

Role of the Parish Clerk

History

In 1439, Symkyn Birches was the first awarded the office of "Toun Clerk" of Coventry for the rest of his life and the position became commonplace as local government developed throughout England and Wales.

In 1835 the Municipal Corporations Act required every borough council to appoint a salaried Town Clerk. The position of Clerk was further consolidated by the Local Government Acts of 1888 and 1894 which granted, respectively, County Councils and then Urban and Rural Districts and the newly created civil parish councils the specific power to appoint a "Clerk of the Council".

The importance of the Clerk's position was underlined by Lord Justice Caldecote ruling in *Hurle-Hobbs ex parte Riley* and another (1944) observed: "The office of town clerk is an important part of the machinery of local government. He may be said to stand between the local Council and the ratepayers. He is there to assist by his advice and action the conduct of public affairs in the borough and, if there is a disposition on the part of the council, still more on the part of any member of the council, to ride roughshod over his opinions, the question must at once arise as to whether it is not his duty forthwith to resign his office or, at any rate, to do what he thinks right and await the consequences."

There has been much discussion that the title Clerk does not properly reflect their important managerial role. Even in the smallest parish council, it is often thought "clerk" suggests a secretary with some admin skills and does not reflect the many other roles the modern parish council officer must fulfil including legal and financial advisor, publicity officer, event's organiser, staff supervisor etc. As a result there is a growing use of other titles such as Council Manager and Executive Officer.

Becoming a Clerk to a Parish or Town Council is one of the most rewarding jobs in a local community - a competent Clerk underpins a good Council. The role of Clerk is to ensure that the Council as a whole conducts its business properly and to provide independent, objective and professional advice and support. Being a Clerk puts you in the centre of things Parish Councils are part of local government District/ Borough councils.

The County Council is responsible for strategic services such as highways, education, libraries social services, strategic planning and refuse disposal.

District councils are responsible for local services including housing, local planning and refuse collection.

The Parish and Town councils in the county are often viewed as the part of government closest to the people. They are the only local government tier that represents residents at parish level.

Importantly Parish Councils can "Precept" - raising a council tax each year to improve facilities and services for local people.

All Parish Council meetings are open to the public. They are led by the Council's Chairman and advised by the Clerk who is there to see that business is conducted within the law.

A job description will always list the duties in detail but here's a useful summary:

- ensures that the council conducts its business lawfully
- administers all the council's paperwork
- ensures that meeting papers are properly prepared, that the public is aware of meeting times and that agendas and minutes are published within the guidelines

- implements the council's decisions
- oversees the implementation of projects
- supervises staff (if any)
- keeps property registers and other legal documents
- keeps up to date by training /qualification

It is very important to understand that being a Clerk to a Parish or Town Council is a job not a spare time activity - even if it takes only a few hours each week to do.

EPPC operates nationally recognised rates of pay and conditions. You have a clear job description, a contract of employment and pay in accordance with national rates for the size of council

Skills and attributes needed include a good deal of common sense, confidence to handle the administrative work, being a good organiser, IT literate and able to get on with most people. Underwriting these qualities is a sense of public duty - of wanting to help others in the community.

The job is no different from large to small councils. What is different however is the amount of time needed to deal with the volume of business. For small parishes this need be only a few hours each week while for the larger councils it could be a full time commitment. EPPC falls somewhere in the middle at an average of 30 hours per week.

Most council meetings are held 'out of hours' so being a part time clerk is not just a daytime activity.

Various courses are available and a lot of learning will take place on the job during meetings at Borough and County level and through courses run by KALC and SLCC where you will meet other clerks and start to get answers to the many questions you will have. Further opportunities include structured training and study, leading, if you choose, to degree level qualification. You can then go on to complete the nationally recognised Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA). EPPC requires that the Clerk obtains this qualification as a condition of employment.

CILCA - Certificate in Local Council Administration

The National Training Strategy has developed a customised qualification for the sector, the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA). This core skills qualification is awarded to those who submit a portfolio of evidence, within 24 months of registering, demonstrating the skills they have in local council administration.

The East Peckham Parish Council Clerk

Meetings (Monthly except August)

- Meetings of Planning & Transportation Committee (Usually 1st Monday)
- Full Meeting of the Council (Usually 3rd Monday)
- Agendas prepared and distributed 10 days before meeting date. Distribute to members, notice board, website, county councillor, borough councillors, PCSO, Community Warden
- Meeting briefing notes prepared in advance of full council meetings and distributed to members

Planning & Transportation Committee

- Provided the committee is quorate (one third of membership) not necessary for all members to also be committee members, deals with all planning, transportation and highways issues

Finance Committee

- Meetings held in January (Precept Setting) and May (Approval of Accounts and Annual Return)
- All members are committee members

Software

EPPC uses word, Avalon booking software and Scribe Accounting Software

Staff/Contractors

Paid Staff Parish Clerk
 Litter Warden

Contractors Jubilee Hall Janitorial Team
 Village Churchyard and Maintenance
 Playing Field Maintenance
 Jubilee Hall Maintenance

The Clerks Year (tasks not an exhaustive list)

January

- Finance Committee Meeting – Committee considers precept and makes recommendation to full council (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Planning & Transpiration Committee Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Full Council Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Formal approval of precept at full council meeting
- Prepare December bank reconciliation
- Input payments and receipts onto Scribe
- Prepare invoices for Jubilee Hall Hire
- Bank January's receipts
- Credit receipts against appropriate invoice
- Prepare members meeting briefing notes
- Compile monthly newsletter
- Update web
- Annual Review of hall hire charges
- Submit Quarter 3 Refund of VAT
- Prepare Quarter 3 Budgetary Control Statement
- Confirm the recipients of the council's annual awards – KALC Community Award and the councils community engagement award
- Prepare payments for approval

February

- Finalise Annual Report
- Planning & Transpiration Committee Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Full Council Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Prepare January bank reconciliation
- Input payments and receipts onto Scribe
- Prepare invoices for Jubilee Hall Hire
- Bank Februarys receipts
- Credit receipts against appropriate invoice
- Prepare members meeting briefing notes
- Compile monthly newsletter
- Update web
- Confirm date for Independent Internal Audit
- Prepare payments for approval
- Consider grants/donations to non-East Peckham groups and organisations received during the year

March

- Planning & Transpiration Committee Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Full Council Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Prepare February bank reconciliation
- Input payments and receipts onto Scribe
- Prepare invoices for Jubilee Hall Hire
- Bank March's receipts
- Credit receipts against appropriate invoice
- Prepare end of year budgetary control statement
- Council agrees meeting dates for year ahead
- Prepare members meeting briefing notes
- Compile monthly newsletter
- Update web
- Organise Annual Meeting
- Gather in trophy's and make arrangements for them to be engraved for the new award recipients, Billy Can Trophy's x2, Parish Council Community Engagement Award & Garden Competition
- Half yearly review of Risk Assessments, Financial Regulations and Standing Orders
- Prepare payments for approval

April

- Organise Annual Meeting, including venue, refreshments, guest speakers, prizes for award winners and event feedback form etc. (minutes, actions)
- Prepare end of year accounts, Annual Return, supporting notes, end of year bank reconciliation and budgetary control statement
- Planning & Transpiration Committee Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Full Council Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Input payments and receipts onto Scribe
- Prepare invoices for Jubilee Hall Hire
- Bank April's receipts
- Credit receipts against appropriate invoice
- Prepare members meeting briefing notes
- Compile monthly newsletter
- Update web
- Submit Quarter 4 VAT Return to claim refund
- Prepare payments for approval

May

- Finance Committee Meeting – Committee considers Receipts & Payments Account, yearend Bank Reconciliation, supporting notes and Sections 1 & 2 of Annual Return (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Prepare for Independent Internal Audit
- Submit Annual Return to External Auditor
- Planning & Transpiration Committee Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Annual Meeting of the Parish Council (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Election of Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Chairman of Planning & Transportation Committee
- Prepare April bank reconciliation
- Input payments and receipts onto Scribe
- Prepare invoices for Jubilee Hall Hire
- Bank May receipts
- Prepare members meeting briefing notes
- Compile monthly newsletter
- Update web
- Prepare payments for approval

June

- Planning & Transpiration Committee Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Full Council Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Prepare May bank reconciliation
- Input payments and receipts onto Scribe
- Prepare invoices for Jubilee Hall Hire
- Bank June's receipts
- Credit payments receipts against appropriate invoice
- Prepare members meeting briefing notes
- Compile monthly newsletter
- Update web
- Prepare payments for approval

July

- Planning & Transpiration Committee Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Full Council Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Prepare June's bank reconciliation
- Submit Quarter 1 Refund of VAT
- Prepare Quarter 1 Budgetary Control Statement
- Input payments and receipts onto Scribe
- Prepare invoices for Jubilee Hall Hire
- Bank July receipts
- Credit payments receipts against appropriate invoice
- Prepare members meeting briefing notes
- Compile monthly newsletter
- Update web
- Annual review of allotment charges
- Renewal documentation sent to allotment holders
- Prepare payments for approval
- Confirm delegation of powers for summer recess

August

- No meetings
- Prepare July bank reconciliation
- Input payments and receipts onto Scribe
- Prepare invoices for Jubilee Hall Hire
- Bank August receipts
- Credit payments receipts against appropriate invoice
- Compile monthly newsletter
- Update web
- Commence work on budget for following year
- Commence work on Annual Report
- Review and update Councils strategic documents, policies and procedures
- Arrange tree safety audit and annual ROSPA inspection of outdoor equipment
- Prepare payments for approval

September

- Planning & Transpiration Committee Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Full Council Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Prepare August bank reconciliation
- Input payments and receipts onto Scribe
- Prepare invoices for Jubilee Hall Hire
- Bank September receipts
- Credit payments receipts against appropriate invoice
- Prepare members meeting briefing notes

- Compile monthly newsletter
- Update web
- Prepare payments for approval
- Order 2 x Poppy Wreaths

October

- Planning & Transpiration Committee Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Full Council Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Annual Meeting of Allotment Holders with the Allotment Panel
- Prepare September bank reconciliation
- Submit Quarter 2 Refund of VAT
- Prepare Quarter 2 Budgetary Control Statement
- Input payments and receipts onto Scribe
- Prepare invoices for Jubilee Hall Hire
- Bank October receipts
- Credit payments receipts against appropriate invoice
- Prepare members meeting briefing notes
- Compile monthly newsletter
- Update web
- Confirm guest speakers for the Annual Parish Meeting
- Half yearly review of Risk Assessments, Financial Regulations and Standing Orders
- Prepare payments for approval

November

- Planning & Transpiration Committee Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Full Council Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Prepare October bank reconciliation
- Input payments and receipts onto Scribe
- Prepare invoices for Jubilee Hall Hire
- Bank October receipts
- Credit payments receipts against appropriate invoice
- Prepare members meeting briefing notes
- Compile monthly newsletter
- Update web
- Next year's budget should be at advanced preparation stage
- Prepare payments for approval
- Consider annual donation to Royal British Legion

December

- Planning & Transpiration Committee Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Full Council Meeting (agenda, minutes, actions)
- Prepares November bank reconciliation
- Input payments and receipts onto Scribe
- Prepare invoices for Jubilee Hall Hire
- Bank December receipts
- Credit payments receipts against appropriate invoice
- Prepare members meeting briefing notes
- Compile monthly newsletter
- Update web
- Annual Report should be in advanced preparation stage
- Prepare payments for approval