

Parish Councils vs Parish Meetings

(information provided by Gloucestershire Association of Parish & Town Councils)

In areas across England, civil parishes are governed either by a *Parish or Town Council* or, in the smallest parishes, by a *Parish Meeting*. Both are part of the first tier of local government but have distinct structures and powers.

Feature	Parish/Town Council	Parish Meeting
Legal Status	Statutory body with corporate status	Not a corporate body
Established By	Local Government Act 1894	Same Act (for parishes with <200 electors)
Governance	Elected councillors (minimum five members)	Electorate meet as a body; chaired by elected chair
Elections	Held every 4 years; members must stand or be co-opted	Chair elected annually by electors
Meetings	Regular formal meetings throughout the year	At least two per year; open to all electors
Precepting Power	Can set and raise a precept via Council Tax	Can also precept, though usually very modest
Duties and Powers	Full range of statutory duties (e.g. s137, GPC*)	Limited to functions outlined in LGA 1972, s.13
Employment of Clerk	Must appoint a Proper Officer (Clerk)	May appoint a clerk; not required
Use of General Power of Competence (GPC)	Available if eligible and resolved by Council	Not applicable
Use of Committees	May delegate to committees, sub-committees, or officers	No delegation powers; decisions made by meeting
Transparency Code	Must comply with statutory Transparency Code	Only partially applies; generally exempt unless handling money

*GPC: General Power of Competence, enabling eligible councils to do "anything individuals may do" (subject to statutory constraints).

Key Distinctions

- A Parish/Town Council is an independent legal entity capable of holding land, employing staff, and entering into contracts.
- A Parish Meeting is a gathering of the local electorate with limited powers and no legal identity.
- Parish Meetings are more participative in form, whereas Parish/Town Councils operate through elected representatives.
- Parish Meetings cannot exercise certain functions such as eligibility for the Local Council Award Scheme or the General Power of Competence.

Conclusion

While both forms of governance serve to represent local interests, Parish/Town Councils are more formalised and capable of delivering a broader range of services. Parish Meetings remain appropriate for very small communities where a council may not be practical or proportionate.

More information

Please refer to *The Good Councillor's Guide 2024* (NALC, p. 11–13) and *All About Local Councils* (NALC, p. 4–6) for further context.

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