

What is the Role of the Clerk and RFO

Becoming a Clerk to a Parish or Town Council is one of the most rewarding jobs in a local community – a competent Clerk underpins a good Council.

Clerks usually pride themselves in having a good deal of common sense, confidence to handle the administrative work, being a good organiser, IT literate and able to get on with most people. Underwriting these qualities is a sense of public duty – of wanting to help others in the community.

It is important to understand, however, that being a Clerk to a Parish Council is a job, not a spare time activity – even if it takes only a few hours each week to do.

The role of Clerk is to ensure that the Council conducts its business properly and to provide independent, objective and professional advice and support.

A Parish Clerk is the partner of the Parish Council. They are mutually supportive and could not really exist without each other. Parish Councillors are elected by residents. The Clerk is paid for by residents, because the salary is part of the village Precept (Council Tax).

Overall duties

The Clerk to the Council is the Proper Officer of the Council and as such is under a statutory duty to carry out all the functions of a council's Proper Officer, and to serve or issue all the notifications required by law.

The Clerk is responsible for ensuring that the instructions of the Council in connection with its function as a parish council are carried out.

The Clerk is expected to advise the Council on, and assist in the formation of, overall policies to be followed in respect of the council's activities, and, to produce all the information required for making effective decisions and to implement constructively all decisions.

The Clerk is the Responsible Financial Officer and accountable for all financial records of the Council and the proper administration of its finances. This means that in law the Clerk is personally liable for the financial probity of the Parish Council – in other words, that all Precept money is budgeted for, spent in accordance with proper powers, and that the accounts are correctly drawn up and audited. Additionally, the Clerk is responsible for managing tax and National Insurance on any salaries paid, including their own.

The Clerk is accountable to the Council for the effective management of all its resources and will report to them as and when required.

The Clerk will understand the issues facing Parish Councils and the environment within which our Council operates and will commit themselves and the Council to an ethos of public service.

Ensuring compliance with legal duties

- Ensure that all statutory and other provisions governing or affecting the running of the Council are observed.
- Monitor the implemented policies of the Council to ensure they are achieving the desired result and, where appropriate, suggest modifications. Managing Parish Council meetings.
- Prepare informative agendas for meetings of the Council, in consultation with appropriate Councillors and in discussion with the Chair. Usually there is a certain amount of background information to be read in advance of the debates, and the Clerk researches and collates these reports. An important aspect is to advise on any legal considerations that would have to be borne in mind.

- Attend all meetings of the Council, take a formal Minute of the meeting and create an Action Points table. Ensure that the Clerk's actions are taken in advance of the following meeting.
- Issue notices and agendas for the Parish Council's annual meeting and the Parish Meeting. Attend and minute these meetings and implement the decisions made that are agreed by the Council.

Delivering Council's strategic Purpose

Draw up, both on their own initiative and as a result of suggestions by Councillors, proposals for consideration by the Council, and advise on the practicability and likely effects of specific courses of action.

- Bring forward draft policies and scheme proposals to reflect community needs.
- Receive correspondence and documents on behalf of the Council and, following known policy of the Council and in liaison with appropriate Councillors, respond on behalf of the Council.
- Draft responses to third party consultation exercises.
- Study reports and other data on Council's activities and on matters bearing on those activities. Where appropriate, discuss such matters with administrators and specialists in particular fields and produce reports for circulation and discussion by the Council.

Carrying out the business of the Council

In partnership with appropriate Councillors:

Parish Administration

- Establish and maintain effective paper and electronic filing systems to record the business of the Parish Council in a recoverable format.
- Maintain effective booking and fault-reporting systems to enable the public to access the services of partner organisations e.g. Police, Tendring District Council, Essex Highways.
- Place and manage orders for the purchase and supply of goods and services.
- Work collaboratively with the Chair in the oversight of those elements of the Council's business.

Health and Safety

- Ensure that the Council's statutory obligations for the proper management of all Health and Safety matters are met; including the review of Council's Health and Safety Policy and the preparation (and oversight) of Risk Assessments, where necessary, for the safe management of Council business and activities.

Financial management

- Manage the annual budget for Council, and prepare financial statements as required.
- Monitor and balance the Council's accounts and prepare records for audit and VAT purposes.
- Ensure that correct financial records are kept and that internal checking regimes are established.
- Receive and report on invoices for goods and services to be paid for by the Council and ensure that such accounts are settled within due timescales.
- Research and bring forward opportunities to apply for grants to support programme aspirations.

Communications

- Manage the Parish Council's website and ensure it is accurate and up to date.

- Identify items to post on the website and in the Village Magazine.
- Devise new ways to communicate with our community to find out their priorities and requirements.
- Attend, as a representative of the Council, the conferences of the National Association of Local Councils, Society of Local Council Clerks, and other relevant bodies if required by the Council.
- Act as the representative or spokesperson of the Council as required.

Other

- Attend monthly evening meetings of the Council and other events as necessary.
- Carry out such other responsibilities and functions as shall from time to time be required by the Council.