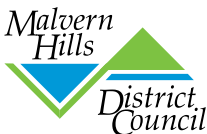


# Becoming a Parish or Town Council or



*“Your opportunity to become involved  
and help your community”*



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# the role of a councillor

## introduction

Parish and Town Councils represent the first tier of local government. There are 54 Parish and Town Councils in the Malvern Hills District and approximately 70,000 parish and town councillors in England.

Elections are due to take place in May 2011 for all 54 Parish and Town Councils in Malvern Hills – there are 199 Councillor seats to be filled in total.

This is your opportunity to become involved and make a real difference for your community.

It is the most local level of government – local people elected by local residents to tackle purely local issues. While they may be responsible for smaller areas and fewer people than district and county councils, they are recognised as the grassroots layer of democracy and are, for around 14 million people, the most ‘local’ level of local government.

Some parish councils are allowed to use the description of ‘town council’. The Malvern Hills district has three Town Councils, Malvern, Upton upon Severn and Tenbury Wells. Councillors are known as town councillors rather than parish councillors and the council has a town mayor rather than a parish chairman. The legal status of town and parish councils is the same.

Parish and town councils exist in most parts of the country, although there are none at present in London. They have small budgets and a limited number of powers but they provide an important link between individual communities and the principal councils in that particular area.

All sorts of people become Parish and Town councillors – a broad spread of ages from eighteen upwards with a wide variety of backgrounds and occupations.

## what do parish councils do?

As well as their basic responsibilities to represent the whole electorate within the parish, deliver services to meet local needs and strive to improve quality of life in the parish, parish councils can also be responsible for providing a range of community services such as: allotments, litter bins and recreation grounds.

They can make a particularly important contribution to tourism; planning; management of town and village centres and providing community centres. Parish Councils have few restrictions on the use of their powers but expenditure does have to be paid by the parish.

Parish and Town Councils also have significant influence over other areas of local government. A prime example of this is in planning applications. Malvern Hills District Council is the planning authority but details of planning applications within the parish are given to the Parish Council for the councillors to comment upon and which MHDC then take into account when making a decision. Similarly, Worcestershire County Council is the highway authority but will consult with a Parish when considering any road scheme, for example the placing of double yellow lines.

Parish Councils are also consulted by both Central Government and the higher tier councils through consultative documents and draft policy documents.

Parish / Town Councils play a vital role in community leadership and may for example work closely with the District Council or prepare for civil emergencies such as flooding.

## your role as a parish councillor

- To represent the parish and your electorate's views at grassroots level.

- To ensure that council business is planned, run, improved and monitored correctly.
- To work in areas of community leadership.

## getting elected

Parish council elections are held every four years, usually on the first Thursday in May. You do not have to have experience of local government to get involved with your parish council.

If you would like to stand for election, you will need to obtain a nomination paper from the Parish Council Clerk or the Electoral Services Office at the Council House, Avenue Road, Malvern and arrange for someone (who is an elector for the parish in which you wish to serve) to propose and another to second your nomination.

## eligibility

To become a parish councillor you must be:

- A British subject or a citizen of the Irish Republic or the European Union and resident in the United Kingdom
- 18 or over on the day of nomination.
- On the electoral register for the area in which you are seeking election; or
- Living within three miles of it, or working, owning/leasing land or property in that parish for at least twelve months.

You will not be able to stand for election if:

- You hold a paid office or employment made or confirmed by the council.
- You are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order
- You have been convicted of a criminal offence and sentenced to not less than three months imprisonment (including a suspended sentence) in the last five years.

continued...

- You can also be disqualified from holding office, by order of the court, if you have incurred illegal expenditure (when acting as a councillor) of over £2,000 and if you have been found guilty of corrupt or illegal practices under the Representation of the People Act (1983) or the Audit Commission Act (1998).

If there are more people nominated than there are seats then an Election will be held. If not enough people stand for election, the Parish or Town Council will seek to fill any remaining vacancies at its first meeting by 'co-opting' additional members.

## **election timetable**

The timetable for the election on 5th May 2011 is as follows:

Publication of Notice of Election/ First date of submission of nominations - **25 March**

Last day for receipt of nominations - **Noon 4 April**

Publication of Statement of Persons Nominated - **Noon 6 April**

Notice of appointment of election agent - **Noon 7 April**

Notice of withdrawal of candidature - **Noon 7 April**

Last day for requests for a new postal vote or to change or cancel an existing postal vote or postal proxy facility - **5.00pm 14 April**

Last date for new proxy applications - **5.00pm 21 April**

Publication of Notice of Poll - **8 April**

Notice to be given of Counting/Polling Agents - **26 April**

Polling Day - **7.00am to 10.00pm, 5 May**

Candidates return of expenses forms - **3 June**

## what to expect once you have been elected

**Term of office** – The term of office is four years unless you were elected at a by-election where you serve until the next scheduled election.

**Code of Conduct** – Prior to, or at the first meeting of the council after election or co-option, councillors are expected to sign a Declaration that they will undertake their duties in accordance with the law. They are also required to complete forms relating to the Code of Conduct which requires a declaration of interests. When completed and countersigned these documents are open for inspection by any member of the public and must be available at every meeting of the Parish Council.

**The time commitment** – There are regular meetings, usually at least once a month and you will be expected to work in and for your local community. Parish and Town Councils usually meet in the evenings and each council will have its own meeting pattern and venues. The Parish Council may have a number of committees which you can join. You will also be approached by residents asking you to help them with issues, especially in areas like planning matters.

**The financial cost** – Some Parish or Town Councils pay allowances to their councillors. Others do not have allowances but reimburse councillors for expenses if they attend meetings outside the parish, with the approval of the Council.

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