

Representing Your Ward

Making the transition to representing the interests of a wide community, as opposed to expressing personal views, can be challenging. Below are some ways in which you can represent your local ward.

Ward Committees

The council has established a ward committee for every ward in York, consisting of elected members. Each ward committee receives support from a Neighbourhood Manager, and in consultation with local residents, has a local budget to spend. This can be used to pay for extra council services, local projects or to attract other funding into the area.

A ward committee always meets in public four times a year, allowing local residents to:

- find out more about local services
- put forward views about local issues
- find solutions to local problems
- help make council and other services work better for the benefit of the whole neighbourhood

A leaflet called 'Your Ward' is delivered to every house in the ward, four times a year, telling residents about the next ward meeting and inviting them to take part. The leaflet also contains local news and information.

As a ward committee member, you will have delegated powers to take decisions which improve the quality of life and the environment in your ward. Each ward committee produces a Neighbourhood Action Plan which identifies the needs of a neighbourhood, highlights specific local issues, and provides a planned approach to tackling these in conjunction with the community and service providers. Upto date information on the work of individual ward committees and their action plans, can be found at http://www.york.gov.uk/council/Wards/02ward_meetings/

Ward Surgeries

People expect to be able to contact their councillor and the traditional way of meeting constituents is through the use of surgeries. Many councillors hold their surgeries before or after their ward committee meetings. You may wish to discuss with your Neighbourhood Manager how best to arrange your surgeries. There is a budget available for venue hire in relation to councillor surgeries, please forward any invoices for this to Member Services.

Street Surveys

Street Surveys can give you an additional method to find out people's views on topics that affect them. You could cold call on an area and find out if the local residents have a problem or a view that you can help them with, or do a leaflet drop, leaving a leaflet

for the resident to fill in which you can call back for later. This also gives you the opportunity to leave them your contact details should the need arise in the future. Street surveys not only benefit the public but give you, as a councillor, a better understanding of what issues are affecting your community. This will enable you to speak with authority on issues that affect not only individual constituents, but the area as a whole.

Dealing with Casework

The problems and issues people raise with councillors are known as casework. Casework can be distinguished by the fact that it deals with the resolution of a specific problem, and it may come to light through surgeries, letters, phone calls, emails, responses to leaflets and door-knocking.

Dealing with Enquiries

Queries can come from all directions – most will be from your own constituents but from time to time you will also be approached by Parish and Town Councillors or by the Press, wanting to know more about something that is happening in your area.

If you are unsure about who does what or the procedure to follow, please refer to another Councillor or a relevant officer before promising anything – you, and the council, might lose credibility if you have to backtrack even over the simplest of things.

Complaints Handling

From time to time, you may get a constituent coming to you with a comment or a complaint about the way they have been dealt with by the council or about the standard of service they have received. This can include anything from a planning application, benefit claim or even a noise complaint, which they think has not been dealt with properly. Very often the public think that if they get a councillor involved, they will be able to change the outcome.

Keep yourself detached, listen to what they have to say and then find out what action the council has taken or is in the process of taking. Remember, there are always two sides to every story and what you need to identify is whether the correct procedures have been followed and that the member of the public has been dealt with in a courteous and professional manner.

The council has recently updated its Customer Feedback Policy to ensure that all comments/complaints/suggestions are dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner. For further information, go to:

http://www.york.gov.uk/council/Corporate_complaints/Comments_complaints/1How_was_it_for_you/

All Councillors can register problems, enquiries, complaints etc via an electronic **Councillor 'Self Serve' Portal**. This allows you to submit, and monitor issues arising in your ward, and track the council's progress in responding to those issues. Further information on using the portal is contained within your induction pack and specific training can be provided.

If you find you have exhausted all avenues in trying to address an issue in your ward, you can raise a 'Councillor Call for Action' (CCfA). For further information on this, go to:

<http://modgov.york.gov.uk/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD1143&ID=1143&RPID=3094737&sch=doc&cat=13028&path=13028>

Parish Councils

What are Parish Councils?

Parish and town councils in England and community and town councils in Wales are the first tier of local government. They deliver a vast range of services at a community level. There are around 10,000 community, parish and town councils in England and Wales, made up of nearly 100,000 councillors. These first-tier councils can respond to the needs of the community – delivering the services or representation it most needs. Typically, parish and town councils maintain local amenities such as recreational areas, footpaths and cemeteries. The parish council also has consultancy roles in road and planning applications. There are 31 local/parish councils in York and many council wards share their boundaries with them.

Funding Arrangements

Parish councils receive their funds by levying a precept on the council tax paid by their electors. The amount levied is set by the parish or town council itself, and depends on the services it provides. In addition to council tax, some parishes receive income from interest rates, sales, fees and charges, capital receipts and borrowing.

Parish Council Charter

York's Parish Councils and City of York Council have agreed a charter that sets out how they will work together. This charter is the result of discussions across York to establish improved ways of working and to confirm existing good practice. Formally reviewed after three years, the Charter:

- includes a commitment to the principles of democratic local government.
- acknowledges and recognises that parish and town councils are the grass roots level of local government. By working with local and parish councils City of York council aims to act in partnership with local communities, while balancing the needs of the wider locality.
- recognises that local councils offer a means of shaping the decisions that affect their communities and of revitalizing or sustaining local communities. In turn, local councils recognise the strategic role of the principal council and the equitable distribution of services which it has to achieve.

It is a good idea to keep in touch with your local parish councillors to appreciate their views on any forthcoming issues in your ward, which the Council may be dealing with.