

LEVENS PARISH COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION TO THE ROLE OF THE PARISH COUNCILS (GENERIC)

The role of the Parish Council is to represent the interests of the whole community. It is part of local government supporting the democratic process. Parish Councils provide a focus for the local community to identify concerns and projects, and endeavour to solve them locally themselves.

The Parish Council is a corporate body, and a legal entity, separate from that of its Members and is accountable to the local community.

Its decisions are the responsibility of the whole body and are made collectively and by majority. Parish Councils have been granted powers by Parliament including the authority to raise money by taxation – the precept, and have a range of powers to spend public money.

A Parish Council is an elected body in the first tier of local government. Elections take place every 4 years. Other tiers known as principal councils or authorities have many legal duties to deliver services such as education, housing, development and strategic planning, transport, environmental health and social services. Parish Councils have the legal power to take action, but they have very few duties and greater freedom to choose what action to take. They can play a vital part in representing the interests of the communities they serve and improving the quality of life and the local environment.

The Parish Council is an employer. The Parish Clerk works for and with the Council to action its decisions.

THE ROLE OF 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 4-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 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.

The Parish Council needs a wide range of skills in order to work effectively as a team and so encourages diversity and those possessing different enthusiasms, skills, attitudes and interests.

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 declare an interest when necessary.

Key Responsibilities:

- As part of the Parish Council, Councillors may have responsibility for running local services such as public open spaces, play areas, village halls and potentially much more;
- Deciding how much to raise through the precept in order to deliver the Council's services;
- 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 environment in the local area; working to identify issues which are important to the lives of the residents you represent;
- 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 (as far as reasonably possible) that he or she is summoned to;
- Councillors together as a team are responsible for the financial decisions made and implemented.

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