

A good council

A good council:

- plays a vital part in representing the interests of the communities it serves
- improves the quality of life of local people and the local environment
- influences other decision makers, for example, in planning matters
- delivers services to meet local needs
- is aware of the Government's intention to give more powers to parish and town councils
- has obtained one or other level of the Local Council Award Scheme
- works with other groups in the community to develop the community and provide better services to the electors.

Profile of a parish councillor

- Effectively represents the interests of their ward or parish.
- Develops and maintains a working knowledge of organisations (including principal councils) operating within the area which have an impact on the wellbeing of both the community and the council as a whole.
- Fulfils and enacts any statutory requirements of an elected member of the council, ie attending meetings of the Council in response to the legal summons
- Deals with constituents' enquiries and representations fairly and without prejudice.
- Actively and constructively contributes to good governance.
- Carries out case work for constituents and represents their interests or enables the constituents to take action to deal with the matter themselves.
- Actively encourages community participation and citizen involvement in the work of the council.
- Identifies and works with local 'hard to reach' and under-represented groups to ensure their views can be identified.
- Encourages people to take up their roles of active and engaged citizenship.
- Contributes to the formation of the council's policies and plans by active involvement in council meetings, committees and working parties.
- Knows and has contact with key local stakeholders.
- Undertakes appropriate training and development to help fulfil the requirements of the councillor role.
- Represents the council to the community, and the community to the council, using all appropriate means.
- Is a channel of communication for the ward or parish and ensures constituents are informed of services available; decisions that affect them and the reasons for those decisions.

- Acts as the council's representative on outside bodies and reports back on their activities.
- Champions the causes which relate to the interests and sustainability of

the council's area and campaigns for improvement in the quality of life of those living in, working in, or visiting the area.

What do chairmen do?

Plan the meeting with the clerk and ensure that everything on the agenda is legal.

Brief themselves and prepare fully.

Welcome members, the public and any visiting speakers as they arrive.

Conduct the meeting:

- Check there is a quorum (minimum number of members needed to make the meeting legal).
- Call the meeting to order and declare it open.
- Formally welcome members, the public and visiting speakers to the meeting.
- Introduce the standard items on the agenda – apologies; declarations of interest; confirmation of minutes of previous meeting.
- Introduce the agenda items and ensure that all members know what they have to achieve and how they might do it.
- Ensure that decisions are clear and made in a lawful manner.
- Encourage participation.
- Stimulate an exchange of ideas and experience.
- Ensure that all have a chance to express their views freely.
- Keep the members aware of objectives.
- Maintain focus.

- Guide and progress discussion towards achieving the objectives.
- Manage conflict.
- Be fair and balanced.
- Preserve order.
- Enforce rules of procedure.
- Rule on disputed matters.

Participate, but do not dominate!

- Ask questions.
- Clarify misunderstandings.
- Correct mistakes.
- Reject irrelevancies and stop the meeting going off on a tangent.
- Co-ordinate the views of members.
- Give information if needed.
- Summarise the meeting's views and conclusions and confirm what has been decided/voted on.
- Listen and analyse the meaning and relevance of members' contributions.
- Consult the clerk for clarification, information, and advice where necessary.

Lead the Council:

- Plan, organise and control discussion.
- Develop harmonious relationships.
- Motivate individuals by encouraging and rewarding their efforts and supporting them in difficulties.

The role of the clerk

- The clerk is the proper officer of the council in law.
- The clerk is a vital team member providing legal and financial advice and information to support the council's decisions.
- The agenda is the clerk's responsibility. The clerk must sign the agenda and can decide how it will be set out. This process is often undertaken in consultation with the chairman. You may ask the clerk to add items to the agenda if you feel a relevant subject should be discussed.
- The clerk writes the minutes as a legal record of what was decided at the meeting. It is important that the minutes are accurate and therefore the minutes of the last meeting are confirmed and signed at the start of the next meeting.
- The clerk provides advice and administrative support and takes action to implement council decisions.
- The clerk may have to act as a project manager, personnel director, public relations officer or finance administrator.
- Usually the clerk is the Responsible Financial Officer (but not always)
- The clerk is not just a secretary and is not at the beck and call of the chairman or other councillors; the clerk is answerable only to the council as a whole.
- Legally councils can agree to delegate decisions to clerks because they are professional officers whose independence allows them to act on behalf of the council.
- The best councils will have a clerk and councillors who work as a team to provide a service for the community.