

What is a Parish Council and why become a Parish Councillor?

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A parish council is a local authority that makes decisions on behalf of the people in the parish and has an overall responsibility for the well-being of its local community. It is the level of government closest to the community. As it is the authority closest to the people, parish councils are invariably the first place people will go with concerns or ideas. For this reason they are a vital part of any community.

Its work falls into three main categories:

- representing the local community
- delivering services to meet local needs
- striving to improve quality of life in the parish

Why become a Parish Councillor?

If you've never been to a parish council meeting before, you may be forgiven for thinking that parish councillors are a group of (probably older) people who meet now and then in a draughty village hall. If, however, you live in a community where something 'big' has happened, you'll know that when people in the community need support and guidance, it is sometimes the parish council that is turned to.

By becoming a parish councillor you become someone your community will look to for help, guidance and support. A community leader with the power to influence decisions for the benefit of the people you serve.

Seeing your community change for the better, as a result of decisions you have helped make, is something that can give you a sense of achievement and pride.

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, helping local groups, managing open spaces and campaigning for and delivering better services and facilities.

It's true to say that on their own, 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.

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?

Pixley and District Parish Council meets every two months for the council meeting, to which members of the public are also invited. Meetings may last two hours depending on the agenda set for the meeting to discuss.

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. If co-opted between elections then the term will be until the date of the next election

Applicants should note that Councillors are expected to attend regular meetings and any additional meetings as may be arranged, and to represent the electors of Pixley and District in raising and discussing those issues of interest and concern on which the Parish Council is empowered to act.

Am I eligible to be a Parish Councillor?

You have to be:

- a British subject, or a citizen of the Commonwealth or the European Union
- over 18 years of age

and additionally, you have to be one of the following

- a local government elector for the council area for which you want to stand
- have during the whole of the 12 months occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the council area or within 3 miles of it for the whole period
- have during that same period had your principal or only place of work in the council area or within 3 miles of it for the whole period.

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).

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.

Don't take our word for it!

The best way to find out what it's like to be a parish councillor is to talk to someone who's doing it now. Come along to a parish council meeting, or speak to one of our councillors and find out what they think of the job.