



# LOCAL COUNCILS

## What do they do?

In England, a Local Council may be formally known as a Parish, Town, Community, Neighbourhood or Village Council

This leaflet tells you what they actually do, and how you can get involved.

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

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

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

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



Produced by the Sussex and Surrey Associations of Local Councils

# **A Little About Local Councils**

- Established by legislation in 1894; Oldest type of Local Authority in England and Wales.
- Elected representative body of the local community. Represent local community. Provide services to meet local needs. Improve quality of life and well being in the community.
- First tier of Local Government in England - there are around 9,000 local councils with around 80,000 local councillors.
- Your Local Council is a statutory body with certain duties and legal powers. They are democratically and financially accountable to the local community.
- Local Councils have the legal right to be informed about planning applications and other issues.
- Give the local community a more powerful voice in the local area.
- 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.

## **Local Council Services**

Local Councils have a range of 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 Anti Social Behaviour
- Cycle Paths and traffic calming measures
- Festivals, celebrations, illuminations and tourism activities
- Allotments , parks and open spaces
- Community Safety Schemes
- Litter bins, Street lighting and Street cleaning

## **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 with grants. Sometimes they own property, and can use the money from rents or leases. They can also generate income through running their community facilities.
- The Localism Act 2011 give more authority and power to the tiers of Local Government including Local Councils. For instance, the General Power of Competence will provide eligible Local Councils with the power to do anything an individual could 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.

## **How about Waste Collection, Education and Social Care?**

Your local Council does not have statutory responsibility for the following services:

- Waste Collection and Environmental Health
- Street parking or traffic regulation
- Street trading or licensing
- Housing, planning or building control
- Education or social care functions
- Development control

The responsibility for these functions rests with the other types of local authority.

## **And What about the Cost?....**

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Naturally, there is a cost. The Local Council issues a precept which is added to the Council Tax bill. That said, local Councils are the most unbureaucratic and the cheapest kind of local authority in existence. Their funds are a tiny part of the Council Tax. They get no general government grant, so they have every incentive to keep their expenditure low. That means most of the money goes directly into activities for the benefit of local people. The vast majority of the 9,000 local Councils in England only make a modest charge against their tax payers. In the very few exceptions, it will be seen to be justified because the facilities provided must be within the local community.

***The average cost for Local Councils across England is £50 a year - less than £1 a week!***

## **So who controls the Local Council?**

In short, you do. The community elects the Local Council members every four years and are entitled to go to the Annual Meeting and say what they think.

What Kind of Support Can a Local Council Get?

The Local Councils in England are supported by 38 County Associations of Local Councils that provide legal, procedural and other advice. They provide relevant training and representational services too.

In the south, Local Councils are represented by:

- Kent Association of Local Councils - [www.kentalc.gov.uk](http://www.kentalc.gov.uk)
- Sussex Association of Local Councils - [www.sussexalc.org.uk](http://www.sussexalc.org.uk)
- Surrey Association of Local Councils - [www.surreyalc.org.uk](http://www.surreyalc.org.uk)

At national level, Local Councils are represented by the :

- National Association of Local Councils - [www.nalc.gov.uk](http://www.nalc.gov.uk)