

Am I Qualified?

Yes - most people are. However there are a few rules. You have to be:

- a British subject, or a citizen of the Commonwealth or the European Union; and
- on the “relevant date” (i.e. the day on which you are nominated or if there is a poll the day of the election) 18 years of age or over; and additionally:
- on the “relevant day” a local government elector for the council area for which you want to stand; or
- have during the whole of the 12 months preceding that day occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the council area; or
- have during that same period had your principal or only place of work in the council area; or
- during that 12 month period resided in the council area. In the case of a sitting member of a parish or community council you can also satisfy the criteria to be elected if you have lived in the council area or within 3 miles of it for the whole of the 12 months preceding the “relevant day”.

You cannot stand for election if you

- are subject of a bankruptcy restriction order or interim order.
- have, within five years before the day of the election, been convicted in the United Kingdom of any offence and have had a sentence of imprisonment (whether suspended or not) for a period of over three months without the option of a fine.
- you work for the council you want to become a councillor for (but you can work for other local authorities that represent the same area).

But I'm too young...

Some parish councils also run youth councils. They are granted their own political forum by having a space and a time to meet and discuss matters that affect them. These youth councils are in direct communication with their parish councils so they can also be involved in decision-making. Contact your parish council or speak to your school to find out if either is involved in such a scheme. If there is not a scheme get together with friends and put a proposal to your local community, parish or town council.

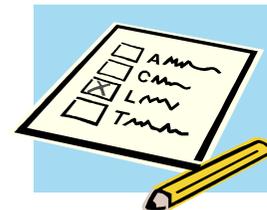
---o0o---

Information produced by Swavesey Parish Council – June 2008

Town and Parish Councils

---o0o---

Why should you stand for local government?



Every four years voters have the chance to decide who will represent them on their local parish and town councils.

---o0o---

What are local councils?

What are community, parish and town councils?

There are around 10,000 community, parish and town councils in England and Wales; they are corporate bodies and local authorities. They have a powerful voice to represent local people.

What do these councils do?

Community, parish and town councils are the part of local government closest to the people. Very importantly, these councils can "precept" - raising a sum collected with the council tax each year to improve facilities and services for local people.

Parish, town and community councils in England and Wales have a number of basic responsibilities in making the lives of local communities more comfortable, many of which are often taken for granted. They fall into three main categories:

- representing the whole electorate within the parish
- delivering services to meet local needs
- striving to improve quality of life in the parish.

Individual powers include:

- support for local organizations
- street cleaning
- village greens
- leisure facilities
- allotments
- car parks
- footpaths & bridleways
- local youth projects
- litter bins
- street lighting
- bus shelters
- open spaces
- crime reduction measures
- village halls

Statutory consultees on planning applications and can be represented at public inquiries.

Parish, town and community councils may soon be granted more powers, especially as part of Quality Status. When councils are awarded this status they are allowed to negotiate with the local principal authorities (the district or county council or unitary authority) that certain responsibilities get devolved to the parish. This is part of the government's initiative to revitalise local democracy.

What do elected representatives do for me?

Community, parish and town councillors represent the people living in their local area at the closest level to the community. When decisions are being made they are there to put your views across.

Being a Councillor

What do councillors do?

Councillors have three main components to their work.

1. Decision making - Through meetings and attending committees with other elected members, councillors decide which activities to support, where money should be spent, what services should be delivered and what policies should be implemented.

2. Monitoring - Councillors make sure that their decisions lead to efficient and effective services by keeping an eye on how well things are working.

3. Getting involved locally - As local representatives, councillors have responsibilities towards their constituents and local organisations. These responsibilities and duties often depend on what the councillor wants to achieve and how much time is available, and may include:

- Going to meetings of local organisations.
- Going to meetings of bodies affecting the wider community.
- Taking up issues on behalf of members of the public.
- Running a surgery for residents to bring up issues.
- Meeting with individual residents in their own homes.

Visiting your council is the best way to find out what happens there. Give the council a call and find out when its next public meeting happens. By law, ordinary people are allowed to be present at most council business.

How much time does it take up?

Quite often councillors say that their duties occupy them for about three hours a week. Obviously there are some councillors who spend more time than this - and some less, but in the main, being a community, parish and town councillor is an enjoyable way of contributing to your community, and helping to make it a better place to live and work.

I am not a member of a political party and do not want to be

Most community, parish and town councillors are not party political.