

The Role of Parish Councillors

Standing as a Parish Councillor can make a real difference to the community that you live in. Residents often ask what this entails; what sort of a commitment being a Councillor requires, and what qualifications you need to become a Councillor.

What is a Parish Council?

A Parish Council is a democratically elected body established by legislation. It is the first tier of local government and has a range of statutory powers and duties and following the Localism Act 2011 the Parish Council has more flexibility to make a difference to its community – however small. Parish Councils have a statutory power to precept (tax) the local electors in the area to finance activities following decisions made by the Parish Council.

A Parish Council does not have statutory responsibility for services such as waste collection, street parking, traffic regulation, planning, licencing and education – these responsibilities lie with the unitary authority, but the Parish Council are consulted when changes to services are proposed, or for planning applications affecting the village.

What is the role of a Parish Councillor?

A Parish Councillor is the holder of a public office, not a volunteer (although the role is unpaid). A Councillor does not have any authority to make decisions about Parish Council business on his/her own. The main job of a Parish Councillor is to actively participate in the collective decision making processes of his/her council. A Councillor's normal term of office, when elected by a general ballot is for four years. Anyone over the age of 18 who is a citizen of the UK, lives in the Parish or works in the Parish, or lives/works within 3 miles of the Parish may put themselves forward to be a candidate. Occasionally, vacancies will arise during the 4 year period and subject to various statutory notices, consultations and periods of time, these can be filled by co-option. This process is known as Casual Vacancy. Normanby by Spital Parish Council has 7 Councillors

What Commitment is required of a Parish Councillor?

A Parish Councillor is required to attend meetings of the Parish Council – usually held on the first Monday of every alternate month, usually in Owmbly church starting at 7.30 pm and lasting no more than 2 hours. They are expected to attend at the meeting having read the agenda and all the accompanying papers which are circulated approximately 1 week in advance of the meeting. They are also expected to participate in the debates and decision making processes. Normanby By Spital has very few Committees, but individual Councillors can opt to be selected to join any that hold a particular interest, or for which they have a particular skill set which would aid the Parish Council. There may be other events held throughout the year, often out of the Parish, to which Councillors will be invited. These may include meetings with West Lindsey District Council or Lincolnshire County Council. Attendance at these events is not mandatory, but representation of the Parish Council at these occasions is an important role. The only other commitment is in relation to Parish Council owned assets. The Parish Council has shared responsibility with Owmbly By Spital for the Community Park and the Cemetery. There is a formal inspection program in place for

the community park in line with our obligations under RoSPA and the insurance company. There is no formal inspection in place for the cemetery. Parish Councillors are asked to be vigilant to their surroundings and to report anything they think is awry to the clerk for onward action. It is not the clerks responsibility to be the sole eyes and ears of the council.

What Qualifications do I need to become a Councillor?

Apart from the residence and age qualifications referred to above – you don't need any formal qualifications. Each new Councillor will be requested to attend a training course for new Councillors, which is held online. They should be computer literate and able to communicate by email. Councillors are given their own Parish Council email address which they must use for all official business in order to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations. Otherwise all that is required is a genuine interest in what happens in the village – to retain it character, its facilities etc, but at the same time to be part of the process of planning for the future. It is really important that the Parish Council has a range of different ages and demographic profiles to ensure that we truly represent the majority of the village.