

# SUTTON PARISH COUNCIL

Guide for

New Councillors

Adopted 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022 (Res:227/22)

# GUIDE TO SUTTON PARISH COUNCIL

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this Guide is to give new councillors an insight and guide to the day to day workings and practices of the Parish Council. It will hopefully also be a useful reference point for the more experienced councillors.

You should be aware that some of the rules and regulations that govern the administration of the council are set in statute (law) and cannot be changed. These will be found in the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, which are held on the Parish Council's website [www.suttonparish.co.uk](http://www.suttonparish.co.uk). If you require a paper copy, please ask the Parish Clerk.

## COUNCIL'S ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES - THE COUNCIL AS A BODY

Sutton Parish Council has a full complement of 12 Councillors and a Clerk. The Annual Parish Council Meeting is held in May at which the Members elect a Chairman and Deputy Chairman and appoint the Council's committees and representatives.

As an elected Councillor this would be the first meeting you attend. If elected at a bi-election or are co-opted, this could happen anytime throughout the year. At your first meeting you will be required to sign a formal declaration of acceptance of office and an agreement to abide by the Code of Conduct. You cannot act as a councillor until this has been done. You will also be required to complete a Register of Interests for lodging with the Monitoring Officer at Cheshire East Council.

## COUNCILLORS AS INDIVIDUALS

**Role:** Councillors are elected by the electors of the parish every four years. A councillor's role is to listen to and represent the views and interests of the community as a whole through being well informed on local issues and by consultation with local people.

**Responsibilities:** A councillor is part of a 'corporate body' and must work with all members of the council to make legal and responsible decisions as a whole body. A councillor should work in partnership with and appreciate and respect the role of the Clerk. All councillors must be aware of their obligation to abide by the council's Code of Conduct.

**Duties:** A councillor must attend meetings on a regular basis and be fully prepared to discuss and make decisions on items on the agenda, sent out in advance. He/she should take an active part in meetings to form a best judgement for the needs of the community and abide by majority decisions. A Councillor should maintain proper standards of behaviour and not bring the Council into disrepute. A councillor must act openly and honourably in the public's interest.

**Skills/Training:** Councillors have many and varied skills and interests that they can offer to the council as a body. These skills can frequently be put to good use through the committees on which you choose to sit, and the projects, with which they get involved. All Councillors are given the opportunity to attend relevant training courses through ChALC (Cheshire Association of Local Councils). All costs incurred for these events are paid for by the Parish Council.

**Allowances:** Councillors are able to claim reimbursement for all travel outside of the parish; Councillors are not able to claim for travel within the parish boundary. Councillors do not currently receive an allowance although the Chairman is granted a modest sum, agreed by the Parish Council, for expenditure incurred in representing the Parish Council.

**Time Off for Public Duties:** Under Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, Councillors who are in paid employment are entitled to receive time off to undertake their duties as a Parish Councillor (though not necessarily paid leave).

## THE CHAIRMAN

**Role:** The Chairman of the Parish Council has authority created by statute and he/she is, if present, the person that presides at all Full Council meetings. He/she has a second or casting vote and is appointed annually by vote of the Parish Council. Apart from this the Chairman has no greater authority than any other councillor.

### Responsibilities and duties:

**Main Task:** The Chairman should work in partnership with the Clerk to ensure that the council's proceedings are carried out promptly, clearly and lawfully.

**Team Work:** He/she should bond the councillors into an effective team, encouraging members to take on projects/representations in accordance with their individual expertise, experience and interests.

**Public Relations:** The Chairman speaks on behalf of the council as a body, giving a corporate view. The Chairman must ensure that all council proceedings are transparent.

**Council Meetings:** He/she should consult with the Clerk, to ensure that meetings are held on a regular basis; the content of the agenda is pertinent and legal, and that councillors are provided with sufficient data to make informed decisions. The Chairman should remain impartial during proceedings. He/she should try to involve all councillors in debate whilst emphasising the need for brevity and relevance.

## THE CLERK

The clerk is employed by the council to provide professional and administrative support.

**Proper Officer:** The Clerk is the Chief Executive ('Proper Officer') for the council, and in many cases is also the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), although this is not a legal requirement. The Clerk for Sutton Parish Council is also the RFO.

The Parish Council do not have offices. 9 Sutton Road, Poynton, Cheshire, SK12 1SU is the official address of Sutton Parish Council. The Clerk works at home.

### Responsibilities & Duties:

The Clerk's main responsibility is to carry out the policies and decisions of the council as a body. The Clerk should be an independent and

objective servant of the council, able to guide and advise the council in matters of law and procedure. Whilst the Clerk liaises closely with the Chairman, the Clerk works for the Council as a body, not individual councillors.

**Skills/Training:** Your current Clerk holds the Certificate in Local Council Administration. Clerks need to keep up to date with all developments that are relevant to the council's work, and will therefore attend training courses and carry out research on behalf of the council, whenever appropriate.

**Clerk's Terms & Conditions:**

The current Clerk is contracted to work 10 hours per week. These hours are, in the main, worked Monday – Tuesday of each week, to include one evening per month for meetings. Additional pay is contractually paid for additional hours worked.

Salaries are paid according to national NALC/SLCC agreed salary scales.

**PROCEDURES**

**Meetings:** The Parish Council holds 11 Full Council meetings per year – monthly excluding August.

The Annual Meeting of the Council is held in May of each year, when the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Committee/Working Groups elected.

The Annual Parish Meeting, which is a public meeting, chaired by the Council Chairman can be held between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 31<sup>st</sup> May inclusive for Sutton Parish Council (this is normally May). This meeting provides the opportunity to hear reports from the Parish Council and to allow the local government electors of the parish to ask questions.

**Format for Meetings:** Full Parish Council meetings are held in the St. James Church Hall, Church Lane, Sutton, SK11 ODS usually on the second Thursday in the month and, by law, are open to members of the public and press. If a confidential matter is to be discussed e.g. to discuss tenders for contracts or staffing matters a resolution to exclude public and press may be proposed. The Agenda allows for the public to ask questions. The Chairman will endeavour to close meetings by 10 p.m.

**Agenda:** It is the Clerk's responsibility to issue a summons to councillors to attend a meeting and to provide the Agenda for the meeting. The Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, will prepare the agenda and send it out by email to all Councillors 3 full days prior to the meeting excluding Sundays. Councillors can receive the agenda by post if requested. Any Councillor can request an item to be included on the Agenda. Such a request should be with the Clerk 7 clear days before the meeting.

A copy of the agenda is also posted on Parish website and notice of meeting is published on the Parish notice boards in Sutton, Langley, and Lyme Green. It is a requirement by law that such a Notice is displayed a least 3 clear days before the meeting.

**Meeting  
Procedures:**

During the meeting a time is allowed for 'public speaking' providing the subject is pertinent to the agenda (it is required by law that all meetings are open to members of the public). After receiving apologies for absence (which should, whenever possible, be sent in advance to the Clerk), the Council will confirm the minutes of the previous meeting. Declarations of Interest must be declared and will be accepted and minuted during the meeting where appropriate; Councillors should refer to their Code of Conduct for more information on this matter. If in doubt, seek advice from the Clerk or contact the Monitoring Officer at Cheshire East Council for advice.

NB. Decisions can only be made on items published on the Agenda. An urgent matter that has arisen since the publication of the agenda may be addressed through delegated powers as detailed in the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, but this practise should be avoided, as there should be public notice of any matter to be dealt with. Routine matters must be held over until the next appropriate meeting. Please note that 'Any Other Business' is not a legal agenda item for Parish Council meetings and therefore does not appear on the Agendas.

**Minutes of the  
Meeting:**

Minutes are a brief account of the proceedings and decisions made, not a verbatim account. They are circulated to all Councillors prior to the next meeting. (Should a Councillor note any item requiring correction, please inform the Clerk as soon as possible). Draft Minutes are published on the Council's web site, followed by the version ratified at Full Council. Paper copies are available from the Parish Clerk.

### **COUNCIL BUSINESS**

The Parish Council covers a large amount of business, and it is impractical to deal with it all, in one monthly meeting. The Council have working groups to look into particular projects and all proposals are brought to the Parish Council for agreement.

### **FINANCIAL REGULATIONS**

The Council's financial procedures are regulated by the Government's Accounts and Finance Regulations and the Parish Council's Financial Standing Orders.

**Bank:**

Sutton Parish Council holds a bank account with NatWest Bank. This is used for all monies paid to the Council (primarily the \*Precept) and is a cheque account from which all the council's bills are paid. There is also a savings account held with Natwest Bank. Every payment is approved and confirmed by at least two councillors. Each cheque needs the signature of two other Councillors.

**Income:**

The bulk of the council's income comes from the 'Precept'. This is the amount requested from Cheshire East Council by the Parish Council, this is in addition to the sum all residents of the Parish are charged. The local precept is determined by the Parish Council's budget process which takes place in October/November each year. The Precept is paid to the Council in 2 half-yearly instalments.

Additional income is received from Allotment fees and refund of VAT paid by the Parish Council.

**Accounting:** The Parish Council accounts are a simple computerised Receipts and Payments. A reconciled report of Receipts and Payments Summary is presented to the Council quarterly, and an Income and Expenses Statement produced at the end of each financial year. A monthly reconciliation is submitted to council each month. The Clerk/RFO is responsible for employing the Council's Internal Auditor. The Parish Council and the Internal Auditor is required to sign and complete an Audit Return for annual examination by the External Auditor, to a strict timetable.

Copies of the Council's Annual Accounts are available upon request and on the parish website.

**Internal Auditor:** It is a requirement of the Financial Regulations that a council appoints an 'Internal Auditor' independent of the council to carry out the 'Annual Internal Audit'. This is to assure that procedures and securities are sufficient to purpose.

**Insurance:** The Council holds a policy, currently with Ecclesiastical Insurance - the main summary of cover as follows:

Public Liability:	insurance cover of £10,000,000
Employer's liability:	insurance cover of £5,000,000
Employee Dishonesty:	insurance cover of £150,000
Officials' indemnity	insurance cover of £500,000
Employee Personal Accident	insurance cover of £100,000.00
Libel and Slander:	insurance cover of £500,000.00

Any Business, undertaking work for the Council, is required to hold its own public liability insurance of at least £5 million.

### **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT: PUBLICATION SCHEME**

Councillors should be aware that the public can request sight of all communications, notes, e-mails, documents, etc. relating to the Parish Council held by the Clerk and Councillors. The Council's Publication Scheme can be viewed on the website or is available from the Clerk.