

## Douzenier or Constable

keeping your parish thriving and beautiful



*This infosheet explains the roles of Douzenier and Constable. Look for our 'Guide to the Parish Elections' for a step-by-step introduction to standing for office in your parish.*

### What does the Douzaine do?

Each of the ten parishes in Guernsey is administered by two elected Constables. They are supported 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. Each Douzaine has a Dean and a Vice-Dean. In some parishes the longest serving Douzenier automatically becomes Dean, in others the Dean is elected from among the Douzeniers. 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 just 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 promoting the parish online, producing the parish magazine, taking part in Floral Guernsey, fundraising for parish events and 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 for members of the public to 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 sub-committee. A sub-committee might look after a parish asset like Delancey Park or organise the parish's contribution to Floral Guernsey or monitor plans for new developments in the parish.

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.

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

## 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 parishioners and working to improve your local community.

Different members of the Douzaine bring different perspectives and skills. 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 be a whizz with social media.

### 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?

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 clerk 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?

The monthly Douzaine meetings are held in the evenings, usually on a Monday, so it is definitely possible to combine being a Douzenier with a full-time job or caring responsibilities. The meetings take place at the Douzaine Room 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. 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 'honorarium' 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?

Go to the Douzenier and Constable section at [www.womeninpubliclife.gg](http://www.womeninpubliclife.gg) for video interviews with existing parish officials and links to further detail.

*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).*