

# Your Parish Council A Guide

Parish Council are part of local government in Staffordshire together with Staffordshire County Council and the District/Borough councils. The County Council is responsible for strategic services such as highways, education, libraries, social services, strategic planning and refuse disposal.

District councils are responsible for local services including housing, local planning, environmental health and refuse collection.

Parish Councils(or Town councils in most towns) in the county are often viewed as the part of government closest to the people. They are the only local government tier that represents residents at parish level.

Importantly Parish Councils can "precept" - raising a council tax each year to improve facilities and services for local people.

Their powers and duties cover many things that we take for granted in making for comfort and well being where we live. They include the provision and maintenance of allotments, burial grounds and public monuments, public clocks, halls, some street lighting, litter bins, car parks, public lavatories,

rights of way, roadside verges, bus shelters, swimming pools and village greens.

Parish Councils also comment on planning applications and can be represented at public inquiries.

Similarly they advise the County and District authorities on the views of residents, and especially priorities for local investment.

All Parish Council meetings are in public. They are led by the Council's Chairman and advised by a clerk who is there to see that business is conducted within the law.

## What can I expect from my Parish Council?

Put simply you should expect your Council to make a difference!

There are 1400 Councillors serving the 170 parishes in Staffordshire.(residents in the large towns of Stafford and Stoke do not have the benefit of Parish Councils). They are elected to serve for four years and at the end of that period they should be able to look back on a range of achievements that had their basis in a plan for the Parish. Examples might be:-

- The funding of improvements to the Village Hall
- Identifying land for affordable housing, youth development schemes and recreation.
- Campaigning successfully for a better environment, road safety and reducing the fear of crime
- Being represented at a local planning inquiry

- Improving street lighting
- Starting a local transport scheme with neighbouring Parish councils

Vitality your local council makes a difference by making your views known to other bodies and councils e.g. when being consulted about planning issues or changes in services.

## What are the hallmarks of a good Council?

Imaginative agendas, encouragement of open debate and getting people involved are the hallmarks of an achieving council.

Your Council will work to a set of standards, for example:-

- Meetings must be in public and agendas published
- There will be rules of business conduct, finance and the personal conduct of Councillors
- Communication and consultation policies will be in place
- Forward planning and budgeting of future projects will be a regular feature of meetings and dealings with the Community.
- The council will work in harmony with other groups in the Parish.

## Should I get involved?

Most people care about where they live, the quality of the local environment and the small things that we take for granted but are important for a balanced, high quality lifestyle.

Getting involved helps your local council to know what you feel and need. Better still getting involved

adds your skills and know how to the Parish Team effort.

### **So is the Council is a team?**

In a word 'yes'. Your Council is a group of people, elected by you and by working together, make decisions and produce plans for the greater community benefit.

Importantly team working is about listening to the views of other Councillors, getting broad agreement on the best way forward and being jointly responsible.

It is also about channelling enthusiasm and commitment and blending skills and knowledge for the benefit of others. The Chairman of the Council is the team captain, so it is right to expect high quality leadership too.

### **What about administration?**

The role of the Clerk or Administrator is to administer the Council's business and advise on the work the Council wants to do. A competent clerk is the linchpin of a good council.

The Clerk is often the first point of contact for the Council. You can expect a courteous, timely and friendly response.

### **Should my Council expect anything from me?**

Local democracy is a two way affair. A good Council will hope you take an interest and ask questions about the things that matter most. It's helpful to attend council meetings -good councils

have a 'public participation' item on the council agenda.

Good Councils will welcome your contribution - likewise community groups. Often being active in a local group is a good way of gaining confidence to put views forward.

If you like being involved why not consider being an elected Councillor - joining the decision making team

Parish elections happen every 4 years and in between there may be elections to fill casual vacancies. No formal qualifications are needed but there are rules to satisfy if you are to be a Councillor.

Alternatively if you have administration and finance skills why not look to becoming a clerk to a council. The appointment is part time, paid and keeps you very much in the centre of things.

### **How much time will it take ?**

All Councils must meet at least 4 times per year. Many councils meet more often, ranging from every fortnight to once every few months. There may also be committees in the busy councils as well as time spent representing the Council on other bodies.

### **Want to know more?**

Why not speak to the Penkrige Parish Council's Administrator on 01785 714157 or ring the Staffordshire Parish Councils Association on 01785 277499 - they will be glad to help you.

# **Penkrige Parish Council Parish Council**

## **Your local parish council**