

Understanding the Democratic Process

What is Medstead Parish Council?

Medstead Parish Council is a democratically elected body at the first tier of local government. Below central Government there are different levels of local authorities that each have defined responsibilities for different functions in relation to specific areas. For example, in Hampshire, the County Council deals with concerns like highways, education or social care whereas East Hampshire District Council has responsibilities including planning applications, rubbish collections, and environmental health for its region. A Parish Council operates within the parish that it serves and is closest to local people. Its primary focus is on delivering local facilities and services to residents.

Who are your Parish Councillors?

Medstead Parish Council is made up of nine councillors who live or work in the parish or live close by. They bring a diverse range of backgrounds and skills to the table but are united in their enthusiasm and willingness to put themselves forward to make the village a better place. Councillors need no special experience for the role, but they tend to be action-oriented rather than the kind of people who just complain. They look for solutions and opportunities to drive change, but also have the patience and persistence to understand that outcomes need work and are generally not instantaneous.

Councillors are unpaid 'holders of public office' but that does not mean they are not valued or don't do work. They give their time and effort to attend meetings as well as preparing for them and undertaking tasks but they find it a rewarding, privileged experience.

Unlike other tiers of government, a Parish Council is a non-political body. This doesn't mean that as individuals Councillors can't have political opinions, but rather it plays no role in the basis of why they are elected or how they conduct themselves in the role. The focus is purely on what is best for the well-being of the parish.

How are Parish Councillors appointed?

Parish Councillors are primarily elected to the role by the electors of the parish, although the process of co-option also sometimes occurs. Ordinary local elections for Parish Councillors take place on the first Thursday in May once every four years, with the next such election due in 2027. Councillors are elected to serve a four year term, after which they must stand for re-election if they wish to continue. Sometimes there are not enough candidates to fill the number of vacancies, in which case everyone nominated is automatically elected and afterwards the Council can co-opt people, i.e. it can choose from people who put themselves forward and meet the eligibility criteria. This can also happen if a vacancy arises mid-term. Do you think you are interested? Read on and there will be more information on what criteria you must meet.



⇒ To find out more about what HCC and EHDC do, look at their websites.

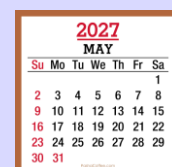
<https://www.easthants.gov.uk/>
<https://www.hants.gov.uk/>

⇒ Do you want to know who your Parish Councillors are? Their names are on the Council's noticeboards and website at

https://www.medsteadpc.org/Parish_Councillors_33004.aspx



⇒ If you are interested in becoming a Councillor and want to find out more about their role, speak to the Clerk or come to our meetings to watch 'democracy in action'.



What does the Parish Council do?

Medstead Parish Council owns and looks after many of the amenities you see and use around the village. This includes the village green area, including the children's playground, adult gym equipment, football pitch, cricket pitch, barbecue, numerous benches and picnic tables, the village pond and the Village Hall car park. It owns and operates Medstead Cemetery and looks after St. Andrew's churchyard and the war memorial; it owns the allotments in Nelson Drive, the Sports Pavilion, the Parish Office, Five Ash pond and two further ponds, the Knapp woodland, Trinity Hill wildflower meadow, the bus stop in Green Stiles, and several litter bins on the village green which it empties fortnightly throughout the year.

The Council's responsibilities include dealing with any day to day problems that arise, regular maintenance, repairs, inspections, replacements and upgrades. Tasks are varied, ranging from regular weekly mowing right down to the less frequent safety inspections of every tree on Council land and every memorial in the graveyard. You probably won't be surprised that owning public infrastructure brings with it a raft of legal responsibilities to keep people and property safe.

The Council is also aware that humans are not the only species who use its land and it is committed to improving biodiversity.

The Parish Council has a legal right to be informed and consulted on planning applications within its parish and it has appointed a Planning Committee that diligently undertakes this role. Responses need to be objective and based on planning law in order to receive consideration by EHDC, but within these constraints, the Council strives to achieve the best outcomes for the village. It speaks at EHDC Planning Committee meetings whenever it gets the opportunity for the larger planning applications.

Given the level of speculative planning applications currently being targeted at the village, the Council is updating its Neighbourhood Plan, which is a joint effort with Four Marks Parish Council. This plan has a defined status within planning law and gives the Council some say on where new housing can be located.

The Council helps to give parish residents a voice and represent their views to higher tier local authorities, their MP, the Government and other public bodies. Some residents don't know where to turn and so come to the Parish Council to raise their concerns and issues. Sometimes it is simply a case of pointing them to the Council's website with lots of useful contact points. But some just need a little more support or they have had no success with other routes.

When appropriate, the Council has written to high tier local authorities on issues such as potholes, flooding, speeding and planning



⇨ Some of our assets are maintained by volunteers, e.g. the village pond and footpaths. If you want to help, email the Clerk.



⇨ You can see the Council's responses to planning application in its meeting minutes or on the EHDC Planning Portal



⇨ You can find information on the Medstead and Four Marks Neighbourhood Plan at: <https://fourmarksparishcouncil.gov.uk/neighbourhood-plan>



enforcement. We will not always achieve a successful outcome, but at least we know who to contact and can amplify resident's voices

The Council employs a Parish Clerk who deals with all the financial and administrative aspects of running the council, advises the Council on legal and procedural matters and liaises with the Council's contractors. The Council's Parish Office is based within the Sports Pavilion building in the Village Hall car park.

How does the Parish Council fund all this?

The primary source of income is the 'precept' - a tax that is levied as part of the Council tax paid by residents. The Council can also apply to EHDC for grant funding for specific projects and there is funding available from developers who build in the parish to help provide the infrastructure needed to support growth and deal with the impacts. The Council is spending your money on your behalf, so wants the wants to best understand people's priorities and is very happy for people to share ideas.

A Parish Council cannot just operate or spend money how it pleases. It is a corporate body created by legislation, and every discretionary power to act and every duty it must perform are defined by law. There are also strict laws to ensure that it operates in a transparent manner and is accountable to the public for the money it spends.

The Council must set a budget in the autumn each year to determine how much precept it needs to request the following year. The Council plans for longer term projects and manages risk by holding reserves, thus evening out variations between years when large investment are needed or major expenditure occurs unexpectedly. The Clerk also acts as the Responsible Financial Officer in managing the finances, controlling risk and ensuring good governance.

How does the Parish Council operate?

The Council can only make decisions on its actions and expenditure when Councillors come together at its public meetings. No individual Councillor has the power to make such decisions on their own. The Clerk must publish an agenda for these meetings several days in advance, posted on the Council's website and its noticeboards around the village. Any member of the public can attend these meetings, and residents of the parish are welcome to speak at the start of the meeting on matters relating to the Council's business.

The way business is transacted at each meeting must be in compliance with legislation and the Council's own rules and policies. After each meeting, the decisions that the Council agreed are documented within the minutes and published on the Council's website. The Council also publishes a wealth of other information, including its financial reports, policies and procedures and news.



⇨ You are welcome to come to the Parish Office to talk to the Clerk. It is always best to contact first to make sure it is a suitable time.



⇨ The Council is accountable for how it spends money. Decisions on spending are transparently made in public meetings and published in minutes. The annual Accounting Return is published each year on the website and noticeboards and the public are able to inspect the accounts.



⇨ The budget is available on the Council's [website](#).



⇨ The dates of meetings for the year are on our website and noticeboards, with detailed agendas added several days in advance of meetings. Minutes are also published on our website



What requirement must you meet to become a Councillor?

The following is a summarised check-list of the conditions that must be met. (There are a few nuances not covered here)

You must say YES to one of the following:

- You are a UK or Commonwealth Citizen
- You are a Citizen of the Republic of Ireland
- You are a qualifying EU Citizen

You must be over 18 years old

You must say YES to one of the following:

- You are a registered elector of the parish
- You have occupied any land or premises in the parish (ownership or tenancy) for the last 12 months
- Your main/only place of work in the last 12 months was in the Parish
- You have lived in or within 3 miles of the Parish in the last 12 months

You must NOT be disqualified for a range of reasons

- These include being employed by the Council, bankruptcy restrictions, electoral fraud, criminal conviction and sexual offences

You must be proposed and seconded by two electors of the parish

Make sure you register to vote

If you are not already registered to vote, you should do so at <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>.

The deadline for registering to vote in the 6th May 2027 local and unitary council elections is midnight on Monday 19th April 2027.

Things will be changing with Local Government Reorganisation

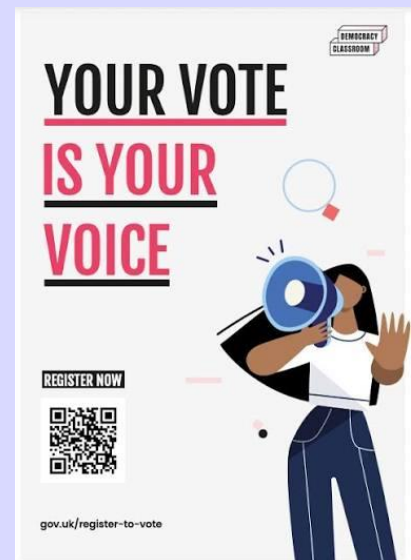
The UK government has announced a major restructuring of local government in Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, and Southampton, replacing the current 15 councils with five new unitary authorities by April 2028. This reorganization eliminates the two-tier county and district system to create larger councils.

Medstead Parish Council will be unaffected for residents, but will see changes to how it works with the next tier of Government. Information on the reorganisation and new council boundaries is available at <https://www.hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/governmentinhampshire/future-hampshire-solent/local-government-reorganisation>.

⇨ When vacancies for co-option become available they are detailed on the Council's website and noticeboards and Four Marks News and Medstead News Facebook sites..

⇨ For more information, the Council has a Councillor Vacancy and Co-Option Policy on its website.

⇨ Nearer to the time, details of how to put yourself forward for nomination for the May 2027 Parish Council election will be detailed on the website, noticeboards, Four Marks news magazine and Facebook pages.



Medstead Parish Council

Contact Details

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Medstead, GU34 5LG

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Tel: 07711 107378

Email: clerk@medsteadpc.org

Website: www.medsteadpc.org