

## **Article 1-February**

### **What is the future for Winsham Parish Council?**

It will be apparent to many that Winsham Parish Council is seriously under strength. This is affecting its ability to manage its work load, and this is likely to become even more serious in the months and years ahead.

What can be done about it?

Only the residents of Winsham can decide, and for this reason Winsham Parish Council are convening a public meeting in early March to enable the problem to be discussed, and to seek possible solutions. It is hoped that as many people as possible will attend. Details of the Parish Meeting will be announced shortly, and it will aim to have a residents friendly format, and its main purpose will be to establish what the people of the parish want and expect from their parish representatives. There will even be a glass of wine and nibbles to help things along.

To inform residents who will wish to attend, between now and the meeting several articles will appear in the Parish Magazine, and on the Parish Web site, which can also be accessed via the Winsham Community Facebook page. These will explain the importance of the Parish Council in everyday parish life, and the part played by the members of the Council, its Chairperson and, very importantly, the Parish Clerk.

The first of these articles is below:

### **The role of Winsham Parish Council**

The parish council is the first tier of governance. There are over 10,000 parish councils in England and Wales, and Winsham Parish Council was one of the first to be formed after the 1894 Local Government Act brought in by Gladstone's government. It met then, as it does now, in the Jubilee Hall.

Records of all the meetings since that time can be found on the Winsham Web Museum web site.

Winsham Parish Council's main responsibilities include planning, street lighting, allotments, cemetery, maintenance and grass cutting in areas for which they are responsible and footpaths. Responsibilities for some of the above are shared with the District Council and Highways Dept. They also need to review

and update if necessary the Parish Plan which is intended to keep the parish moving towards its agreed objectives.

They are also responsible for setting a local tax on the parish to meet the costs of the above, and employing the Parish Clerk, a legal requirement. In some of the responsibilities, they do not have direct power, but do have an influence and opinion that cannot be ignored by higher levels of government-usually , in practice, applicable to the South Somerset District Council.

### **The role of the Parish Clerk**

The Parish Clerk is the engine of the parish council. Employed by the parish council, the Clerk is the principle executive and adviser, and administrator of its financial affairs. In Winsham the parish council employs Mrs Teresa Pinder, who is professionally qualified to carry out the task.

Her key role is to advise Winsham Parish Council on governance, ethical and procedural matters and is the Responsible Financial Officer with duties relating to the budget, annual accounts and audit to ensure proper financial management. She is responsible for giving clear guidance on the above to the Councillors before decisions are reached, even when the guidance may be unpalatable

She is also responsible for the management of the Parish Council Web site which is now a statutory requirement for all parish councils.

The Parish Clerk must function as an independent and objective servant of the Parish Council who takes instructions from the council as a whole, recognising that it is the council which is responsible for the decisions.

### **The Role of the Chairperson**

The Chairperson is elected by the members of the parish council each year at the Annual Meeting. The chairperson has few special powers. He or she is responsible for the general conduct of a meeting, with the principle purpose of encouraging a fair debate by ensuring that every councillor present has the opportunity to put their point of view. The Chair has the power to suspend a meeting and call an extraordinary meeting. The Chair also liaises with the Clerk on the setting of the Agenda for a meeting, and has a casting vote when appropriate.

In practice the personality of the chairperson is important. Every 'Chair' has their views on how meetings should be conducted and a successful council has a chairperson who holds their respect.

### **The role of the Parish Councillor**

The role of the parish councillor is to contribute towards decisions that are made for the general long term good of the community as a whole, not favouring any particular group at the expense, in money, convenience, or peace of mind , of another, and certainly not for personal benefit.

The job of the parish clerk is to do the 'heavy lifting' in terms of legal responsibilities and paperwork. There are safeguards, such as liability insurance in the very unlikely possibility of the Parish Council becoming involved in serious legal conflict.

Councillors are required to make a Declaration of Interest if topics close to their personal interests are to be discussed by the Parish Council , financial or otherwise. This may preclude involvement in the discussions. There is also a code of conduct that councillors sign up to.

Detailed information about all of this is available from the Parish Clerk.

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