

St Mellion Parish Council
Local Elections 2017
Information for Candidates
16.3.17

What are town and parish councils?

Town and parish councils (T&PCs) are local councils. They are the tier of local government closest to the community. A local council serves as the collective voice of its community.

T&PCs have the same powers as a city or community council, and act within the same legislation.

A town council is usually a parish council that has decided to have a mayor and call itself a town council.

Local councils represent the concerns and aspirations of the local community. They are not voluntary organisations, not charities, nor do they have anything to do with the Church.

Local councils often have no permanent office and meet in a local hall or school. They often don't have full-time staff, although their part-time nature should not be taken as an indication of their effectiveness or efficiency: many parish councils work hard for their electors and run a wide range of services.

Larger local councils can cover quite large populations and often provide a wide range of services such as leisure facilities, support for museums, Tourist Information Centres, town centre closed-circuit television systems, as well as those services similar to smaller parish councils such as maintaining closed Church of England churchyards, providing halls and allotments, etc.

Despite being strictly audited each year, parish councils are the least bureaucratic and cheapest kind of local authority in existence.

What can town and parish councils do?

As local councils were created in law, they can act only within the law, i.e. they exercise powers and functions conferred on them by Statutes (i.e. Acts of Parliament). Provided the law allows, they are able to do anything in their area to support their local communities.

The range of powers available to local councils continues to change. Central Government's commitment to localism and devolution is giving local councils greater opportunity to act. The intention is for local councils to help improve services by bringing these services closer, and making them more responsive, to local communities.

Local councils' responsibilities are many and varied, e.g. the purchase of land and buildings, providing and maintaining village greens, providing recreational facilities, crime prevention measures and traffic calming. In future these responsibilities will be far greater.

Local councils can use many powers if they choose to. The types of powers chosen by Councillors, and the way in which they are used, can make for a forward-thinking local council that brings positive benefits to the local community.

A local council's key responsibility is to represent the whole electorate within the parish, improve the quality of life in the parish and of parishioners, and deliver or co-ordinate services to meet local needs.

Local councils also can comment on planning applications and be represented at public enquiries.

Local councils acquire their income through a variety of sources but for many it is through a small percentage of the Council Tax bill paid by local householders. There is currently no limit to the amount a local council can raise in this way. Some gain further income from services they provide. Local council budgets are a small part of the whole Council Tax bill. At present, local councils do not receive any Central Government funding or income from business rates.

A local council should embody local people's hopes and concerns, and ensure that local services are provided efficiently and effectively for the benefit of community well-being. A well-informed local council is aware of its community's needs, and strives to provide this through teamwork, accessing grant funding, representation at other meetings and lobbying appropriate bodies.

Local councils have a duty to appoint or employ a Clerk to record and carry out the council's decisions. Depending on their size and the services provided, they may employ staff for the benefit of the community. All local councils must meet at least four times a year (although most meet more often) and their meetings must be open to the public, although for certain restricted items of confidentiality they may occasionally exclude the public.

Applying to become a Parish Councillor

Parish Councillors are elected by the public and serve in office for terms of four years. These were unpaid positions until 2004 when allowance schemes were introduced to encourage more people to stand for election. Allowances, which tend not to be very large, are at the discretion of individual parish councils and most still choose to maintain an unpaid status.

If you wish to stand as a Parish Councillor you must satisfy the following requirements:

- be over 18 years of age;
- be a British citizen, a qualifying Commonwealth citizen, or a citizen of any other Member State of the European Union;
- be on the electoral register for the local council area for which you wish to stand;
- be a local government elector of the parish; or a person who during the whole of the twelve months before nomination as a candidate occupied land **or** other premises as owner or tenant in the parish; **or**, during the same period, has resided in that area **or** within three miles thereof; **or**, during the same period, has had a principal **or** only place of work in that area.

You cannot stand for election if:

- you are bankrupt and an Order or Interim Restriction Order has been imposed;
- within five years before the day of the election, you have been convicted in the United Kingdom of any offence and have had a sentence of imprisonment (whether suspended or not) for a period of over three months without the option of a fine;
- you work for the local council where you are intending to standing for election (but you can work for other local authorities, including the principal authorities that represent the same area);
- you have been convicted or reported guilty of a corrupt or illegal practice by an election court, or have been disqualified from standing for election to a local authority.

NOTE Further to advice from Cornwall Council, the Parish Council requires its Councillors to undergo a **criminal record check**. This is administered by Cornwall Council with fees paid by the Parish Council.

The election procedure

Ordinary elections of Parish Councillors take place on the first Thursday in May every four years. Reorganisation of local government may cause alteration of the election day and election year in some cases.

Common terms used in the election procedure.

- **Returning Officer:** person empowered to run an election.
- **Standing:** putting your name forward for election.
- **Electoral register:** names and addresses (plus election identification numbers) of all people within a community who are registered to vote.
- **Election timetable:** dates when specific forms must be publicised or submitted.
- **Warded:** where election areas are split into smaller 'wards'.
- **Expenses:** for example, the cost of producing campaign leaflets or pamphlets which you will have to declare to the Returning Officer.

Publication of the Notice of Election

The Chief Executive of Cornwall Council is the Returning Officer and has the duty to call an election. Staff in Cornwall Council's Elections Office will have all the papers you need to stand and can offer advice on this. In addition, notices will be published on the local council's notice board and website.

Getting the nomination form and candidate pack

The appropriate forms can be requested from the Clerk of the Parish Council, or Cornwall Council's Elections Office. The application packs are made available at various Cornwall Council offices around the county. Further information on this is available at www.cornwall.gov.uk/beacouncillor.

Completing the nomination form

You need to provide personal details and electoral register number for yourself and all those nominating you. For advice on obtaining electoral register numbers, contact the Clerk of the Parish Council, or Cornwall Council's Elections Office.

Submitting the nomination form

You must submit your form in accordance with Cornwall Council's 'timetable of proceedings'. Failure to do so will render your application null and void. The forms must be delivered in person to the nominated office for your area. Instructions will be included in the candidate pack. Note that the Clerk of the Parish Council cannot accept the form on your behalf.