

What does a councillor do?

Most people's impression of what a councillor does is that they just attend council meetings, and nothing could be further from the truth. The duties and pleasure, of being a local councillor are many and varied, however it is the ordinary day to day contact with local people in their own community that is the most important part of being a councillor.

A Parish Councillor signs a Declaration of Acceptance of Office and thereby undertakes to observe an ethical Code of Conduct when dealing with matters on behalf of the community. A councillor also completes a register of interests.

Listening: One of the most important tasks of a Parish Councillor is listening to and understanding the views of people in their community. Many public bodies or organisations acknowledge this is the hardest information for them to capture and they in turn use the skills and local knowledge of the parish or town council for advice to assist and inform their services.

Meetings: A councillor agrees to attend all meetings (where reasonably possible) that he or she is summoned to. In Broadmayne this only requires one meeting of full council a month although there are occasionally meetings of smaller working groups. Most council meetings are held at 7:30pm on the first Monday of the month.

Representation: Parish Councils also need representation at other local government meetings or on local bodies/organisations, and councillors may be asked to serve on certain groups or attend functions on behalf of the parish council. Councillors act as ambassadors for their community keeping everyone aware of local needs and concerns and reporting back on Unitary, and regional changes.

Councillors represent the voice of their community as a whole, whilst being aware of and considerate to, specific minority needs.

Extra skills: Through all of these functions councillors will draw on their own skills and experiences and it is the sharing of these skills that makes a strong team. Parish Councils provide a focus for the community to identify concerns and projects and endeavour to solve them locally themselves. Councillors working as a team will need to deal with employment issues, budgeting, asset management, staff management, project management or grant funding and probably lots more if they are creative and involved. All councils must be aware and owe a duty to their community to manage staff considerately, (in Broadmayne's case, our parish clerk and Responsible Financial Officer). Accounts must be kept and whilst the clerk and RFO is employed to carry out this duty, councillors together as a team are responsible for the financial decisions made and implemented. A clerk is employed to advise and seek

advice on behalf of councillors to assist them in their decisions. Councillors are there to consider the information gathered and make a group decision on all matters. No individual councillor is responsible for any single decision. This is democracy at its best.

Training and support: Training is available to any council, large or small. Legislation allows for councils to pay for training, and ongoing training for councillors is sound business management. The Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils (DAPTC) will be able to provide details of professional training programmes designed specifically for councillors.

Responsibility: All councillors are expected to abide by the Parish Council's Code of Conduct. The responsibilities detailed in the Code of Conduct are designed to protect councillors as well as the people they serve and give clear guidance so that councillors may undertake their duties with confidence.