

# LOCAL COUNCILS

## What Do They Do?

Parish, Town, Neighbourhood, Community or Village Councils in England are colloquially known as “Local Councils”. This leaflet tells you what they do and how you can get involved.

### A Little About Local Councils

- Established by legislation in 1894, the first tier of local government in England - there are around 10,000 local councils with around 80,000 local councillors.
- Elected representative body of the local community. Provide services to meet local needs, improve quality of life and well-being in the community.
- Statutory bodies with certain duties and legal powers. They are democratically and financially accountable to the local community.
- Have the legal right to be informed about planning applications and other issues.
- Give the local community a more powerful voice.
- Help support local groups in their area. This may be through funding, provision of meeting places, or through publicity. This could include voluntary groups that help young people or the older generation to name but a few.
- May take on some devolved duties from the “Principal Authorities”, Kent County Council, Medway Unitary Authority and the twelve District and Borough Councils in Kent. The Principal Authorities are responsible for Education, Transport, Planning & Development, Waste Collection and Disposal, Housing, Licensing and Street Trading.





## Local Council Services

Local Councils have a range of specific, yet discretionary powers and can provide, maintain and/or contribute to services in their community. Here are a few examples:

- Village Halls, Community Centres and leisure facilities.
- Local youth projects
- Bus shelters, car parks, and community transport schemes.
- Crime reduction measures - CCTV and dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour.
- Cycle paths and traffic calming measures.
- Festivals, celebrations, illuminations and tourist activities.
- Allotments, parks and open spaces.
- Community Safety Schemes
- Litter bins, street lighting and Street cleaning.
- Parish and Neighbourhood Plans.

## So Who Controls the Council?

**You do.** Parish electors vote for Local Council members every four years and are entitled to go to the Annual Meeting and say what they think.

Council meetings are also open to the public to observe (but not participate in) and there is usually an opportunity for informal discussion when the meeting is adjourned.

Local Councils are public bodies and subject to the Freedom of Information Act and GDPR laws.

## Who Supports Local Councils?

Local Councils in England are supported by 38 County Associations that provide legal, procedural and other advice. They also provide relevant training for Councillors.

In Kent, Local Councils are represented by the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC).

**[www.kentalc.gov.uk](http://www.kentalc.gov.uk)**

At national level, Local Councils are represented by the National Association of Local Councils.

**[www.nalc.gov.uk](http://www.nalc.gov.uk)**

## And What Else?

- Local Councils can raise money to spend on public purposes through their “precept” which is collected through the local Council Tax. Most of that money is invested back into the local community to improve facilities and services. Many local councils also supplement the precept by obtaining grants. Sometimes they own property and can use the money from rents and leases. They can also generate income through running their community facilities.
- Local Councils are the least bureaucratic kind of local authority. Their funds are a tiny part of the Council Tax with an average cost across England of less than £65/year to Council tax payers. They get no general government grant so they have every incentive to keep their expenditure low and get value for money.
- The Localism Act 2011 gives more authority to Local Councils. For instance, the General Power of Competence will provide eligible Local Councils with the power to do anything an individual can do unless it is specifically prohibited by law. Other measures contained in the Localism Act include Community Right to Bid, Community Right to Build, Community Right to Challenge, Neighbourhood Planning and the Community Infrastructure Levy.





**So, what are you waiting for?**

**Are you concerned about your local area?**

**Do you want to represent the views of local people?**

**Are you passionate about services provided to your community**

**Do you want to contribute your business or personal skills and expertise?**

**Why not stand for your local council and make a difference!**

## **Could You Be A Councillor?**

Any person 18 years of age and older who is a local government elector, lives or works in the parish or lives within three miles of the area of the Local Council may stand for election.

Candidates for election must complete nomination forms and submit them to their local electoral office by the closing date for nominations - usually four to five weeks before polling day. The local electoral office will be at Medway Unitary or District/ Borough Council in which the Local Council is located.

A Councillor's normal term of office is four years. He/she is a holder of a Public Office.

Councillors can receive expenses for their role.

Candidates may stand under a party political label, but most don't.

Councillors are subject to their Council's Code of Conduct and must complete a Declaration of Interest form which will be publicly available.

## **What Will You Do If Elected?**

- Attend Council meetings and raise matters that the Council can consider and formally decide to take action.
- Make informed contributions and influence debate at meetings.
- Receive training for your role.
- Represent the Council externally.

For more information on Local Councils in Kent and how to become a Councillor, go to [www.kentalc.gov.uk](http://www.kentalc.gov.uk) or scan the QR code below.

