

What Local Councils Do

What are local councils?

There are over 8,700 parish, town, community and neighbourhood councils (local councils) representing around 16 million people across England. They form the most local level of government and cover many rural and urban areas. The latter includes many of our larger cities such as Birmingham, Leeds and Newcastle. Recent changes to the law mean that it is now possible to create a local council in London, last seen in the capital in the 1960s. To find out if there is a parish, town, community or neighbourhood council in your area contact the National Association of Local Councils.

What's the difference between parish, town, community and neighbourhood councils?

Not a great deal. They all have the same powers and can provide the same services. The only difference is that a town council has decided that it should be known as a town council instead of a parish, community or neighbourhood council, and has a mayor.

What services do they provide?

Your local council has an overall responsibility for the well-being of your local neighbourhood.

Their work falls into three main categories:

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

Your council might provide, maintain or contribute to the following services:

- allotments
- bus shelters
- car parks
- community centres
- community safety schemes
- community transport schemes
- crime reduction measures
- cycle paths and Rights of Way maintenance
- local festivals and celebrations
- traffic calming/speed management schemes
- recreational/play/sports areas
- youth projects

They will often work with larger councils in your area called 'principal authorities' and cooperate to ensure the effective delivery of services to the local community.

How do they make decisions?

Your local council is made up of a number of councillors who meet regularly to make decisions on the work and direction of the council. As elected bodies local councils are responsible to the people they represent – that's your local community.

Attending a council meeting is the best way to find out what they do. Give the council a call and find out when its next public meeting is scheduled to take place.

Where do they get their money from?

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

How are local councillors elected?

Local council councillors are elected to represent a geographical area known as a ward or – mainly in smaller local councils – the parish, town, community or neighbourhood council area as a whole. They are elected by people who live in the area. Condover Parish Council has 4 wards an election is held in each ward, the same way elections are held in district or borough wards. Most local council elections are on the same cycle, the next elections will be in 2013 when the principal council's (Shropshire Council) elections are also held.

Who can vote in local council elections?

To vote in any election you need to be registered to vote. To get on the electoral register contact the electoral services at Shropshire Council or visit www.aboutmyvote.co.uk to download a registration form. You can register to vote when you are aged 16 years or over but you need to be 18 or over to vote. To vote in a local council election you need to be a British citizen, Irish citizen, European Union citizen or citizen of a Commonwealth country (including Cyprus and Malta).

What do local councillors do?

Councillors have three main areas of work:

1. **Decision-making:** through attending meetings and 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. This often depends on what the councillor wants to achieve and how much time is available.

The day-to-day work of a councillor may include:

- going to meetings of local organisations such as tenants' associations
- going to meetings of bodies that affect the wider community, such as the police, the Highways Authority, schools and colleges
- taking up issues on behalf of members of the public, such as making representations to the principal council
- running a surgery for residents to bring up issues
- attending council meetings
- meeting with individual residents in their own homes.

How do I contact my local councillor?

[Please visit our Councillors page](#)

Could I become a local councillor?

As a councillor you can become a voice for your community and affect real change. Councillors are community leaders and represent the aspirations of the public that they serve. Parish, town, community and neighbourhood councillors are the most local part of our democratic system and are closest to the public. Why don't you stand for your local council and see what difference you can make to your local neighbourhood.

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 local 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?

Most people are. However there are a few rules. You have to be:

- a British citizen, or a citizen of the Commonwealth or the European Union, and
- 18 years or older on the day you become nominated for election.

You cannot stand for election if you:

- are the 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 prison sentence (whether

suspended or not) for a period of over three months without the option of a fine

- work for the council you want to become a councillor for.

There are specific rules around candidacy. The full range of disqualifications for candidates is quite complex and some exceptions may apply. Full details can be found on the website of the National Association of Local Councils (contact details are at the bottom of this page).

But I'm too young...

Some local councils also run youth councils, which are often made up of young people representing their local schools and colleges. This provides young people with a time and place to meet and discuss matters that affect them. In 2007, the age you can run as a candidate in an election was lowered from 21 to 18.

These youth councils are in direct communication with their parish, town, community or neighbourhood council so they can also be involved in decision making. Contact your local council, or speak to your school or local youth service to find out more.

If there isn't a local youth council you could get together with friends and put forward a proposal to set one up.

Further information

The National Association of Local Councils is the national representative body for parish and town Councils in England. Elections advice and resources are available on its website at www.nalc.gov.uk For additional advice or support please contact 020 7637 1865.

The Electoral Commission (www.electoralcommission.org.uk) is an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. Our aim is integrity and public confidence in the democratic process.

For public awareness materials visit www.dopolitics.org.uk

For more information on registering to vote or elections visit www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.