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

What is a Parish Council?

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 government closest to the community, with the district authority above it in the hierarchy. 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 (such as the borough or unitary council, health authorities, police etc).

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?

Councils usually meet once a month for the council meeting, to which members of the public are also invited. Meetings may last two or three hours, depending on the agenda set for the meeting to discuss. Some councils have committees to deal with specific subjects, such as environmental issues. In addition to the regular meetings, councillors are required to attend other meetings representing the council, for example acting as a representative on an outside body, community activities or helping develop a new project for the community. Such meetings won't happen every day, so it's not going to take over your life.

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.

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

Andoversford 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 must 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.

What powers do parish councils have?

They have a wide range of powers which essentially related to local matters, such as looking after community buildings, open space, allotments, play areas, street lighting, bus shelters, car parks and much more. The council also has the power to raise money through taxation, the precept. The precept is the parish council's share of the council tax. The precept demand goes to the billing authority, the district council, which collects the tax for the parish council.

Parish Duties

Andoversford Parish Council has capacity for 7 Councillors who stand for election every four years. The duties and functions of a parish council are many and varied. The Council meets monthly and considers planning applications and any other matters referred to it by local residents. Cotswold District Counci, Gloucestershire County Council and by central government. All meetings are open to the public and there is a forum before the start of the meeting at which members of the public can raise concerns and ask questions. There is also an annual meeting which all parishioners are invited to attend. All meetings are advertised on the council notice boards and on this website. Residents can bring to the attention of the parish council anything that concerns them, either directly or though the clerk. If matters raised are not the responsibility of the council, the clerk can bring them to the attention of the proper authority.

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 more.