

WHAT IS A TOWN COUNCIL AND WHY BECOME A TOWN COUNCILLOR?

What is a Town Council?

A town council is a local authority that makes decisions on behalf of the people in the parish. It can be also called a parish council but is know as a town council as a result of a decision to elect a Mayor. It is the level government closest to the community, with the district authority (Calderdale MBC) above it in the hierarchy.

As it is the authority closest to the people, parish councils are invariably the first place people will go with concerns or ideas. For this reason they are a vital part of any community.

Why become a Town Councillor?

If you've never been to a town council meeting before, you may be forgiven for thinking that town councillors are a group of (probably older) people who meet now and then in a draughty village hall. If, however, you live in a community where something 'big' has happened, you'll know that when people in the community need support and guidance, it is sometimes the town council that is turned to.

By becoming a town councillor you become someone your community will look to for help, guidance and support – a community leader with the power to influence decisions for the benefit of the people you serve. Seeing your community change for the better, as a result of decisions you have helped make, is something that can give you a sense of achievement and pride.

What decisions do Town Councils make?

Town councils make all kinds of decisions on issues that affect the local community. Probably the most common topics that parish councils get involved with are planning matters (they are statutory consultees), crime prevention, managing open spaces and campaigning for and delivering better services and facilities.

It's true to say that on their own, town councils have limited powers to make decisions. But they do have the ability to negotiate with, and the power to influence, those other organisations that do make the final decisions (such as the borough council, health authorities, police etc).

In this respect town councils are extremely powerful. The organisations that make the final decisions know that a town council gives the best reflection of how a community feels about something, and its views will be taken seriously.

How much time does it take up?

Councils usually meet once a month for the council meeting, to which members of the public are also invited. Meetings may last two or three hours, depending on the agenda set for the meeting to discuss. Some councils have committees to deal with specific subjects, such as environmental issues. In addition to the regular meetings, councillors are required to attend other meeting representing the council. – for example acting as a representative on an outside body, community activities or helping develop a new project for the community. Such meetings won't happen every day, so it's not going to take over your life.

How long does a town councillor serve for?

Once elected, town councillors sit on the council for a maximum of four years. If they then want to stay in the post they can stand for re-election.

Am I eligible to be a Town Councillor?

To stand for election on a parish council, you must:

- be a UK or commonwealth citizen, or;
- be a citizen of the Republic of Ireland, or;
- be a citizen of another Member state of the European Union;
- be a least 18 years old.

To be eligible to stand for an election for a particular parish, you must:

- be an elector of the parish, or;
- for the whole of the previous 12 months have occupied (as owner or tenant) land or other premises in the parish, or;
- during the previous 12 months have worked in the parish (as your principal or only place of work), or;
- for the whole of the previous 12 months lived in the parish or within three miles of the parish boundary.

You don't have to be connected to a political party.

If you do become a town councillor you will have to sign up to the Code of Conduct.

What powers do town councils have?

They have a wide range of powers which essentially related to local matters, such as looking after community buildings, open space, allotments, play areas, street lighting, bus shelters, car parks and much more. The council also has the power to raise money through taxation, the precept. The precept is the town council's share of the council tax. The precept demand goes to the billing authority, the district council, which collects the tax for the parish council.

Town Council Duties

Hebden Royd Town Council has 18 Councillors who stand for election every four years. The duties and functions of a town council are many and varied.

The Council meets monthly and considers planning applications and any other matters referred to it by local residents. Calderdale MBC and by central government. All meetings are open to the public and there is a forum before the start of the meeting at which members of the public can raise concerns and ask questions. There is also an annual meeting which all parishioners are invited to attend. All meetings are advertised on the council notice boards. Residents can bring to the attention of the town council anything that concerns them, either directly or through the clerk. If matters raised are not the responsibility of the council, the clerk can bring them to the attention of the proper authority.

Don't take our word for it!

The best way to find out what it's like to be a town councillor is to talk to someone who's doing it now. Come along to a town council meeting, or speak to one of our councillors and find out what they think of the job.