



Ramsgate

a Parish in its own right?

Should Ramsgate have a Parish Council? If so, which area should it cover and how many Councillors should represent the town?

Those are the questions that Ramsgate residents are being asked as part of a Parish Review being carried out by Thanet District Council under the Local Government & Rating Act 1997. It will look at the following wards:

- Central Harbour
- Eastcliff
- Nethercourt
- Newington
- Northwood
- Cliffsend and Pegwell Ward (excluding the existing Cliffsend Parish Council); and
- Sir Moses Montefiore

What are the options?

1. Abolish the existing Ramsgate Charter Trustees and create a Ramsgate Parish Council with a minimum of five Councillors; or
2. Retain the Ramsgate Charter Trustees and do not create a Ramsgate Parish Council.

To make your views known, write to the Democratic Services Manager, Thanet District Council, PO Box 9, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent, CT9 1XZ by 18th January 2006. For more information contact Democratic Services on (01843) 577500.

All the suggestions we receive will be available for you to see in the Council offices (by appointment)

To help you make a decision, we have answered some of the questions you may have.



What is a Parish Council?

A Parish Council is another tier of local government. Although Parish Councils are local authorities, they are very different from County and District Authorities.

What can Parish Councils do?

They can be involved in providing local facilities, such as sports fields, village halls and open spaces, either on their own or in partnership with other bodies. As is the case with District and County Councillors, Parish Councillors can also represent the views of their community on a range of issues, such as planning, highways, street lighting and seats.

They are notified of all planning applications within their Parish boundary, but the decision on planning applications remains with Thanet District Council.

Small projects, such as providing seats, clearing footpaths, planting and landscaping work can be done directly by Parish Councils. Bigger projects, such as village halls, sports facilities and children's play areas often only get off the ground if the Parish Council puts some money in to start with, which can then be used to possibly unlock grants from organisations outside the Parish.

There is a cost for such services and money is also needed to pay for

staffing and accommodation. The cost of a Parish Council would be raised locally through a charge to residents.

What is the role of the Ramsgate Charter Trustees?

The Ramsgate Charter Trustees have existed since the early 1970's and are responsible for safeguarding the historical and ceremonial links of the Town. They represent local people's views and control and distribute grants to Ramsgate organisations and residents for community schemes, although they have no executive powers.

The Charter Trustees are made up of the seventeen elected members of Thanet District Council, whose wards lie within the boundary of the old Borough of Ramsgate. They are responsible for electing the Town Mayor, who is then Chairman of all Charter Trustee Meetings and also pay the Mayor a reasonable allowance for the expenses of office.

The Charter Trustees are funded through Council Tax, with everyone who lives in Ramsgate paying an additional amount on their bills.

Isn't a Parish Council just another talking shop?

Although Parish Councils do not make major decisions that affect our lives, they are a body that larger

outside organisations can deal with, so there is an opportunity to make local views known, similar to the role undertaken by your District Councillor. Where Parish Councils do not exist, people can still make their views known through District Councillors and the Charter Trustees.

How are Parish Councils accountable?

The decisions of the Parish Council are made by elected Councillors who must have a local connection.

Their meetings must generally be open to the public and most Parish Councils allow a session for the public to comment and ask questions. The meetings must be advertised in advance. There also has to be an Annual Meeting for all the electors in the Parish each year. Usually the Council reports at this meeting on what they have done and what they intend to do.

Parish Councillors are elected for a four year term of office, so people can vote out an unpopular or unsuccessful group of Councillors. Parish Councils are also publicly audited and have to make copies of a statement of their accounts available.

Doesn't all this cost money?

No one can pretend that Parish Councils are free. The cost is paid for by residents living in the Parish. Parish Councils can, in some instances, have significant costs associated with staffing and accommodation.

To raise money, a Parish Council issues a precept which is added to the Council Tax bills for everyone who pays Council Tax within the Parish.

Because all their powers are discretionary, the Parish Council effectively decides how much money it will spend and how much it needs to raise on the Council Tax.

Not all Parish Councils have high overhead costs. Some of them only employ someone to act as Clerk to the Council to carry out the routine administration, often on a part-time basis. Being effective does not have to involve lots of expensive office buildings or a small army of staff.



How much could we end up paying?

As an example, Folkestone Town Council was formed in June 2004. The first annual precept charged by the Town Council in 2004/05 was £116,000. In 2005/06 this rose to £445,700 and had to be paid for by the residents living in the Parish through the Council Tax.

It is likely that a Ramsgate Parish Council would cost more to run than the current amount of money spent on the Charter Trustees, although it would be up to the Parish Council to decide

how much money they want spent.

The table below sets out the current precepts charged by some of the other Parish Councils within Thanet for 2005/06 and the recently created Folkestone Town Council. This will give you an idea of the likely cost of establishing a Parish Council for Ramsgate.

The cost to individual households varies, depending on the number of properties in an area, so details of the additional cost charged to a Band D property during 2005/06 in each of the areas have also been included.

	Ramsgate Charter Trustees	Folkestone Town Council	Broadstairs & St. Peters	Cliffsend	Manston	Minster
Total Annual Precept	£100,002*	£445,700	£167,262	£7,717	£9,000	£37,670
Total Annual Charge per Band D Council Tax Property	£8.10*	£57.35	£17.82	£11.25	£31.41	£30.78

* Note: of the total annual precept to the Ramsgate Charter Trustees of £100,002, £40,000 is specifically set aside for specific grants to Ramsgate organisations and residents for community schemes.

Tell us what you think

Do you agree with such a proposal or not? Your views are important to us. Please let us know what you think by writing to: **Democratic Services Manager, Thanet District Council, PO Box 9, Cecil Street, Margate, CT9 1XZ**

This leaflet can be made available in other formats, including Braille, large print or audio tape. It can also be made available in other languages on request. Please telephone 01843 577500.