000 community, parish and town councils in England and Wales; they are corporate bodies and local authorities. They have a powerful voice to represent local people.

### What do these councils do?

Community, parish and town councils are the part of local government closest to the people. They serve the smallest area and are responsible for the most local of matters. Very importantly, these councils can "precept" - raising a sum collected with the council tax each year to improve facilities and services for local people.

In England they are called parish councils or town councils, if they cover a largely urban area. In Wales they are known as community councils. In both England and Wales they are elected units of local government whose activities are controlled by Acts of Parliament. There are 10,000 community, parish and town councils in England and Wales.

Parish, town and community councils in England and Wales have a number of basic responsibilities in making the lives of local communities more comfortable, many of which are often taken for granted. Essentially these powers fall within three main categories: representing the whole electorate within the parish; delivering services to meet local needs; and striving to improve quality of life in the parish.

Individual powers include the provision and maintenance of community transport schemes, traffic calming measures, local youth projects, tourism activities, leisure facilities, car parks, village greens, public lavatories, litter bins, street lighting, street cleaning, burial grounds, allotments, bus shelters, commons, open spaces, footpaths, bridleways, and crime reduction measures.

For a full list of powers and duties visit:

[http://www.nalc.gov.uk/About NALC/What is a parish or town council](http://www.nalc.gov.uk/About%20NALC/What%20is%20a%20parish%20or%20town%20council)

Community, parish and town councils can also comment on planning applications - they are statutory consultees (they have to be consulted if they so wish) and can be represented at public inquiries.

Parish, town and community councils may soon be granted more powers, especially as part of Quality Status. When councils are awarded this status they are allowed to negotiate with the local principal authorities (the district or county council or unitary authority) that certain responsibilities get devolved to the parish. This is part of the government's initiative to revitalise local democracy.

### What do elected representatives do for me?

Community, parish and town councillors represent the people living in their local area at the closest level to the community. When decisions are being made they are there to put your views across.

### Where can you find parish councils?

Parish councils are not only found in rural areas. Many metropolitan areas of England have created councils where there were none. Areas of Leeds, Liverpool and Birmingham, among others, have created parish councils to deliver the type of local representation residents felt they otherwise lacked. London is the only city in England not legally able to create parish councils - and the government has indicated they may change the legislation that prohibits parishes for London.

Scotland also has community councils, but they have fewer powers. [Visit www.ascc.org.uk](http://www.ascc.org.uk) for more information.

# Being a councillor

## What is a councillor?

Councillors are elected to represent an individual geographical unit on the council, known as a ward or - mainly in smaller parishes - the entire parish or town council area. They are generally elected by the public every four years.

## What do councillors do?

Councillors have three main components to their work.

1. *Decision making* - Through meetings and attending 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.
2. *Monitoring* - Councillors make sure that their decisions lead to efficient and effective services by keeping an eye on how well things are working.
3. *Getting involved locally* - As local representatives, councillors have responsibilities towards their constituents and local organisations. These responsibilities and duties often depend on what the councillor wants to achieve and how much time is available, and may include:
  - Going to meetings of local organisations such as tenants' associations.
  - Going to meetings of bodies affecting the wider community.
  - Taking up issues on behalf of members of the public.
  - Running a surgery for residents to bring up issues.
  - Meeting with individual residents in their own homes.

Visiting your council is the best way to find out what happens there. Give the council a call and find out when its next public meeting happens. By law, ordinary people are allowed to be present at most council business.

## How much time does it take up?

Quite often councillors say that their duties occupy them for about three hours a week. Obviously there are some councillors who spend more time than this - and some less, but in the main, being a community, parish and town councillor is an enjoyable way of contributing to your community, and helping to make it a better place to live and work.

## Am I Qualified

Yes - most people are. However there are a few rules.

You have to be:

- a British subject, or a citizen of the Commonwealth or the European Union; and
- on the "relevant date" (i.e. the day on which you are nominated or if there is a poll the day of the election) 18 years of age or over;

and additionally:

- on the "relevant day" a local government elector for the council area for which you want to stand; or
- have during the whole of the 12 months preceding that day occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the council area; or
- have during that same period had your principal or only place of work in the council area; or
- during that 12 month period resided in the council area.

In the case of a sitting member of a parish or community council you can also satisfy the criteria to be elected if you have lived in the council area or within 3 miles of it for the whole of the 12 months preceding the "relevant day".

You cannot stand for election if you

- are subject of a bankruptcy restriction order or interim order.
- have, within five years before the day of the election, been convicted in the United Kingdom of any offence and have had a sentence of imprisonment (whether suspended or not) for a period of over three months without the option of a fine.
- you work for the council you want to become a councillor for (but you can work for other local authorities, including the principal authorities that represent the same area).

### **But I'm too young...**

Some parish councils also run youth councils, which are comprised of a number of young people representing their local schools and colleges. They are granted their own political forum by having a space and a time to meet and discuss matters that affect them. These youth councils are in direct communication with their parish councils so they can also be involved in decision-making. Contact your parish council or speak to your school to find out if either is involved in such a scheme and you are interested in getting involved. If there is not a scheme, or a parish youth forum, get together with friends and put a proposal to your local community, parish or town council.

### **I am not a member of a political party and do not want to be**

Most community, parish and town councillors are not party political - and many who are tied to a party as a councillor for another sector, do not stand as a political candidate for their parish council

If you wish to stand as a party political candidate, you are also welcome to do so. Contact your party's local office for more information.

Conservative Party	<a href="http://www.conservatives.com">www.conservatives.com</a>
Green Party	<a href="http://www.greenparty.org.uk">www.greenparty.org.uk</a>
Labour Party	<a href="http://www.labour.org.uk">www.labour.org.uk</a>
Liberal Democrats	<a href="http://www.libdems.org.uk">www.libdems.org.uk</a>
Plaid Cymru	<a href="http://www.plaidcymru.org">www.plaidcymru.org</a>

The Electoral Commission has a guide on candidates at local elections in England and Wales.

<http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/elections/Candidates.cfm>