

BECOMING A PARISH COUNCILLOR

Information for Candidates

Parish Councils are often at the heart of a thriving local community and form a key part of the democratic process. They give people a say at a very local level on proposals which affect them.

Parish Councils are generally involved in providing local facilities, such as playing fields, open spaces and, in conjunction with the County and Borough Councils, they may also be involved in other local initiatives. A Parish Council has a legal right to be notified of all planning applications within the Parish boundary and they must be consulted fully by the Borough Council. This means that Parish Councils can have a say in strategic planning issues and a range of other important matters affecting the communities they serve.

These notes have been prepared for prospective candidates to offer an insight into the role and responsibilities of Parish Councillors and to explain some of the things you might encounter if elected.

Parish Councillors

Becoming a Councillor is a rewarding and valued form of public service. Councillors (or Members as they are often known) have to balance the needs and interests of their parishioners and in doing so will make legitimate demands on your available time. Parish Councillors are all volunteers.

All Councillors are expected to contribute to the work of the Parish Council by:-

- (i) responding to the needs and views of their parishioners
- (ii) working to achieve the goals that have been identified
- (iii) promoting the Parish Council within the community
- (iv) getting involved in decision-making by voting

An individual Councillor (including the Chairman) cannot make a decision on behalf of the Council. Therefore, co-operation between Councillors to achieve the best possible outcome for the community is the key to the success of the Council and the basis for a rewarding contribution. Importantly, this involves listening to the views of other Councillors and getting broad agreement on the best way forward.

Parish Council Meetings

Boughton under Blean Parish Council meets on the second Tuesday every month (except in August) and holds relevant Committee meetings to consider particular topics (e.g. Planning Committee or Amenities Committee)

Council and Committee meetings are usually held in the evenings to allow good public access and to enable those in full-time employment to become Councillors. An average full council meeting might take 2 hours, whilst Committee meetings can be significantly shorter.

Agendas and supporting documents for all meetings are sent to Councillors in advance. This allows Members to read and prepare themselves for the important decision making to be taken at the meeting. These agendas are also made available to the public.

Formal minutes recording the decisions made at all meetings are produced and these are also available to the public.

In addition to taking decisions at meetings, Councillors may also be expected to:-

- actively participate in projects being supported or sponsored by the Parish Council
- represent the Council on other bodies
- attend other meetings on particular subjects

The Parish Clerk

The Parish Council employs a part-time Clerk who acts as the Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer to the council. The Clerk provides advice and assists councillors in fulfilling their roles.

The Clerk is an independent and objective professional, who protects the Council by ensuring that legal, statutory and other provisions governing or affecting its operation are observed. Although it is not possible to give an exhaustive list of all the functions of Clerks, they will normally include:-

- preparing and circulating agendas and reports for meetings
- attending meetings and preparing the minutes
- implementing and monitoring the Council's decisions
- keeping required records and dealing with correspondence dealing with the Council's finances and accounts
- managing the Council's assets
- maintaining high ethical standards and ensuring good practice within the Council
- keeping up-to-date with Government legislation and taking appropriate action
- Some Parish Councils employ a small number of other staff and the Clerk will also be responsible for their supervision.

Conduct of Councillors

Parish Councillors must at all times observe a local Code of Conduct to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties.

Members are required to register a range of financial and other interests, details of which are contained in the Code of Conduct. The Register of Members' Interests is available for public inspection. These interests will include employment and business activities, property and share ownership and membership of other organisations.

If you are not prepared to reveal such information in a public register, you will not be eligible to serve on the Parish Council.

Alongside the Register, Members are also required to disclose any financial or personal interest they may have in any matter being considered at a Council meeting. This may prevent a Member from speaking on the issue concerned or require them to leave the meeting whilst it is being considered.

Advice on compliance with the Code is available and the Parish Clerk will be prepared to offer advice when required. However, ultimate responsibility rests with the individual Member.

Still Interested?

In general terms, subject to a small number of additional qualifications and disqualifications contained in the Local Government Act 1972, electors over 18 years of age may become a member of the Parish Council.

If you are still interested, come along to your local Parish Council meeting and see how things happen (meetings are open to the public). Talk to the Councillors and the Clerk after the meeting to help you decide whether you wish to perform this challenging, but rewarding role, or contact the Clerk for an informal discussion.

Elections to Parish Councils are held on the first Thursday in May every four years. The next ordinary election will be in May 2027. Between ordinary elections casual vacancies sometimes occur and in these circumstances the seat will be advertised.

Co-Option

If a process of co-option is used, the Parish Council may co-opt whomever it wishes to fill a casual vacancy, subject of course to the qualification requirements for being a local councillor.

Co-option vacancies will be advertised. Applicants will be asked to complete a short application form, and attend a short interview with the Council in order that Councillors can assess the applicants suitability for and understanding of the role. Councillors may then vote on whether to co-opt a councillor at the next meeting following a successful interview.

Who can be a candidate?

To be qualified to become an elected a member of the Parish Council you must be 18 years of age or over at the date of your nomination, and a British or Commonwealth citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland or a citizen of another Member State of the European Community, and either:

1. be a registered local government elector for the Parish; or
2. you must have occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the Parish during the whole of the twelve months before the day you are nominated; or
3. your principal or only place of work in the twelve months before the day you are nominated has been in the Parish; or
4. you must have lived in the Parish or within 4.8 kilometres (3 miles), during the whole of the twelve months before the day you are nominated.

Who cannot be a candidate?

Certain people are disqualified from being elected. You cannot be a candidate if you:

- hold a paid office under the Parish authority or a politically restricted post (as defined in Part I of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989); or
- have been adjudged bankrupt or made a composition or arrangement with creditors; or
- have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment of three months or more (including a suspended sentence) without the option of a fine, during the five years before election day; or
- have been disqualified under part III of the Representation of the People Act 1983 or under the Audit Commission Act 1998.