

## GUIDE TO BECOMING A PARISH COUNCILLOR

**Councillors play a key role in the life of a Parish Council. They are a vital cog in making life better for its residents.**

Parish Councillors are:

- the voice of the community representing local people;
- the lynchpin to partnership work with other levels of local government.

All the seats on the Parish Council are up for election every four years giving you the perfect opportunity to get involved by standing as a representative of your community. From time to time, a casual vacancy will arise. There is a process for co-opting a new councillor (see below for details).

We hope this guide will help you make up your mind as to whether you would like to become a councillor.

### **Why become a councillor?**

People become councillors for all manner of reasons. For some it's a completely new direction to take, school governing body, political party or trade union. (Please note, West Horsley Parish Council is apolitical.)

But most want to:

- make a difference to their local community and be involved in its future shape;
- ensure that their Parish is able to access the services it deserves;
- represent the views of local people and ensure they count.

No specific qualifications are needed to become a councillor - life experience is the best thing to bring to the role. It's vital that members represent all sections of the community - we want to attract people from a broad range of backgrounds to stand as candidates.

### **Do I have to belong to a political party?**

Membership of a political party is not necessary. (As above, WHPC continues to be apolitical.)

### **Who can become a councillor**

To be able to stand as a candidate at a Parish Council election you must:

- be at least 18 years old on the day of your nomination;
- be a British citizen, an eligible Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any other member state of the European Union;
- live within three miles of the parish to stand for election;
- meet at least one of the following qualifications:
  - on the relevant day and thereafter they continue to be on the electoral register for the Parish
  - during the whole of the twelve months before that day, they have owned or tenanted land or premises in the parish
  - during the whole of the twelve months before that day their principal or only place of work has been in the parish
  - during the whole of the twelve months before that day, they have lived in the parish or within 4.8km (3 miles) of the parish boundary

You cannot be a candidate if at the time of your nomination and on the day of the election:

- you are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order;
- you have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment of three months or more (including a suspended sentence), without the option of a fine, during the five years before polling day;
- you have been disqualified under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (which covers corrupt or illegal electoral practices and offences relating to donations) or under the Audit Commission Act 1998.

If you are in any doubt whether you would be able to stand for election or co-option, contact Electoral Services via 01483 505050.

### **How decisions are made**

Parish councillors are elected every four years and they meet monthly as 'full' Council. These meetings are open to the public, except where personal or confidential matters are being debated, and are led by the Chairman of the Parish Council. Decisions are made in full Council, not by councillors individually.

The council sets the financial budget each year, upon which the Parish Precept is based.

Council members make decisions which are in line with overall budgets and other matters which are brought before the Council.

The Parish Council also has a number of task groups, made up of councillors which deal with different areas in which the Council oversee on behalf of the Community, such as planning and environment, finance, asset management and communications.

### **What do Councillors do?**

Every councillor is a member of full Council and will also sit on one or more of the task groups to debate and approve council business. Full council meetings are open to the press and public and are governed by written 'procedure' rules. A good deal of time will be taken up in:

- regular monthly and occasional extraordinary meetings;
- dealing with local people;
- carrying out volunteer working parties within the Parish;
- carrying out a specific role on the Council.

Councillors have responsibilities to their Parishes, Council, the Community as a whole and as Advocates.

To the Parish:

- represent the views of the community;
- ensure services are provided in the parish;
- help individual residents on specific issues.

To the Council to:

- help develop the budget and set the Council annual Precept charge;
- make and scrutinise decisions.

To the Community:

- listen to their communities and bring partners together to implement a shared vision of how they can help to improve their areas;
- support the local community and working to resolve local issues;

- become actively involved, by offering their time, in a wide variety of community projects, such as the biennial village fete, as well as various working parties set up as and when required, such as the village litter pick and community speed watch, where councillors are able and willing to become involved.

As Advocates:

- speaking up for and on behalf of residents and groups;
- encouraging residents to engage and participate;
- taking part in plan making and planning decisions;
- communicating individual resident's concerns to the council and other interested parties.

### **How much time is involved?**

Each councillor will decide their own level of commitment to the role and some of the issues to consider before committing are:

- how being a councillor will impact on family and personal relationships - you will need their support as some of your free time will be occupied with council matters;
- the people you represent will look to you for help and assistance;
- there are twelve monthly Parish Council meetings a year which you are expected to attend the majority of - meetings start at 7.30pm and generally last for up to two hours;
- you will be a member of at least one task group, with meetings being held as and when required;
- some councillors may also represent the Parish Council on local outside bodies so there will be other meetings to attend;
- if you are elected as lead of a task group more work and time may follow.

### **Probity and Integrity**

Councillors' conduct is formally governed by the Code of Conduct adopted by every local government authority. It sets out the rules members should work and adhere to.

They must work to make sure they do nothing to bring the Council into disrepute and not misuse their official position to their own advantage or the advantage of others. Certain interests, such as land owned in the district, must be registered.

Councillors are expected to follow certain principles:

- Selflessness
- Objectivity
- Accountability
- Openness
- Leadership
- Honesty

### **Filling a casual vacancy in the office of Parish Councillor**

If a vacancy arises on a Parish Council, due to an existing Councillor's resignation, disqualification or death, there is a process to fill the vacancy. For full details of this process go to [www.guildford.gov.uk/parishcouncilvacancies](http://www.guildford.gov.uk/parishcouncilvacancies).

To contact us:

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