

## **The Parish Clerk - Roles and Responsibilities**

The parish council Clerk is the 'engine' of an effective parish council. He or she is its principal executive and adviser and, for the majority of smaller parish councils, is the officer responsible for the administration of its financial affairs. The Clerk is sometimes a council's only employee.

The Clerk is required to give clear guidance to Councillors, including the Chair, before decisions are reached, even when that guidance may be unpalatable. The Clerk has a key role in advising the council, and Councillors, on governance, ethical and procedural matters. They must also liaise with the Monitoring Officer at the district/unitary council on ethical issues and the Councillors' Register of Interests.

Some larger councils employ a range of administration and support staff and the Clerk is normally responsible for advising the council on staffing provision and managing the recruitment process. In smaller councils the Clerk may also carry out the role of the Finance Officer. However, it is common, especially in larger councils, for a separate Responsible Finance Officer to be appointed and given specific duties relating to the budget, annual accounts and audit to ensure proper financial management and transparency.

Many parish councils encourage their clerks to seek professional recognition for the work that they do. A qualified Clerk is one of several pre-requisites for a parish council achieving Quality Council status and also in becoming a council eligible to exercise the power of well-being.

The Clerk is an independent and objective servant of the council who takes instructions from the corporate body and must recognise that the council is responsible for all decisions.

In an emergency (e.g. to cover a temporary vacancy) a Councillor may fulfil the role of Clerk to the parish council (this must be unpaid (see below)). However, it is not good practice for Councillors to do this as it confuses Officer/Member roles.

It should be noted that Councillors may not be paid employees of their council (as there is an unacceptable conflict of interest) and may not become employees of their former council until at least 12 months after ceasing to be a Councillor (Sections 112(5) and 116 Local Government Act 1972).

*Source: Governance Toolkit for Parish & Town Councils (Published jointly by ACSeS [The Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors], SLCC [The Society of Local Council Clerks], The Standards Board for England, NALC [The National Association of Local Councils] and LGA [The Local Government Association], 2009*