



THE ROLE OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

The role of the Parish Council is to represent the interests of the whole community.

Parish Councils were first established under the Local Government Act 1894. They are the first tier of local government supporting the democratic process. The Parish Council is a corporate body, and a legal entity, and is accountable to the local community. Parish Councils provide a focus for the community to identify concerns and projects, and endeavour to solve them locally themselves.

The Local Government Act 1972 substantially revised the powers available to parish councils. For example, it provided them with the opportunity to raise money through taxation, known as the precept, allowing them to take on various responsibilities. These responsibilities vary between councils depending on the needs of the communities, but may include public open spaces, play areas, village halls, the provision of litter bins, the maintenance of war memorials, allotments, cemeteries, the encouragement of tourism, and potentially much more.

The Parish Council as a whole are responsible for ensuring that they achieve the best value for this money, and that it is spent in the interests of the community.

PARISH COUNCILLORS

The main role of a Parish Councillor is to represent the views of all residents within the Parish and to listen to, and understand, the views and needs of different groups in the community (such as young and older people). As a Councillor, there is a responsibility to be well-informed, especially about diverse local views. Councillors cannot assume that they represent the interests of electors without consulting them.

Parish Councillors are elected representatives, not volunteers or employees, and serve for a four-year term, unless co-opted or elected in a bye-election when they serve until the next election. They must apply the law and comply with the Code of Member Conduct.

Councillors contribute to the work of the Council by suggesting ideas, influencing policy, engaging in constructive debate and by responding to the needs and views of the community. Councillors comment on proposals to ensure the best outcome and vote to enable the Council to make decisions.

Individual Parish Councillors cannot make decisions on behalf of the Council, but they can actively lead and engage with local projects. Parish Councillors have no powers outside of the Council meeting.

Diversity is encouraged. Councillors from different backgrounds better represent the whole community and possess different enthusiasms, skills, attitudes and interests. Some Councillors work with ideas while others are very practical; some like accounts whilst others prefer reports. The Parish Council needs a wide range of skills to work as a team.

Occasionally there will be a conflict of interest requiring sensitive judgement, and the need to take difficult decisions in an open, honest, and reasoned way. Councillors are also required to act in an ethical way and to declare an interest when necessary.

Key Responsibilities:

- As part of the Parish Council, Councillors may have responsibility for running specific local services.
- Deciding together how much to raise through the precept in order to deliver the council's service.
- Influencing and shaping the long-term development policy for the Parish, and as part of the planning process, commenting on planning applications in the Parish.



- Improving the quality of life and the environment in the local area
- Working to identify issues which are important to the lives of the residents.
- Working to bring about improvements through local projects, lobbying other service providers and working in partnership with other Parishes, local authorities, and agencies.
- A Councillor agrees to attend all meetings (reasonably possible) that he or she is summoned to.
- Help the Council to make decisions on behalf of the local community.
- Councillors together as a team are responsible for the financial decisions made and implemented.

A Councillors main task is to bring local issues to the attention of the Council, participate in debate and help the Council to make decisions on behalf of the local community.

THE CHAIRPERSON

The Local Government Act 1972 requires that a chair be elected annually by the council. They will remain in this role, unless they resign or are disqualified, until the next annual meeting of the council.

The Chair acts on behalf of the community in which they serve. This can be achieved by undertaking various responsibilities, such as: promoting public involvement in council activities, attending community events, and promoting the image and value of the council. The Chairman is responsible for representing the council as a whole and, as such, when acting in an official capacity should only express the agreed views of the council.

Within Council meetings, their main duty is to chair them, ensuring, with the assistance of the Clerk, that they run smoothly, are conducted properly, and that the decisions made at them are lawful and fair. If present, it is always the Chair who presides and, as such, they will be required to sign the minutes as a true and correct record of proceedings. It is also the duty of the Chair to provide the casting vote at a meeting, should there be an equality of votes during the decision-making process.

THE CLERK

The Clerk is employed by the council under the Local Government Act 1972. A Clerks primary role is to ensure that the council carries out its activities properly and lawfully. As its principal advisor it can do this by providing independent advice, support, and clear guidance to all Councillors, including the Chairman, so that effective decisions can be made.

The overall responsibilities of the Clerk are varied but may include implementing decisions made by the council, overseeing projects, monitoring, and implementing policies, responding to correspondence, and attending training courses. In addition to routine administration, the Clerk has several statutory duties to perform, such as sending each Councillor a signed summons to attend at least 3 clear days before a meeting. They also have a duty to inform the council, in writing, if a contract in which they have a financial interest has been, or is proposed to be, entered into by the council or one of its committees.

In the case of Desford PC, the Clerk also undertakes the role of Responsible Financial Officer. The RFO acts as the council's principle financial advisor, ensuring that its financial activities comply with legislative requirements and proper practices. They undertake preparation of annual budgets, proper recording of VAT, payment of wages, maintaining the Councils Assets register and ensuring that the Councils obligations for insurance are properly met. There are several statutory duties that the RFO exercises, including: annual preparation of accounts for external audit and maintaining a separate account of income and expenditure.