

Your Parish & Town Council

Working for a better life in your community

Parish Councils are part of local government in Cumbria, together with Cumbria County Council and six 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 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, and village greens.

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

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

All Parish Council meetings are open to the 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 or Town Council?

Put simply you should expect your Council to make a difference! There are 2100 Councillors serving the 272 Parishes in Cumbria. 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. 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.
- Getting CCTV installed in the town centre.
- 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 publicised
- 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 or Town

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 the Council is a team? In a word 'yes'. Your Council is a group of volunteers, 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's right to expect high quality leadership too.

What about administration?

The role of the Clerk 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 encourage 'public participation'.

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