

New Councillor  
Essentials





## Course Objectives

- ✓ Understand where your parish or town councils fits in the bigger picture of local government and who does what?
- ✓ Understand how local councils function and make decisions
- ✓ Understand what role you play as a councillor and what you are responsible for
- ✓ Understand the Clerks role for council
- ✓ Understand what guides your council in how it operates

# New Councillor Essentials



3

Structure for this session

Please feel free to ask questions at any point

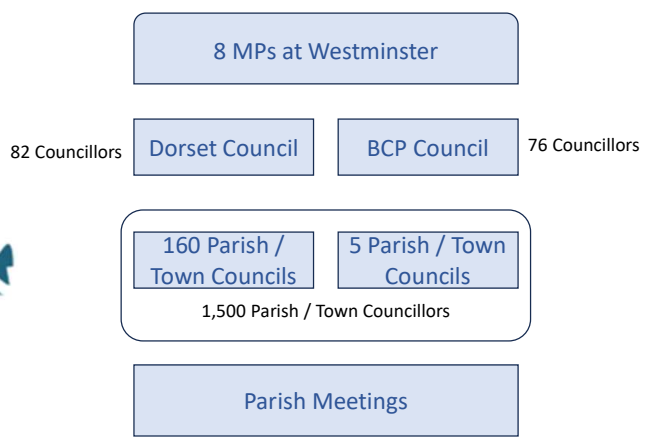
We will provide you with copy slides and other useful resources after the session

We will cover the topics on the slides



# 1. Local Government in Dorset

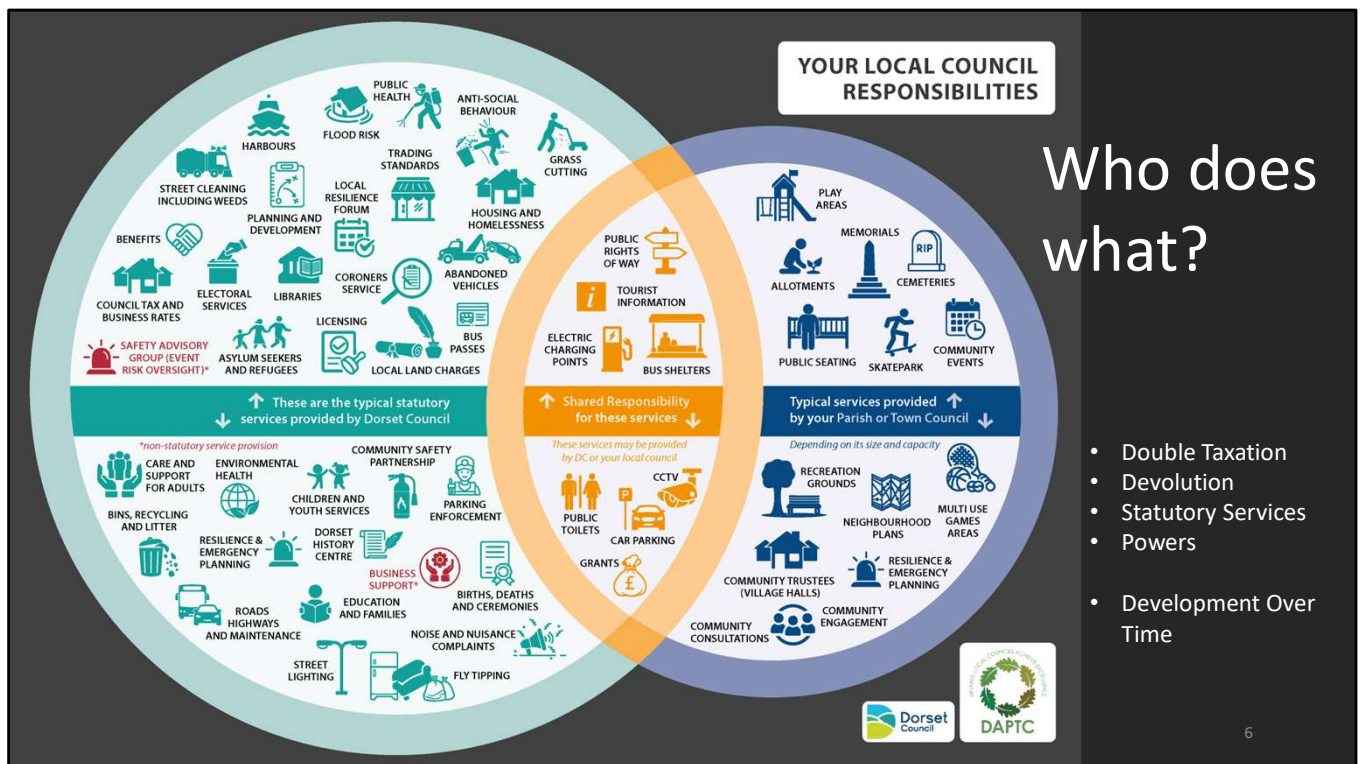
# Local Government in Dorset



5

Population in each unitary council is approx. 385,000

1500 parish and town councillors



One area of significant confusion is – who does what?

Difference between statutory services of a unitary council and the services provided by parish/town councils using powers which are discretionary

Central government don't want residents to have the unitary and towns/parishes collecting council tax to do the same thing

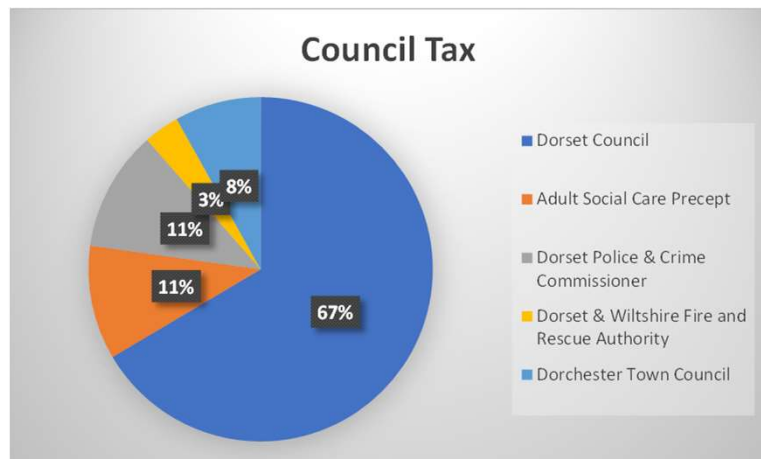
Unitary provides the large scale, more costly and complex services

Parish and towns work within their parish boundary on distinct services to improve the locality

This graphic is available for your councils to use and publish

# How are parishes and towns funded?

Dorset Council	£1,723.41
Adult Social Care	£277.74
Dorset PCC	£293.58
Dorset Wiltshire Fire	£86.95
Dorchester Town Council	£210.33
Band D Council Tax	£2,592.01



Do you know what your precept is?

7

This is how your council tax bill is made up

Part of it is attributable to your parish or town council

Always good to know what your Band D council tax amount is (most frequently occurring council tax band) – one useful for comparing other towns and parishes

Do any of you know what your precept is for 2024/25?

# How do councils arrive at their precept?

The parish council precept is a local tax levied by the parish council and collected by the district or unitary council as part of the council tax. Here's how it is typically calculated:

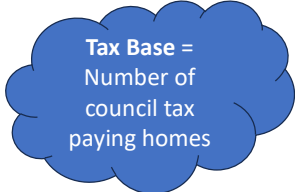
## Example Calculation

1. **Total Budget:** £100,000
2. **Expected Income:** £20,000 (building hire, events, markets, car parks, allotments)
3. **Net Funding Requirement:** **£80,000** (Total Budget less Expected Income = **Precept**)
4. **Tax Base:** 2,000 (households) Band D equivalents


**Precept per Band D Household:**  $£80,000 \div 2,000 = £40$

Each household in Band D would be charged **£40** for the year as part of their council tax bill. Charges for other bands would be proportionate (e.g., Band A would pay less, Band H would pay more).

This precept amount is then collected by the unitary council and passed on to the parish/town council to fund its activities for the year. **Paid in April and September.**



Tax Base =  
Number of  
council tax  
paying homes



£40/year =  
£0.77p per week  
(52) or  
£4.00 per council  
tax payment (10  
months)

8

Band D homes are in the middle of the council tax bands and are often the most in terms of household numbers – therefore when talking about increases and decreases it will resonate with more of your electorate.....unless of course you live on Sandbanks!

Explain how the precept is arrived at during the period when council budget – which is Autumn

Explain that sometimes % increases look very high but in reality when shown as £s is not what you would expect.

When communicating your precept change always explain it using Band D households and the £s amount rather than %

If you have a lot of development and you hold your precept at 0% - your share of the council tax payments will go down for households

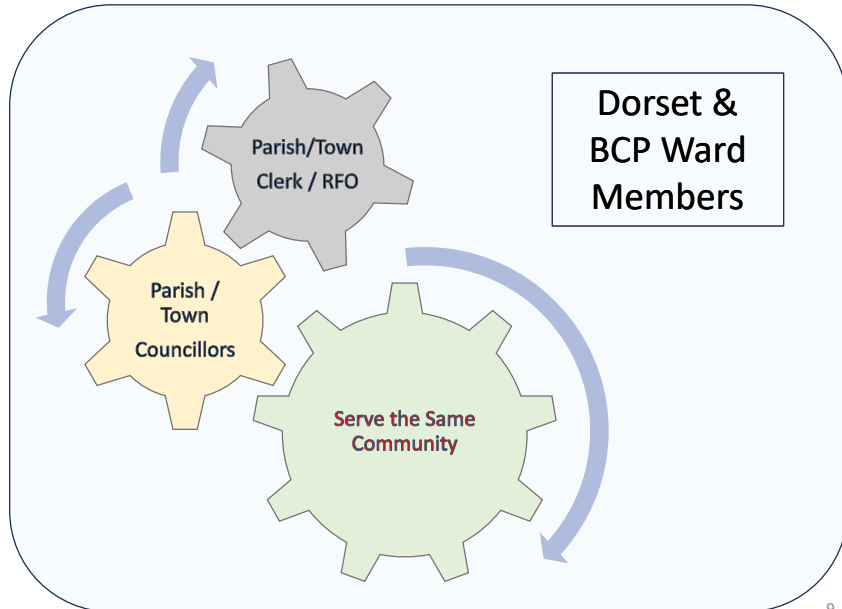


# Key relationships

Parish and town councils are often closest to their community and can offer unique insights into issues not obvious to their larger authority

They understand the local impact of projects and changes to services or changes deployed by the unitary council

**Critically** – both parish and town councils serve the same electorate / population / community as the unitary council



Don't burn bridges but do question your ward councillors and any other people that present or come to your council meetings



## 2. Your Role

New Councillor  
– First Meeting  
- First Year



## Plug and Play?



Jargon Busters

DOWNLOAD

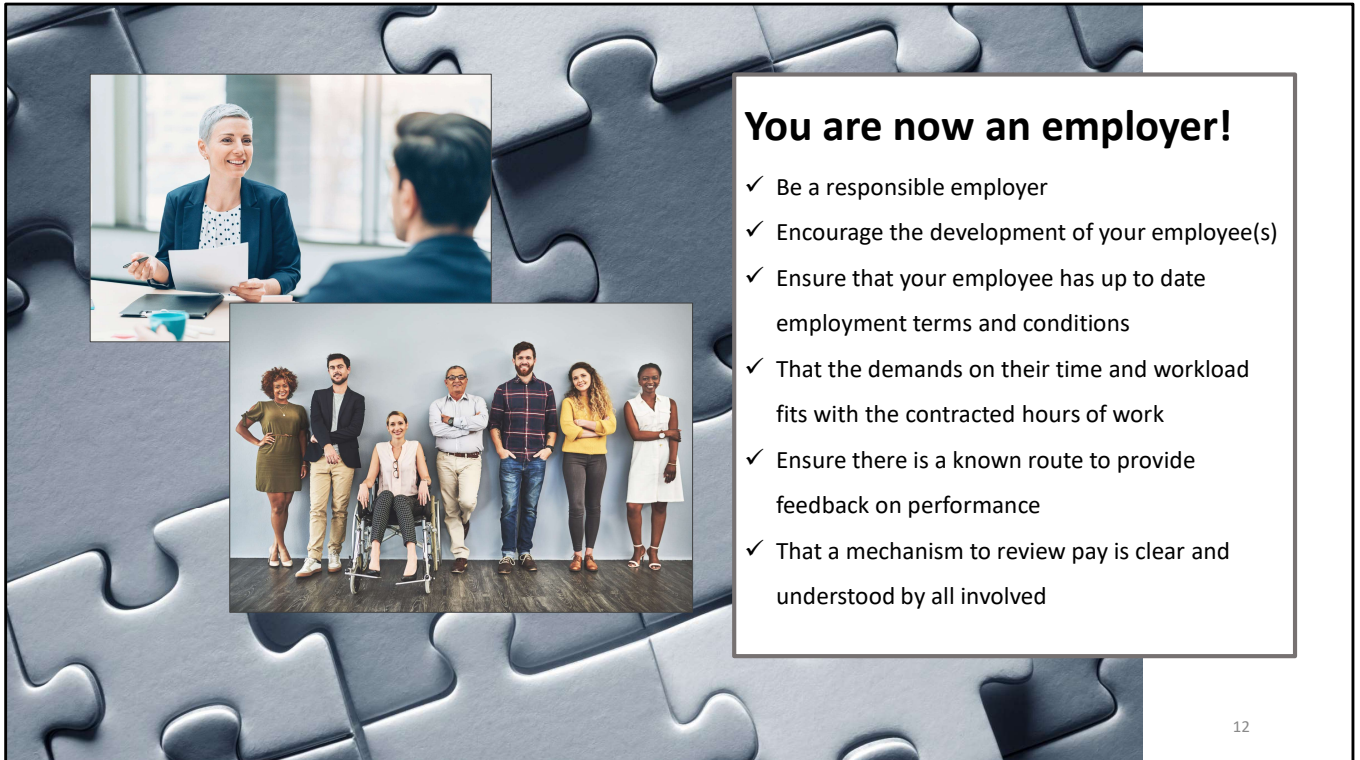
11

Resources: Jargon Busters generally and one specifically for planning

As a new councillor it is often difficult to understand or get up to speed on historic issues and context

Don't be afraid to ask questions and seek support from your clerk and fellow councillors – longstanding councillor often assume you know all the past history.

Of course you don't!



**You are now an employer!**

- ✓ Be a responsible employer
- ✓ Encourage the development of your employee(s)
- ✓ Ensure that your employee has up to date employment terms and conditions
- ✓ That the demands on their time and workload fits with the contracted hours of work
- ✓ Ensure there is a known route to provide feedback on performance
- ✓ That a mechanism to review pay is clear and understood by all involved

12

Very important aspect of becoming a new councillor

Unique circumstances – inverted triangle (most parish and town councils have significantly fewer employees than councillors)

In fact - probably 70% of our member councils have just one employee

That aside you have a duty of care to ensure that your employee(s) – are managed, looked after and trained to help support your community.

### Conduct standards to adhere to:

- ✓ Comply with Standards in Public Life which are centred on the 7 Nolan Principles
- ✓ Abide by the Code of Conduct adopted by your council
- ✓ Declare any interests in and outside of meetings
- ✓ Attend and prepare for meetings / committees
- ✓ Represent your council on outside bodies
- ✓ Ensure openness and transparency
- ✓ It's great to have strong views and robust debate – but it shouldn't become personal or aggressive
- ✓ Chair / Lead your council - should you be appointed



IN COLLABORATION WITH SLCC, NALC, OVW, COUNTY ASSOCIATIONS

13

As a councillor conduct is very important:

You need to adhere to the Nolan Principles (covered on our Standards in Public Life Course)

Prepare for meetings

Represent your councils

Stand up for openness / transparency and fairness

Respect for the chair

Be clear what action you need to take when you have an interest to declare



**It's not a political appointment for the vast majority of local councils:**

- ✓ Listen to the community you serve
- ✓ Help make decisions for the benefit of your community
- ✓ Councils perform better when they work collegiately and work well with their employee(s)

“there's no i in team”

14

Michael Jordan basketball quote

By far and away the most productive and impactful parish and town councils are the ones that can put aside political differences for the benefit of their community

It may necessitate occasionally eating humble pie on a topic you have strong views about

### What helps you be more effective in role?

- ✓ Work with your Clerk and officers
- ✓ Read the papers and agenda so you are prepared for meetings
- ✓ Ask questions if you are unclear
- ✓ Don't be too disheartened in Year 1 – everything makes more sense in Year2!
- ✓ **Attend training** – it can help you become more effective sooner

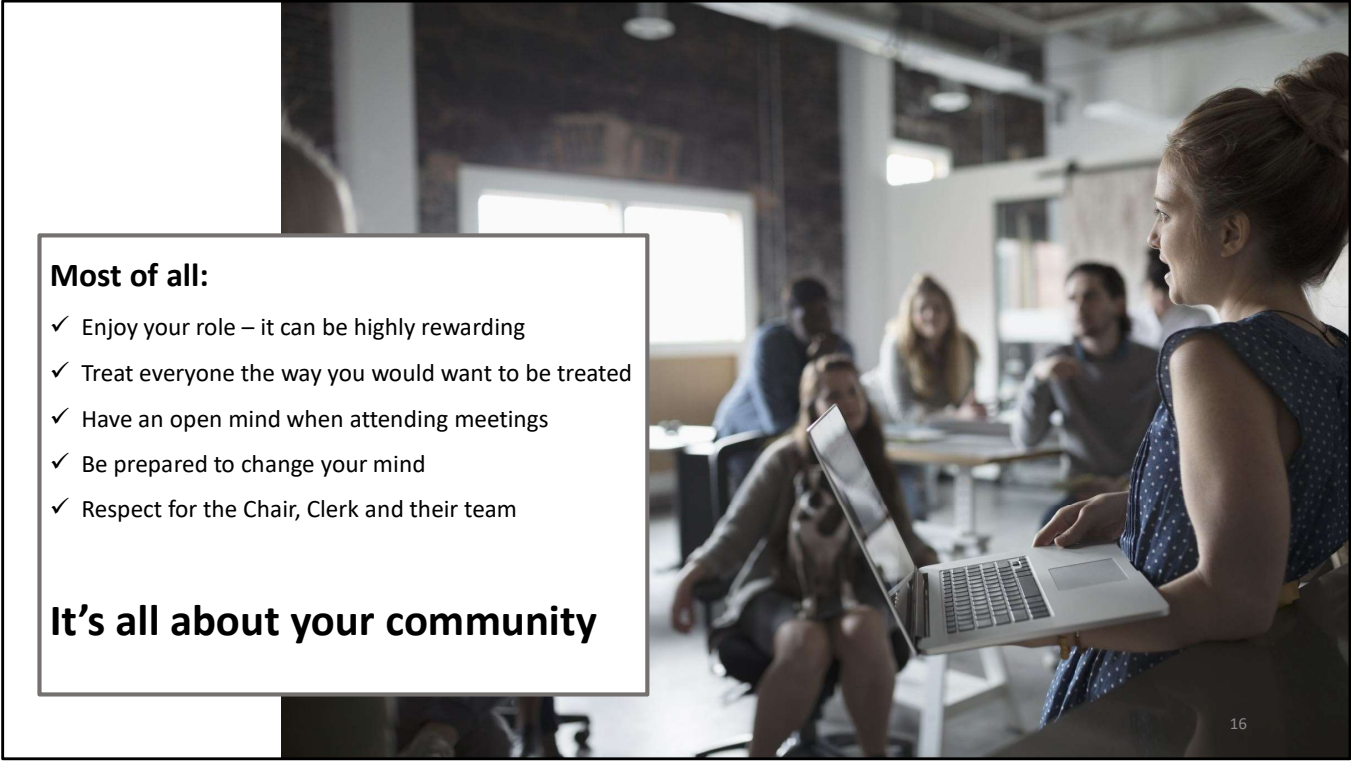


15

Establish a good work rapport with your clerk and any other employees

READ your meeting papers and agenda – don't use the meeting to ask loads of questions that could have been answered by reading your papers!

Training courses help give you more context and a broader understanding of what your councils can do



**Most of all:**

- ✓ Enjoy your role – it can be highly rewarding
- ✓ Treat everyone the way you would want to be treated
- ✓ Have an open mind when attending meetings
- ✓ Be prepared to change your mind
- ✓ Respect for the Chair, Clerk and their team

**It's all about your community**

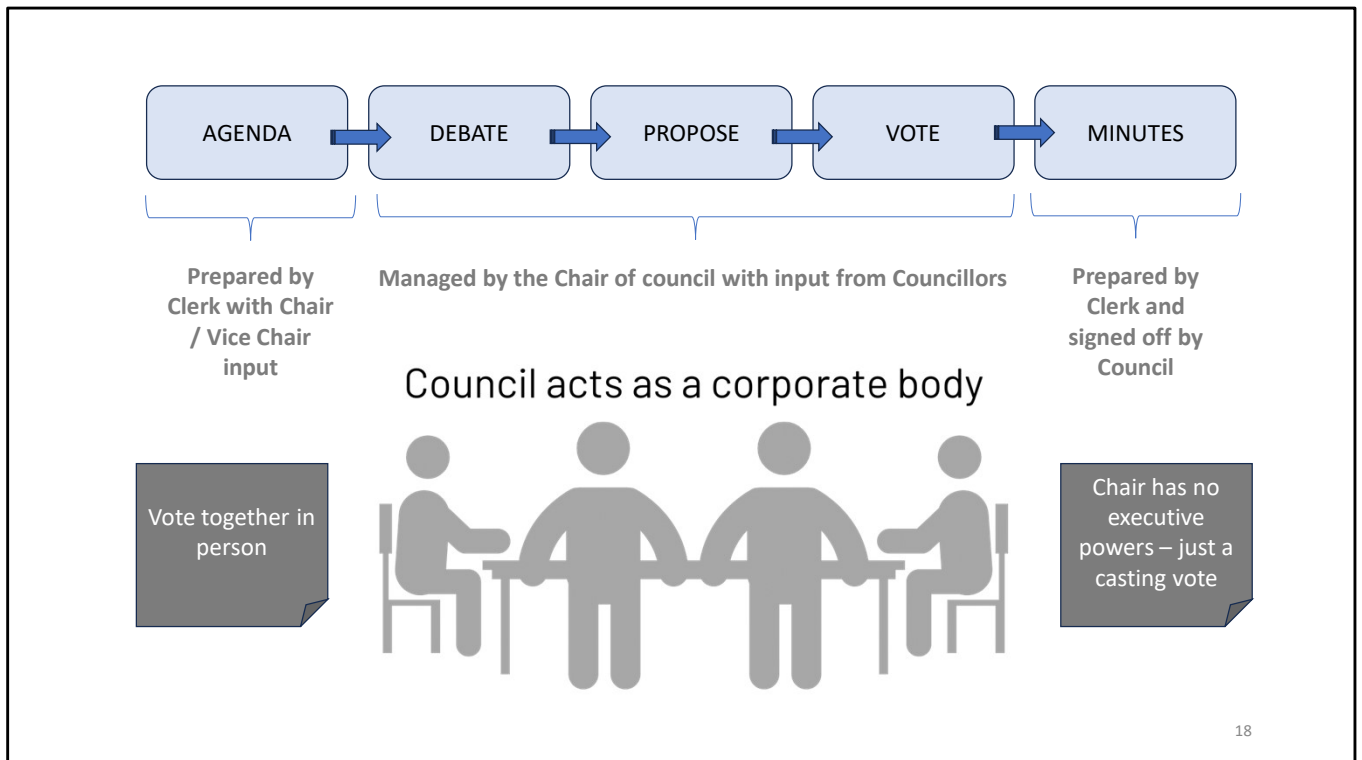
Make the most of your time as a councillor – both you and your community can benefit from you taking part



### 3. Making Decisions



This next section works through the simple headline approach to making decisions in council.



Council has a very simple way of executing decisions – but it can cause problems if not managed correctly.

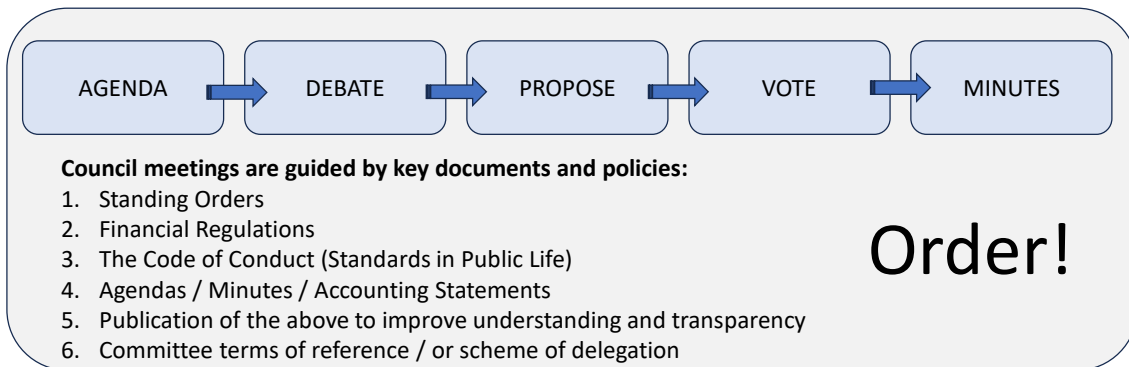
First rule for meetings of council – if a decision is required on a topic, it must be on the agenda which the Clerk prepares with input from the Chair/Vice Chair

For certain topics councillor may require a supporting paper/report with additional information to understand the options; this might include:

- Quotes if expenditure is needed
- Understanding of any risks
- Understanding any operational requirements for your employee(s)
- Understand when it will happen
- Understand any feedback if residents have been consulted

A debate ensues and once the topic has been explored the chair will ask someone to make a proposal, then vote and finally the Clerk will capture the agreed decision.

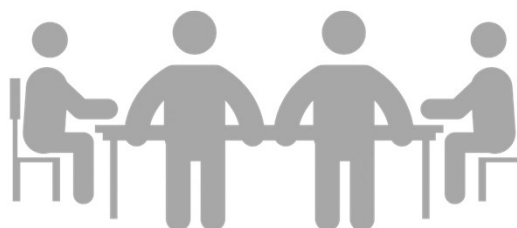
Everyone votes together on a show of hands – the only ‘executive’ power the chair has is to offer a casting vote if there is a tie



**Key roles in council:**

- ✓ Chair of Council
- ✓ Vice Chair of Council
- ✓ Committee Chairs & Vice Chairs
- ✓ Clerk (Proper Officer)
- ✓ Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)

Council acts as a corporate body



19

The meeting is controlled by Standing Orders – these are the rules by which meetings take place and decisions are reached

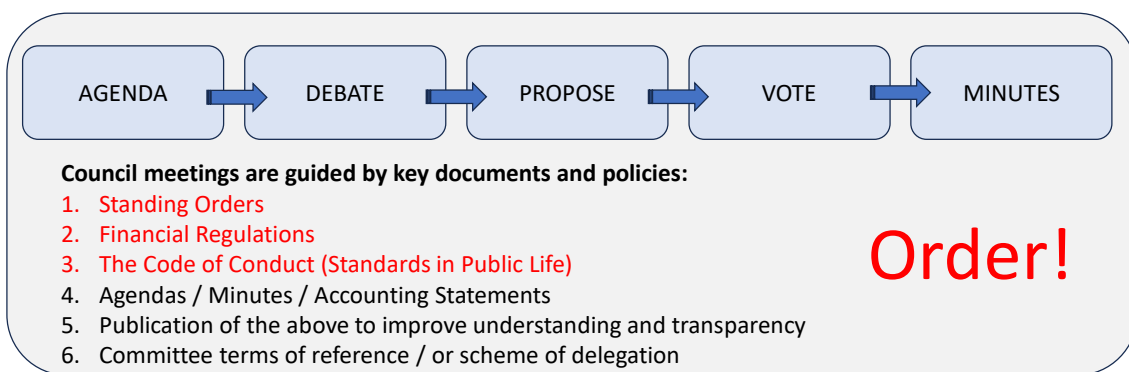
Financial Regulations are council’s guidance on how they spend and approve payments for council

In the event of an issue or concern about procedure – the Chair/Clerk will check the Standing Orders to ensure any decisions are lawful

Other key documents are The Code of Conduct which outlines how you must conduct yourself and also why you should declare any interests.

If you are involved in committees or your council has them – ask for copies as these explain the remit of the committee and importantly if it is an advisory committee or decision-making committee

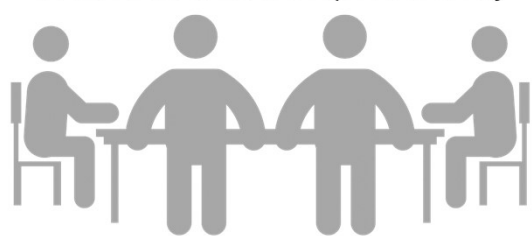
The minutes for council are the key lawful record of what has been approved or not.



**Key roles in council:**

- ✓ Chair of Council
- ✓ Vice Chair of Council
- ✓ Committee Chairs & Vice Chairs
- ✓ Clerk (Proper Officer)
- ✓ Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)
- ✓ Ward Member (unitary council)

Council acts as a corporate body



As new councillors the items highlighted in red are the key documents to read and the key roles to understand in terms of what they do for your council.

In practical terms how does this little fella benefit from what you do as a Councillor?

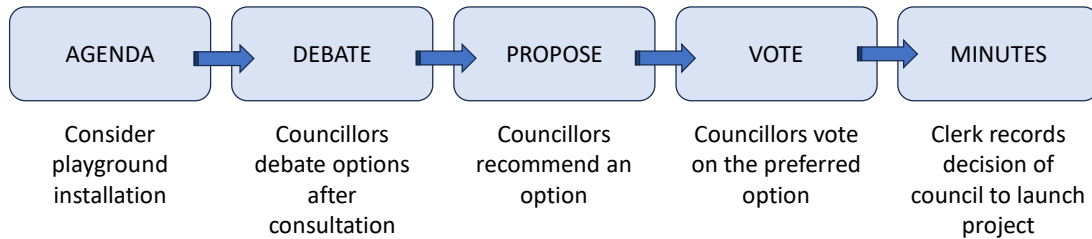
Let's look at an example of decision making in practice.....



21

Let's look at a practical example of how an item/project might come before your council and things that you as councillors might need to consider.

## Local democracy and decision making in action:



### Clerks / Officers role:

Ensures council has the power to act and spend money?

- ✓ Power to provide a wide range of recreational facilities
- ✓ Legislation: Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 S.19
- ✓ Ensures operationally the playground complies with Health & Safety Legislation
- ✓ Suitable public liability cover is in place
- ✓ Ensures it is maintained and serviced regularly
- ✓ Ensures inspections take place and are documented



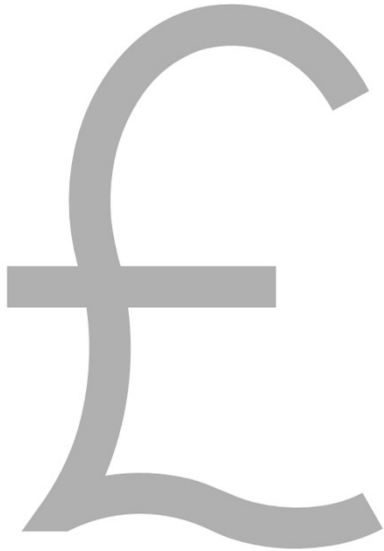
The example here is for a playground installation – a common item that may come before you in your council

The same rigorous process is followed and the information before you may include costs, operational matters and any consultation done with the community – don't forget to ask the youngster via their school or parents

It's important you are reassured by your clerk that operationally the play equipment will need to be:

- Added to your insurance
- Added to your asset register
- Inspected regularly to ensure still operating safely
- Maintained once or twice a year – whatever the installer recommends
- Have signage to explain correct use and where to report any issues

## What can you spend council tax on?



Parish and town councils do not have a raft of statutory duties like district or unitary councils. Instead, they have discretionary powers upon which they can spend council tax.

Page 87 – 91 Table of Powers that Parish and Town Councils can use



23

We provide you with a PDF file for the Good Councillor Guide

This is a simple and good read covering quite a bit of what I've touched on today

In addition, it explains what discretionary powers parish and town councils have – i.e. what you can spend money on and provide for your community

## The Financial Year



24

If finance isn't your thing – in parish and town councils it will make far more sense the second time around



# The Financial Year £

Month	Council Activity
1 April	New financial year
April	Internal Auditors Report to Council
May	Council completes Annual Governance & Accountability Return for public and External Auditors
June/July	Notice of Public Rights
Sept	External Auditors reply to AGAR submission
Oct/Dec	Budget preparation for next financial year
Jan	Precept submission to unitary council
Feb / Mar	Clerk/RFO prepares for financial year end which is 31 March



**During the year council get:**

- Financial updates at least quarterly sometimes at every monthly meeting
- Payments to be approved
- Processes they know (internal controls) and take part in to provide oversight on finances
- To hear how the community are kept informed about how their council tax is being spent

Council year is like many other workplace years

Based around finance activities and reporting plus requirements to plan for the next year



## 4. Council Support

## The Proper Officer

Your Parish or Town Clerk – holds the answers to a high proportion of your questions and queries – your working relationship with them is important



27

Really important relationship whilst a councillor

They can help:

Clarify

Guide

Be a source of information

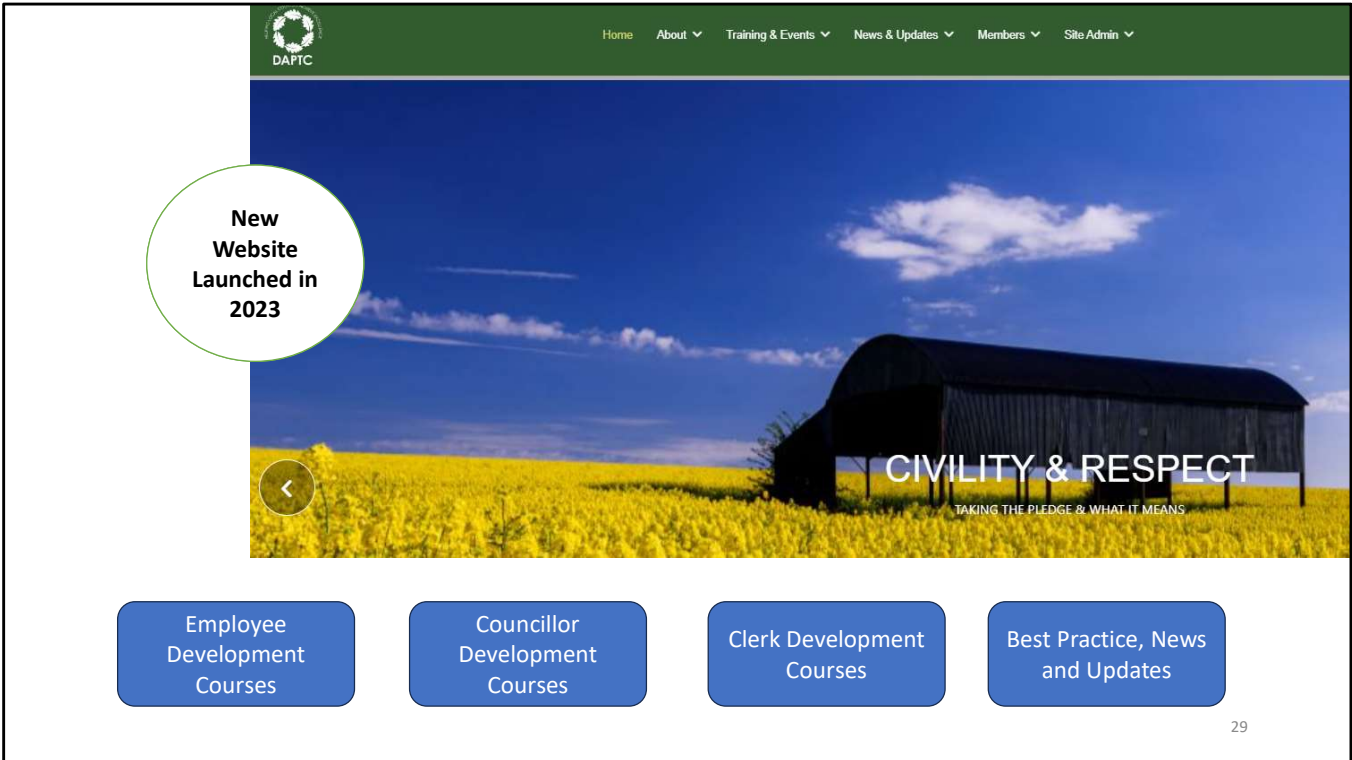
Check to make sure all has been decided correctly

They are supported by us and our national body, also their own professional membership association

- By email every Friday
- Subscribe direct
- Contribute features or news
- Latest national picture from NALC
- Updates and consultations from the Unitary Councils in Dorset



If you haven't signed up for the weekly e-news please do so



We organise our website for training purposes under these headings



# Quick Quiz Time

Q1

Which council tax band is commonly used by councils to explain how much their precept has gone up or down?

A. Band H

B. Band B

C. Band D

D. Band C

Q1

Which council tax band is commonly used by councils to explain how much their precept has gone up or down?

A. Band H

B. Band B

C. Band D

D. Band C



Q2

In your role of Councillor which of the following employee related matters are you responsible for?

- A. Training and development
- B. Appraisals
- C. Welfare and duty of care in the workplace
- D. All of the above

Q2

In your role of Councillor I am now responsible for the following employee related matters?

A. Training and development

B. Appraisals

C. Welfare and duty of care in the workplace

D. All of the above

Q3

Which document for your councils do the Clerk and Chair of Council use to ensure decision making is compliant and lawful?

- A. The Code of Conduct
- B. Financial Regulations
- C. Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR)
- D. Standing Orders

35

Q3

Which document for your councils do the Clerk and Chair of Council use to ensure decision making is compliant and lawful?

- A. The Code of Conduct
- B. Financial Regulations
- C. Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR)
- D. **Standing Orders**

Q4

During which time in the year do parish and town councils discuss and set their budgets?

- A. New Year
- B. Autumn
- C. Summer
- D. Spring

Q4

During which time in the year do parish and town councils discuss and set their budgets?

- A. New Year (if you are late!)
- B. Autumn
- C. Summer
- D. Spring

Q5

Which weekday does DAPTC's e-news get published?

- A. Monday
- B. Tuesday
- C. Friday
- D. Wednesday

Q5

Which weekday does DAPTC's e-news get published?

A. Monday

B. Tuesday

C. Friday and have you signed up?

D. Wednesday





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TRAINING

Q U E S T I O N S