



Get Involved and Make a Difference

**a guide to becoming
a parish or town
councillor**

Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils

Supporting and Informing Local Councils in
Worcestershire

Get involved and make a difference

Introduction

If you want to do something for your local community why not think about becoming a parish or town councillor?

What are local councils?

There are many types of local councils, all with different responsibilities. The thing they have in common is that they all provide local services for local people.

There are around 8,500 local councils representing around 16 million people across England and they form the most local tier of government making decisions on behalf of their residents. In Worcestershire there are three levels of local government; parish and town councils are known as the first and the tier of local government closest to the people. The next level is the district councils which cover an area that includes a number of parish councils, whilst the county council covers the whole of Worcestershire. There are six district councils in Worcestershire - Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch Borough, Worcester City, Wychavon and Wyre Forest.

Parish and town councils were established by the Local Government Act of 1894 and there are 150 parish and town councils and 10 parish meetings in the county. There is no legal difference between a parish and a town council - they both have the same powers and functions. The only difference is in the name and the fact that the chairman of

a town council is referred to as the town mayor.

In this paper any reference to local councils refers to parish or town councils not to the district or county councils.

What services do they provide?

The main role of parish and town councils is set out in law and they have a wide range of functions and powers to provide a variety of local services. Parish and town councils also have by law the right to be asked about their view on some services that are the responsibility of other levels of local government.

Their work falls into three main categories -

- Representing the local community
- Delivering services to meet local needs
- Striving to improve the quality of life in the local area

Each year a sum of money raised locally called a 'precept' is collected through the council tax. This money is invested back into the local neighbourhood by the local council to improve facilities and services. Local councils can also apply for grants and loans and, if they own property, can receive money from rents or leases.

Councils usually meet once a month and meetings may last two or three hours depending on what is to be discussed.

In addition to regular meetings a number of councils have additional meetings to look at specific areas or services.

The purpose of a local council is to improve the lives of people in their local community and to give their local community a voice and the means to achieve this.

What do parish and town councillors do?

Councillors should represent all sectors of the community and have a dual role. Firstly they play a vital part in representing the views and concerns of the communities they serve to the parish council itself and through it to the district and county authorities. Secondly they report back to residents on issues affecting the parish.

The first role is carried out by attending meetings and liaising with the clerk. Individual councillors do not have, and cannot be given, powers to make decisions on behalf of the council. This applies to the chairman as much as to the other councillors, although the chairman does have personal responsibilities in connection with the running of formal meetings.

It is the councillor's task to bring local issues to the attention of the council and help it make decisions on behalf of the local community. Through this they can help to improve the quality of life and the environment in their local area. Councillors help to influence and shape the long term development policy for the parish, and as

part of the planning process, comment on planning applications in the parish.

Every councillor must sign a declaration of acceptance of office before taking office. Once elected, parish councillors sit on the council for a maximum of four years. If they want to stay in post, they can stand for re-election.

How you can get involved

Elections of local councillors take place on the first Thursday in May, every four years. Residents in parish and town councils decide who they want to represent them by voting in local elections.

To stand for election on a parish or town council you must be:

- ✓ a UK or Commonwealth citizen; or
- ✓ a citizen of the Republic of Ireland; or
- ✓ a citizen of another Member state of the European Union; and
- ✓ be aged 18 or over.

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

- ✓ be registered as a local government elector for 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.

However you should not have been:

- × declared bankrupt; or
- × be a paid employee of the council that you are standing for; or
- × convicted of a crime and sentenced to a term of imprisonment of not less than three months within five years before the date of the election; or
- × disqualified under any enactment relating to corrupt or illegal practices.

Standing to be a councillor

There are four initial steps to take before standing in elections:

- 1. Find out when the Notice of Election is published**

Contact the Returning Officer in your District Council who can provide the timetable.

- 2. Get a nomination form**

Parish or town clerks hold a number of forms. Staff in the Electoral Services Office also have all the papers you need and can give you advice. Anyone who is eligible to stand can request these forms.

- 3. Complete your nomination form**

Put all your personal details and those of the two people supporting your nomination on the form - all three of you must sign it. All three of you must include your Electoral Register number (available from your Electoral Services Office). The technical names for the two people supporting your nomination are Proposer and Secunder.

- 4. Return your completed nomination form**

Don't forget to send your form back by the deadline time and date. If you don't you will not be able to stand in the election!

What support is available?

Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils (CALC) is a member organisation offering support, training and information to parish and town councils. If you become a councillor for a CALC member council we will help your council and do anything we can to support you.

To contact CALC

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