



Northumberland
County Council

BECOME A PARISH COUNCILLOR

A guide about membership of community, parish, and town councils in Northumberland

1.

The role of a Parish Councillor

Role	Parish Councillor
Responsible to	All people resident within the local area
Liaison with	Other councillors, residents, County Council
Period of service	Maximum of 4 years before re-election
Salary	This is a voluntary position with some expenses able to be paid in certain circumstances

- Representing the views of all residents within your local area.
- As part of a Parish Council, you will have responsibility for running local services which may include open spaces, play areas, village halls, community car schemes, cemeteries, allotments and potentially much more, depending very much on individual Parish Councils.
- Deciding on how much to raise through the council tax in order to deliver your council's services.
- Influencing and shaping the long-term development policy for the parish, and as part of the planning process, comment on planning applications in the parish.
- Improve the quality of life and the environment in the local area.
- Working to identify issues which are important to the lives of the residents you represent.
- Working to bring about improvements through local projects, lobbying other service providers and working in partnership with other parishes and agencies.

2.

What is a Parish Council?

A Parish Council is a local authority that makes decisions on behalf of the people in the community. There are Parish Councils in all parts of Northumberland, although in some isolated areas no Parish Council has been elected for some years. They are the most local level of local government, with Northumberland County Council above it in the hierarchy.

Parish Councils have limited powers to make decisions, but they do have the ability to negotiate with, and the power to influence those other local organisations that do make the final decisions (such as the county council, health authority and police). In this respect Parish Councils are extremely powerful. The organisations that make the final decisions know that a Parish Council gives the best reflection of how a community feels about something and its views will be taken seriously.

Parish Councils must act within the law and must abide by a Code of Conduct which requires them to act impartially and fairly which does not bring the council into disrepute.

Councillors must disclose certain information about themselves, such as the address of any land holdings within the parish, their membership of any political parties or trade unions and the name of their employer for example.

4.

How much time does it take up?

Councils usually have a meeting once a month, others only every 2 or 3 months to which members of the public are also invited. Meetings tend to be on weekday evenings and may last one to two hours, depending on what's on the list of items to discuss. Some larger councils may also have sub-committees to deal with specific subjects, such as planning matters.

5.

Do you get paid to be a Parish Councillor?

Councillors are not paid for their work, but councils can choose to reimburse expenses such as telephone calls and postage.

6.

How long does a Parish Councillor serve for?

Once elected, Parish 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. This does not mean that you have to stay for four years. If you find it is not for you, or you can no longer meet the commitment, you can stand down.

7.

Becoming a Parish Councillor

To become a Parish Councillor, you are either elected or co-opted:

The ordinary elections of councillors (when all of the parish or town seats become vacant) in Northumberland are organised by the Returning Officer of Northumberland County Council and take place on the first Thursday in May every four years.

To stand for election you must be nominated by completing a nomination paper, supported by a proposer and a seconder. If there are more candidates than seats available, the election will proceed to a poll, if not, the Returning Officer may declare the candidates as duly elected unopposed.

Casual vacancies

If a seat becomes vacant during the 4-year cycle, the council will either co-opt members to the council or if required hold a by-election.

8.

What are the qualifications to be a Parish councillor?

To be qualified to be elected as a member of a Parish Council, you must:

- be at least 18 years old
- be a British citizen, an eligible Commonwealth citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland, a qualifying EU citizen or an EU citizen with retained rights.

Additional qualifications can be found at:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance-candidates-parish-council-elections-england/what-you-need-know-you-stand-a-candidate/qualifications-and-disqualifications-standing-election/qualifications>

9.

Training and support

The Northumberland Association of Local Councils represent the vast majority of Parish councils in Northumberland and can provide training and support to councillors.

10.

Interested in becoming a Parish councillor?

The best way to find out what it is like to be a Parish councillor is to talk to someone who's doing it now. Go along to a Parish Council meeting and speak to one of the councillors and find out what they think of the job. Use the website for your Parish Council, to get the names and contact details of the current councillors, and the dates of their meetings.

Further information on the work of Parish councils can be found at:

<https://northumberlandalc.uk/>