

# BARTON UNDER NEEDWOOD PARISH COUNCIL

## Guide for new Councillors

### Read in Conjunction with:

[Policies - Barton Under Needwood Parish Council \(bartonunderneedwood-pc.gov.uk\)](http://bartonunderneedwood-pc.gov.uk)

## **BARTON UNDER NEEDWOOD 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 Barton under Needwood Parish Council.

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 our website. If you require a paper copy, please ask the Clerk.

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

Barton under Needwood Parish Council is made up of 11 Councillors and employs a Clerk who is also the Responsible Financial Officer, a groundsman and two village lengthsman. The Annual Parish Council Meeting is held in May at which the Members elect a Chairman and Vice Chairman and appoint the Council's committees and representatives.

If 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 East Staffordshire Borough Council.

Committees are Finance, Planning, Human Resources, Allotments, Burial Ground, Parks & Open Spaces and Village Enhancement. Councillors are also represented on outside bodies such as the Village Hall, Holland Sports Club, Newbold & Barton Quarries and Barton & Dunstall Key Trust.

**The Chairman of the Council is an ex-officio member of all committees.**

### **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 judgment 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 they are appointed to and the projects with which they get involved. All Councillors are given the opportunity to attend relevant training courses as they become available. 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 but may request one ream of paper annually from the Clerk.

**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.

**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 is also the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), although this is not a legal requirement.

The Village Hall, Crowberry Lane, Barton under Needwood, DE13 8AF is the official address of Barton under Needwood Parish Council, although the Clerk is authorised to work at home outside of office opening hours.

### **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:** The current Clerk holds a 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 28 hours per week. Salaries are paid according to national NALC/SLCC agreed salary scales.

## PROCEDURES

**Meetings:** The Parish Council holds 12 Full Council meetings per year usually the first Thursday of the month.

The Annual Parish Meeting, which is a public meeting, chaired by the Council Chairman is held in April. This meeting provides the opportunity to hear the Chairman's report, Financial Report. Invited members of local voluntary groups are also encouraged to provide an update on their activities.

The Finance Committee meets quarterly to review finances, budget and recommend the precept. Planning Committee meets fortnightly subject to applications received. Other Committees meet regularly according to ongoing activities to be discussed.

**Format for Meetings:** Full Parish Council meetings are held at the Village Hall, usually on the first Thursday of 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, a resolution to exclude public and press may be proposed. Public Participation is allowed at the start of the meeting.

**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 by email, to all Councillors 3 full days prior to the meeting excluding Sundays. 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 the village noticeboards and the Council's website. 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 East Staffordshire Borough 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 practice 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 Town/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 final version ratified at Full Council. Paper copies are available from the 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.

### **Planning Committee:**

The work of considering local planning applications is delegated to the Planning Committee. Minutes of these meetings are provided for all Members, and significant actions/decisions reported by the Committee Chair to the next Full Council Meeting. If the Chairman considers a matter of sufficient import/contention, he may refer a matter for consideration by Full Council.

### **Parks & Open Spaces Committee**

This Committee is responsible for the maintenance and safety of play equipment, recreation grounds, grounds maintenance and the fishpond. Minutes of these meetings are provided for all Members, and significant actions/decisions reported by the Committee Chair to the next Full Council Meeting.

### **Burial Ground Committee**

This Committee is responsible for the maintenance and administration of the parish burial ground. Minutes of these meetings are provided for all Members, and significant actions/decisions reported by the Committee Chair to the next Full Council Meeting. If the Chairman considers a matter of sufficient import/contention, he may refer a matter for consideration by Full Council

### **Allotments Committee**

This Committee is responsible for the maintenance and administration of the allotments at Efflinch Lane. Minutes of these meetings are provided for all Members, and significant actions/decisions reported by the Committee Chair to the next Full Council Meeting. If the Chairman considers a matter of sufficient import/contention, he may refer a matter for consideration by Full Council

## **FINANCIAL REGULATIONS**

The Council's financial procedures are regulated by an Annual Governance and Accountability Statement, its Finance Regulations and the Parish Council's Financial Standing Orders. Internal and External Audits are carried out following each year end of 31<sup>st</sup> March.

**Bank:** Barton Parish Council hold bank accounts with Lloyds 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 investment with National Savings & Investments. Every payment is approved and confirmed by at least two councillors. Each cheque needs the signature of the Clerk and that of two other Councillors.

**Income:** The bulk of the council's income comes from the 'Precept'. This is the amount requested from the Borough Council by the Parish Council and is determined by the 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 through burial ground fees, allotment and other rents, plus any fundraising/successful grant bids.

**Accounting:** The Parish Council accounts are a computerised Receipts and Payments cash book system. The Clerk/RFO is responsible for meeting with the Council's Internal Auditor twice yearly. 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 and notices of the public's right to examination of the accounts are displayed on our website and in the village noticeboards

at the appropriate times.

Copies of the Council's Annual Accounts are available upon request.

**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. In addition, the Council appoints a Finance Chairman, who also carries out regular inspections of the monthly accounts.

**Insurance:** The Council holds an insurance policy, currently with BHIB Insurance - the main summary of cover as follows:

Public Liability:	£10,000,000
Employer's liability:	£10,000,000
Personal Accident:	£100,000 Employees & Cllrs
Libel and Slander:	£250,000

Any Business, undertaking work for the Council, is required to hold its own public liability insurance.

## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT**

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. Councillors are advised to use the bartonunderneedwood-pc.gov.uk email account provided by the Council.

## **VILLAGE HALL**

Barton under Needwood Parish Council as a corporate body, is the Sole trustee of Barton Village Hall, Charity No. 502046. There is no individual liability.

Meetings of the Trustee of Barton Village Hall are held quarterly. All Councillors are expected to attend these meetings.

***Barton under Needwood Parish Council is affiliated to Staffordshire Parish Council Association of Local Councils and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), from which we can obtain information and legal advice, when required. The Clerk is a member of the Society of Local Council Clerks.***