

## **Role of a Parish Councillor?**

To appreciate what is involved in being a Parish (or Town) Councillor you need to know what a Parish Council is, and what it can and cannot do. We also have to get the image of the Vicar of Dibley out of our mind.

So curiously, starting with the negative, the Parish Council is nothing to do with the Church or the Diocese; nor is it a voluntary and community sector body.

“Your Parish Council is the local authority closest to the Electorate.” Each councillor has their own reasons for running but the role offers the chance to make a huge difference to the quality of life for people in your local area.

Being an effective councillor requires both commitment and hard work. Councillors have to balance the needs and interests of residents and the council.

A Parish Council is a separate legal, corporate entity. First created by the Local Government Act of 1894 in most rural areas, the current consolidated legislation is that of 1972. A Parish Council also provides services for the local people. These will range from recreation grounds and play areas, a cemetery and may be crematorium to allotments, bath-houses and nature reserves. What you provide is down to your Council.

There is a list of the activities that a Parish Council has the power to provide. Like any statutory body it can only do the things for which the law or any governing document gives a power. The Parish Council has one particular asset that is extremely valuable — it has the ability to set a Precept (sum of money), which is collected from all residents through the Council Tax system.

With the right to levy a form of taxation come some duties. In particular a duty to behave in an ethical manner according to a Code of Conduct (declaring interests and leaving the room when likely to be prejudiced) and a duty to have the annual accounts subjected to audit. Training is available and support will be found from colleagues, the Clerk to the Council, as well as from external training providers if you wish.

All Councillors retire after a four year term but can stand again as many times as they wish; casual vacancies may well arise in the intervening period. It is a useful way of seeing if you like being a local Councillor to take a seat for a short period before the next full elections.

So, if you want to do more for your community, if you want to spend your time productively, and if you can think, listen and act locally — Become a Parish Councillor.