

NOTICE

Elections 2024

The following elections are taking place in May 2024:

- Dorset Council election for 82 member seats
- Elections for all 150+ parish and town councils across the Dorset Council area - some 1500 seats

The elections will take place on Thursday 2 May 2024, for a five-year term of office (2024-2029)

To stand as a candidate, you will need to complete a set of nomination papers for the electoral area you are wanting to represent. Your nomination papers will need to show that you have been formally nominated by a particular number of registered electors in the electoral area you are wishing to stand.

These are a proposer and seconder who support your nomination in the Parish/Town or Ward (if warded) you are wanting to represent. Nomination papers must be hand delivered to Dorset Council. Please check on your local authority website as an appointment is necessary. The deadline for nomination papers to be delivered is 4.00 pm on 5 April 2024.

Further information about the elections and Nomination packs can be downloaded from:

- Elections page on the Dorset Council website - <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/councillors-committees-elections/elections-and-voting>
- DAPTC - [Elections 2024 webpage](#)
- [Electoral Commission pages](#)
- Video link that helps candidates 'get it right first time' when filling in their nomination forms: [Nomination Form Video Guide](#)

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To be able to stand as a Parish Councillor Candidates must satisfy criteria on the day they are nominated and on polling day:

- be at least 18 years of age
- be a British, qualifying Commonwealth citizen, or qualifying national of an EU member state

The candidate should check the most up-to-date guidance on the [Electoral Commission website](#) with regard to qualifications.

A prospective candidate must also meet at least one of the following four qualifications on the day they are nominated and on polling day:

- they are registered as a local government elector for the parish or town council area in which they wish to stand; or
- they have, during the whole of the previous 12 month period, occupied as owner or tenant any land or premises in the parish or town council area; or
- their main or only place of work during the whole of the previous 12 month period has been in the parish or town council area; or
- they have, during the whole of the previous 12 month period, lived in authority area for Dorset Council or in the parish or town council area (or within 4.8 km/3miles of it)

A person **cannot** be a candidate if at the time of their nomination or their election:

- they are employed by the parish or town council or hold a paid office under that council; or
- they are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order in England or Wales; or
- they 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 election day (ie, since 2 May 2019); or
- a person may also be disqualified from election if they have been convicted or reported guilty of a corrupt or illegal practice by an election court, or if they have been disqualified from standing for election to a local authority

Further information will be on the Parish Council website as it becomes available and candidate nomination forms will be on-line from end February 2024.

What is a Town or Parish council?

Parish and Town Councils are the same; they have the same powers and act within the same legislation. A Town Council is a Parish Council that has usually decided to have a mayor and call itself a Town Council. Parish and Town councils are the tier of local government **closest to the people**.

Parish Councils represent the concerns and aspirations of a genuine local community. They are not a voluntary organisation, not a charity nor (a common mistake) anything to do with the Church.

Parish Councils often do not have a permanent office or any full-time staff and will meet in the local hall or school. The part-time nature should not, however, be taken as any indication of the effectiveness and efficiency of the council as many Parish Councils work very hard for their electors and can run a wide range of services very effectively. A larger Parish or Town Council can cover quite large populations and will often provide a wide range of services from 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

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

What can they do?

As Parish 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). Anything a Parish Council tries to do outside these powers is *ultra vires*, in other words, outside the law.

Section 11 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 also acknowledged that some communities not yet represented by this tier of local government (Parish or Town Council) might choose, and could petition, to demand its own elected Parish or Town Council. An indicator of how important local representation can be to people.

The range of powers available to Parish Councils continues to change and proposals announced by the new coalition government especially in relation to 'Decentralisation and Localism' give a clear indication about the government's plans to reinvigorate local politics by giving more power to councils and communities. Legislation enacting the changes will come into force at a later date, but the message is clear: - services are to be improved by bringing them closer and making them more responsive to local communities. Already Local Council responsibilities are many and varied, including (not a comprehensive list) the purchase of land and buildings, providing and maintaining village

greens, the provision of recreational facilities, crime prevention measures and traffic calming. In future these responsibilities will be far greater.

Parish and 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 Parish 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 within the parish, delivering or co-ordinating services to meet local needs and striving to improve quality of life in the parish. Parish and Town Councils can also comment on planning applications and be represented at public enquiries.

Parish Councils range in size from a large Town Council representing 70,000 people to the smaller parish that may only have 200 people. Town and Parish Councils do not receive Council Tax directly from the public, but are primarily funded at present from a small percentage of the Council Tax charge made by District/Unitary authorities to local householders. Their annual budgets can be anything from £1000 to sums in excess of £5,000,000, with some even raising further income from services they provide. Parish and Town Council budgets are a tiny part of the whole Council Tax and Parish and Town Councils do not receive any Government funding or income from business rates. The way that local government is financed is under great scrutiny and there is likely to be a fundamental change the way that the whole of local government manage their services to the community and the way they fund them.

Whatever the make up of your council, it embodies the representation of people's hopes and concerns for ensuring that local services are provided efficiently and effectively for the benefit of community wellbeing. 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.

Town and Parish 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 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.

A Parish or Town Council *is* the collective voice of its community.

What does a councillor do?

Most people's impression of what a councillor does is that they just attend council meetings and nothing could be further from the truth. The duties and pleasure, 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 thereby 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. Many public bodies or organisations acknowledge this is the hardest information for them to capture and they in turn use the skills and local knowledge of the parish or town council for advice to assist and inform their services.

Meetings: A councillor agrees to attend all meetings (reasonably possible) that he or she is summoned to. In a smaller council this may only require one meeting of full council a month (there are however a few small councils that still only meet once every two months). In medium and larger councils however, along with full council meetings, there are further committee meetings or working groups. Most meetings are held in the evening but some committees and group representation may be during the day. Some of these committees may include planning, finance and staffing, properties or policy. Where committees are used however the council usually consists of a larger number of councillors and therefore each councillor is only expected to serve on one or two committees.

Representation: Parish 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 parish council. Councillors act as ambassadors for their community keeping everyone aware of local needs and concerns and reporting back on District/Unitary, County and regional changes.

Councillors represent the voice of their community as a whole, whilst being aware of and considerate to, specific minority needs.

Ceremonial Duties: In some larger councils there will be times when councillors are asked to attend civic functions as part of their duty to the community. This may entail Remembrance Parades, civic dinners or attendance at public functions to name but a few.

Extra skills: Through all of these functions councillors will draw on their own skills and experiences and it is the sharing of these skills that makes a strong team. Parish and Town Councils provide a focus for the community to identify concerns and projects and endeavour to solve them locally themselves. Councillors working as a team will need to deal with employment issues, budgeting, asset management, staff management, project management or grant funding and probably lots more if they are creative and involved. All councils must be aware and owe a duty to their community to manage staff considerately, whether it is employing one parish clerk or a whole host of office and grounds' maintenance staff. Accounts must be kept and whilst the clerk (or Responsible Financial Officer) will be employed to carry out this duty, councillors together as a team are responsible for the financial decisions made and implemented. A clerk is employed to advise and seek advice on behalf of councillors to assist them in their decisions. Councillors are there to consider the information gathered and make a group decision on all matters. No individual councillor is responsible for any single decision. This is democracy at its best.

Training and support: Training is available to any council, large or small. Legislation allows for councils to pay for training and ongoing training for councillors is sound business management. The County Secretary for the Association of Local Councils in your area will be able to provide details of professional training programmes designed specifically for councillors, see the useful contacts section in this pack for contact information.

Responsibility: All councillors are expected to abide by the Parish Councils (model code of conduct) Order 2007 No.1159, this document is available to download free of charge from: -

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2007/1159/contents/made>

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.

This is likely to change following legislation going before Parliament in 2011

Applying to become a councillor

Even those who have stood as councillors before may forget what the process was like 4 years ago. Whilst relatively easy, it is strict and if not followed exactly, will result in disappointment and rejection for the wrong reasons! The rules are there to ensure that only those who are eligible to stand for election in your community are considered and that those put forward have agreed to stand for election. Parish Councillors are elected by the public and serve four year terms in office; 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 the individual councils and most still choose to maintain an unpaid status.

If you wish to stand as a councillor you must satisfy these requirements:

- You need to be over 18 years of age
- A British citizen, a qualifying Commonwealth citizen, or a citizen of any other member state of the European Union
- On the Electoral Register for the council area for which you wish to stand,
- 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 has, during the same period, resided in that area or within three miles thereof; or has during the same period, 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.
- Have, within five years before the day of the election, 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
- Work for the 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).
- 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

The Election Procedure:

Ordinary elections of local 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.

A few terms that you will encounter explained:

- **Returning Officer** – person empowered to run an election.
- **Standing** - Putting your name forward for election.

- **Electoral Register** – Names and addresses, together with 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** – Areas are split up into what is called ‘wards’ so that councillors are elected by a specific smaller number of people and will be aware of their local concerns rather than having to represent all people within a whole parish.
- **Expenses** – If you do produce your own leaflets/pamphlets you need to declare how much you have spent on this.

1. Publication of the Notice of Election.

The Chief Executive of the District/Unitary Council is the Returning Officer and therefore has the duty to call an election.

Election staff in the District/Unitary Council Elections’ Office have all the papers you will need and will be able to give advice and may check nomination forms.

2. Getting the nomination forms

You will probably need to contact your District/Unitary Council Elections Office to ask for the appropriate forms. Parish and Town Councils are sent a certain number of forms and may make them available in the community, but the District/Unitary Council will send additional forms to anyone who requests a pack. Anyone who is eligible to stand can request these forms.

3. Completing the nomination forms

You will need to fill in all your personal details and those of the people nominating you. You and those nominating will be asked to fill in your Electoral Register number. This is the district code on the front of the Electoral Register e.g. A Village might be ‘SX’ then this is followed by the number that appears next to your name, or next to the name of the person nominating you. The entry in this box will therefore read something like ‘SX 413’.

You must get your form completed and signed by those nominating you and it will help to copy the numbers of those nominating you when you obtain your own Electoral Register number.

4. Sending the nomination forms back.

It is imperative that you submit your forms in accordance with the Timetable of Proceedings. Failure to do so will render your application null and void!

Checklist:

- Do not forget to get **everyone** mentioned to sign the forms
- Ensure that all addresses are in **full** with no abbreviations
- Include the whole Electoral Register reference **letters and numbers**
- **Be careful not to miss important dates** (see insert 12 ‘Election Timetable’ enclosed)