

STALBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL ELECTION SPECIAL NEWSLETTER

February 2019

**Elections for the next 5 year term take place on
Thursday 2nd May 2019**

What is a Town / Parish Council?

Parish / Town Councils are the tier of local government closest to the people. They represent the concerns and aspirations of the local community and run a wide range of services which can include leisure facilities, support for museums, Tourist Information Centres, town centre closed-circuit television systems maintaining closed Church of England churchyards, providing halls and allotments.

Despite being strictly audited each year, Town / Parish Councils are the most non bureaucratic and the cheapest kind of local authority in existence.

What can they do?

As Parish / Town Councils were created in law, they can only act within the law by exercising their powers and functions which have been conferred on them by Statutes (i.e. Acts of Parliament). Parish / Town Councils have many powers if they choose to use them. It is how and which of these powers that Councillors decide to use, that makes a vibrant forward thinking Council and can bring positive benefits to communities. The basic responsibility of Parish and Town Councils is to make the lives of their local communities more comfortable by representing the whole electorate, delivering or co-ordinating services to meet local needs and striving to improve quality of life. Parish and Town Councils can also comment on planning applications and be represented at public enquiries. Town and Parish Councils do not receive Council Tax directly from the public, but are primarily funded from a small percentage of the Council Tax charge made to local householders. A well informed Council is aware of what its community needs and strives to provide this through team work, accessing grant funding, representation at other meetings and lobbying appropriate bodies. All councils must meet at least four times a year (although most meet more often) Their meetings must be open to the public, although for certain restricted items of confidentiality they may occasionally exclude the public. A Parish or Town Council is the collective voice of its community.



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What does a Parish / Town Councillor do?

The duties of being a local councillor are many and varied, however it is the ordinary day to day contact with local people in their own community that is the most important part of being a Councillor. A Parish or Town Councillor signs a Declaration of Acceptance of Office and undertakes to observe an ethical Code of Conduct when dealing with matters on behalf of the community. A Councillor also completes a register of interests.

Listening: One of the most important tasks of a Parish or Town Councillor is listening to and understanding the views of people in their community.

Meetings: A councillor agrees to attend all meetings (reasonably possible) that he or she is summoned to. Along with full Council meetings, there are further committee meetings or working groups. Most meetings are held in the evening but some may be during the day. These committees may include planning, finance and staffing, properties or policy.

Representation: Parish / Town Councils also need representation at other local government meetings or on local bodies/organisations and Councillors may be asked to serve on certain groups or attend functions on behalf of the Council.

Extra skills: Through all of these functions Councillors will draw on their own skills and experiences.

Training and support: Training is available. Legislation allows for Councils to pay for training and ongoing training for Councillors as this is sound business management.

Responsibility: All Councillors are expected to abide by the Parish / Town Councils Code of Conduct. Each local Council must adopt and publicise a Code of Conduct that is in line with the Nolan principles. The Code deals with Councillors obligations about their conduct, including the registration and disclosure of their interests. Complaints about Councillors' conduct are dealt with by the principal authority. The responsibilities detailed in the Code of Conduct are designed to protect Councillors as well as the people they serve and give clear guidance so that Councillors may undertake their duties with confidence.



If you would like an informal chat about becoming a member of Stalbridge Town Council please contact the Clerks office: e mail clerk@stalbridgetowncouncil.gov.uk Tel 01963 364276. Nomination packs will be available to download from the dorsetforyou website in mid-February