

Does Winsham need a properly elected parish council?

The present situation

The Parish Council is seriously under strength, despite ongoing efforts to remedy the situation over the last twelve months. It also needs candidates for the elections that will be held in May 2019. Currently it has six members, with only three 'elected'-not having been co-opted or recruited by a casual vacancy. This means that the council does not have its general 'Power of Competence' because less than two thirds of its membership are deemed as being elected. This restricts spending decisions, and also has other problems associated with shortage of members.

For the Parish Council to be truly democratic it needs to hold next May, a proper election for its members. To enable this to happen there must be at least ten candidates, all aged 18 or above, and living within the parish borders, or within three miles of the boundary. There are also some other criteria. Details are available.

It is hoped that existing members will stand for election, and if this happens four additional candidates would be needed to ensure a 'hustings' style election

Winsham is a vibrant community.

It is a great place in which children can grow-up. The elderly can feel secure in their homes. It has a pub, a shop, a village hall, two churches and a Sports and Social Club and Football Club. It has many other organisations and interest groups. It also provides a base for many diverse small businesses and has high speed Broadband and a communications network which reaches all age groups. *Not bad for a rural parish with just 320 households and 750 people.*

To sustain this activity, Winsham needs to continue to punch 'above its weight' and for this needs a fully empowered and representative parish council which is seen to reflect this diversity and vitality.

In the past the parish council has quietly carried on its business to the satisfaction of most residents. It was not a case of people not being interested in matters of local planning and maintenance of roads and rights of way, but there was little movement in and out of the parish. Many decisions were taken at District Council level, over which the parish council had little influence. Parish

Council business was largely concerned with 'domestic' business, such as cutting grass and maintaining footpaths and setting a precept that covered the cost of doing these things.

In the last twenty years things have changed a great deal.

The population of the parish is more transient and changing.

More people are coming in to Winsham, either to seek a pleasant retirement away from the bustle of a metropolis, or for younger people to find a better place to bring up their families. Also with the growth in self-employment and aided by the digital revolution, many small businesses have emerged, set up by people who find Winsham a good place to work and live.

Pressures from Central government have placed more influence in the hands of Parish Councils as it attempts to reduce the costs associated with running local government. These pressures are likely to increase as the size of District Councils are likely to diminish under the unitary reorganisation currently being planned.

It therefore becomes essential that Winsham equips itself with a democratic parish council that takes decisions that will influence the direction of travel for our community.

The problem, as it always has been, is to persuade people to recognise that their judgement, based on their experience of life, and their skills and talents are of value to the community.

Demands on time for councillors need not be excessive, usually limited to some three or four hours a month, including the monthly meeting at which the main purpose is to discuss agenda items and make decisions. A good deal of the time consuming work is carried out by the Parish Clerk.

Winsham Parish Council