

What is a Town or Parish council?

Parish and Town Councils are the same; they have the same powers and act within the same legislation. Parish and Town councils are the tier of local government **closest to the people**.

Parish Councils represent the concerns and aspirations of a genuine local community. They are not a voluntary organisation, not a charity nor (a common mistake) anything to do with the Church.

Broadmayne Parish Council does not have a permanent office or any full-time staff and meets in a local hall. The part-time nature should not, however, be taken as any indication of the effectiveness and efficiency of the council as the Parish Council works very hard for the electors.

Despite being strictly audited each year, Parish Councils are the most non bureaucratic and the cheapest kind of local authority in existence.

What can they do?

As Parish Councils were created in law, they can only act within the law by exercising their powers and functions which have been conferred on them by Statutes (i.e. Acts of Parliament). Anything a Parish Council tries to do outside these powers is *ultra vires*, in other words, outside the law.

The range of powers available to Parish Councils continues to change and changes implemented in relation to 'Decentralisation and Localism' gave a clear indication about the government's intention to reinvigorate local politics by giving more power to councils and communities. The message is clear: - services are improved by bringing them closer and making them more responsive to local communities.

Parish and Town Councils have many powers if they choose to use them. It is how and which of these powers that councillors decide to use, that makes a vibrant forward thinking Parish Council and can bring positive benefits to communities. The basic responsibility of Parish and Town Councils is to make the lives of their local communities more comfortable by representing the whole electorate within the parish, delivering or co-ordinating services to meet local needs and striving to improve quality of life in the parish. Parish and Town Councils can also comment on planning applications and be represented at public enquiries.

Parish Councils range in size from a large Town Council representing 70,000 people to the smaller parish that may only have 200 people. Broadmayne Parish Council does not receive Council Tax directly from the public but is primarily funded from a small percentage of the Council Tax charge made by

Dorset Council to local householders. Broadmayne's income from its annual precept is currently £28,500 (2024) it is a tiny part of the whole Council Tax and Parish and Town Councils do not receive any Government funding or income from business rates. The way that local government is financed is under great scrutiny and there is likely to be a fundamental change the way that the whole of local government manage their services to the community and the way they fund them.

Your council embodies the representation of people's hopes and concerns for ensuring that local services are provided efficiently and effectively for the benefit of community wellbeing. Broadmayne's council tries to be aware of what the community needs and strives to provide this through team work, accessing grant funding, representation at other meetings and lobbying appropriate bodies.

Parish Councils have a duty to appoint or employ a Clerk to record and carry out the council's decisions. Currently Broadmayne does not need to employ other staff for the benefit of the community. Councils must meet at least four times a year (although Broadmayne's meets monthly) and meetings must be open to the public, although for certain restricted items of confidentiality they may occasionally exclude the public.

A Parish or Town Council *is* the collective voice of its community.