

## Douzenier or Constable

### keeping your parish thriving and beautiful

#### **What does the Parish do?**

##### The Parish

Each of the ten parishes in Guernsey is administered by two elected Constables. They are supported and monitored by an elected council of residents called the Douzaine.

Together the Constables and the Douzeniers aim to promote a thriving local community.

The Constables are responsible by law for the day-to-day administration of the parish, assisted by a small team of parish staff.

Douzeniers are representatives of the parishioners and are responsible for the vision and direction of the parish and the transparency of its affairs. The Douzeniers elect a Dean and a Vice-Dean. In most parishes there are 12 Douzeniers, as the name “Douzaine” suggests. But the Vale has 16 and St Peter Port has 20.

Douzeniers and Constables are volunteers. The parish staff are employed by the Constables on behalf of the parish.

##### Parish responsibilities

The responsibilities of the parish are numerous. Here’s a selection:

- collecting the parish rates and ensures the funds are well spent
- promoting and enhancing the assets of the parish
- maintaining parish property
- giving feedback on local planning applications
- inspecting hedges, streams and dangerous roads and walls

- collecting household refuse
- issuing liquor and other licences to local businesses
- signposting parishioners to the right States committee

In addition, there are optional projects, such as

- producing a parish magazine
- taking part in Floral Guernsey
- campaigning for new services

Representatives from the Douzaines also take part in the election of Jurats and commemorative events.

## Links to the States

Douzaines are the link between the parish and the States of Guernsey.

Historically, Constables and Douzeniers met with parish Deputies before States meetings to give feedback on the items in the latest Billet on behalf of parishioners. But this has changed now that general elections are island-wide.

Some parishes previously organised parish surgeries where members of the public could meet with their local Deputies. But now the focus is more on drop-in sessions where parishioners can raise issues with parish officials.

## What do Douzeniers and Constables do?

The main commitment for a **Douzenier** is the monthly meeting of the Douzaine, called by the Senior Constable, to discuss parish affairs. Several parishes publish summary minutes of these meetings. For example, [Vale](#) and [St Peter Port](#).

Douzeniers also assist the Constables in caring for the parish. For example, Douzeniers check the hedges and streams in their canton (sub-division of the parish) in June and September.

Douzeniers may also be asked to focus on a particular aspect of the work of the Douzaine, or join a specific sub-committee. A sub-committee might produce the parish magazine or organise the parish's contribution to Floral Guernsey.

The two **Constables** are the executive officers of the parish and have a more extensive and hands-on role, in conjunction with the parish staff. They are responsible for the collection of parish taxes and accounting for how those funds are spent. They make sure parish assets like the Douzaine Room and the parish cemeteries are well maintained. They are the point of contact for the States and for the media.

Constables are 'summoned' to the ancient [Court of Chief Pleas](#) once a year, attend an annual Chief Pleas dinner with the Bailiff and the Lieutenant-Governor and are invited to a Garden Party at Government House for the Queen's Birthday.

All of the island's Constables have an informal meeting twice a year, to share experiences.

## How do you get elected?

### Vacancies

Each **Douzenier** is elected for four years. Terms are staggered so there will be at least three seats up for election each year (four in Vale and five in St Peter Port), plus opportunities to take the place of anyone who has stepped down before the end of their term. There are no restrictions on re-standing so seats may be vacant or you may be running against a current Douzenier who wants to stand again.

Constables are elected by law for a three year term but the convention in many parishes is to only serve for two of those years - one as Junior

Constable and one as Senior Constable. Again, there are no restrictions on re-standing.

Contact your [parish office](#) to find out what vacancies are coming up.

## Nominations

To stand for election as a Douzenier or Constable, you must be proposed by two people who live in the parish and are on the electoral roll. You don't need to wait to be asked - if you want to stand, just find two people in the parish who would be willing to sign your nomination form. They don't need to be VIPs. Ideally, one of your proposers will be willing to make a short speech at the next parish meeting explaining why you are a good candidate.

Nomination forms are available on [some parish websites](#) or in person from the parish office. Nominations open three to four weeks before the election and completed nomination forms must be received seven working days prior.

## Elections

The main elections take place in November, although there may be additional elections at other times of year if someone steps down before the end of their term of office or a seat has not been filled at the main election.

Initially, nominations for the main election are considered at a parish meeting on the first Wednesday in November. At the beginning of the meeting the parishioners in attendance are given the opportunity to decide whether they will elect the Douzeniers and Constables themselves at the meeting or whether the election should be deferred for two weeks. Deferral gives time for a polling station to be set up so that all of the people on the electoral roll in the parish to have the opportunity to take part. At least seven parishioners must raise their hands for the election to be deferred.

All stages of the election process are announced in the Gazette Officielle (published at the back of the Guernsey Press).

After election, Constables and Douzeniers are sworn in by the Royal Court.

## **Eligibility**

To be eligible to be a Douzenier or Constable you must live in the parish, **be on the electoral roll**, be at least 18 years old and have lived in Guernsey for the previous two years (or for periods adding up to at least five years in total). You must not have had a prison sentence of more than six months in the previous five years. Jurats of the Royal Court are not eligible but Deputies are.

## **What skills do you need?**

### Douzenier

Douzeniers are meant to represent their community so they can come from all walks of life. The more diversity the better so that there are a variety of voices around the table, fully representing the parish.

The main skill you need is a passion for your parish and a willingness to roll up your sleeves and dedicate time and energy to listening to your parishioners and working to improve your local community.

Different members of the Douzaine bring different perspectives. You may be an accountant so focus on the numbers. You may be a parent so understand the issues for local schools and playgrounds. You may like to write and be able to help with the parish magazine.

### Constable

Constables also come from all walks of life but theirs is more of a management role and therefore experience of running a business, charity or other initiative will help.

## **What support or training is there?**

### Support and training

Parishes do not run any specific training for Douzeniers or Constables.

You will learn on the job with the support of the Dean, the Constables, the parish secretary and other Douzeniers.

When taking on new activities eg checking hedges and streams you are likely to be twinned with a more experienced person.

## **What's the time commitment?**

Douzaine meetings are held in the evenings, usually on a Monday, so it is possible to combine being a Douzenier with a full-time job or caring responsibilities. The meetings take place at the Douzaine Rooms and last about two hours.

Meetings of any sub-committees that you volunteer to join are held at a time that suits all the participants.

You may occasionally be asked to represent the Douzaine at a commemorative event, eg Remembrance Sunday.

Being a Constable is more time-consuming and a lot of the work happens during the day. Some Constables combine the role with a full-time job but ideally you would have more flexibility.

Different parishes and different Constables vary in their approach to the role. Some Constables take on a lot of personal responsibility, others delegate more to parish staff and the Douzeniers.

## **Do you get paid?**

Being a **Douzenier** is a purely voluntary role to help your community.

**Constables** receive a nominal 'honorary' payment which is set at a different amount in each parish. Ask your parish office for details.

## Rewards and downsides

### Rewards

You will be working in a team to support your local community, ensuring that your parish is well maintained and looking at its best.

You will really get to know your parish, discovering parts you didn't know existed.

### Downsides

Some Douzaines can be traditional and reluctant to embrace change.

The responsibilities of the Douzaine have been reducing over time, as services are centralised by the States of Guernsey. However, that also means there are opportunities to modernise and take a new approach to identifying and supporting the local community's needs.

## Where can I find out more?

### Leaflet

[Support your local community - Be a Douzenier](#)

### Parish election infosheets

[A Guide to the Annual Parish Election Process](#)

[Campaigning in a Parish Election](#)

### More information

[Contact details and websites for each of the parishes](#)

[List of Parochial Officials by parish, including when their terms expire.](#)

[Douzaine Liaison Group page](#), including the ['Charter between the States of Guernsey and the Douzaines'](#).

[Vale Parish's 'A Day in the Life of the Douzaine'](#).

Deputy Shane Langlois' '[Guernsey's Douzaines in the 21st Century](#)' - a brief history.

Examples of Douzaine projects and decisions

[Questioning the accounts for the cemetery](#)

[Objecting to plans for new schools](#)

[Renting out parish land](#)

Download this information

To download all of the information about Constable/Douzenier as a PDF, click the PDF symbol on the right of this page.

Corrections

This description of the roles of Constable/Douzenier has been researched by Women in Public Life volunteers. If you spot an error, please do let us know by emailing [hello@womeninpubliclife.gg](mailto:hello@womeninpubliclife.gg).

## Questions?

*If you have a question about being a Douzenier or Constable that isn't answered on this page, please email us at [hello@womeninpubliclife.gg](mailto:hello@womeninpubliclife.gg). We'll research the answer and then publish it here to help inform others who might be curious about the same thing.*