

Municipal Government in England

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT IN ENGLAND.

The following notes on the functions of the various local bodies in England are reproduced from a report on the British System of Local Government prepared by Mr. J. D. Sifton for the Indian government and published in the "Local Self-Government Gazette" of Madras. With one or two slight differences in names, the systems of local government in Scotland and Ireland, are the same as in England. It might also be said that the controlling authority for municipal government in England, is the Ministry of Health (old title Local Government Board.), under a responsible Minister of the Crown.

Parishes.

The smallest unit in Local Government (in England) is the parish. There are 14,500 parishes, which correspond very roughly to the villages in India (and to rural municipalities in Canada). The business of the parish is conducted either by the parish meeting—an assembly of all parochial electors—or in larger parishes, where this system is unsuitable, through elected parish councils. The main duty of the parish is the appointment of overseers to prepare valuation lists and to correct the poor rate and other rates. In addition the parish organisation looks after all civil parish property such as village greens, agricultural allotments, parochial buildings and burial grounds and has the important right of complaint to the superior authorities in case the parish finds itself neglected by the district council in the matter of water-supply, drainage, the closing of unhealthy dwellings or any other matter of sanitation, or in the repair of the roads. The parish itself has no duties under the Public Health Acts unless these have been delegated to it by the District Council. The parish rate is the poor rate, which for parish purposes cannot exceed 3d. in the £ (pound) upon the value of rateable hereditaments in the parish. But with the poor rate the overseers are required to collect the ratemoneys demanded by the County Councils, Boards of Guardians. Rural District Councils and some other local authorities. These authorities issue "precepts" upon the overseers are required to levy a rate to cover the total of all such requisitions.

Poor Law Union.

5. Above the parish comes the "poor law union" in rural districts. This is a grouping of a number of parishes around a central market town for the local administration of the poor laws, the supervision of the parochial valuation lists, the registration of vital statistics, and the enforcement of vaccination. The union discharges its functions through a board of guardians composed of elected members from each parish.

Rural District Councils.

The Rural District Council in charge of a rural sanitary district is generally co-extensive with the poor law union, and the Councillors are the Guardians acting in another capacity. The function of the Rural District Council is to execute within its area the Public Health and Highway Acts. The Council has also to protect the public interests in rights of way, rights of common and roadside wastes. The expenses of a Council are either general or special. General expenses which include the expenditure on establishment and the repairs of highways, part of the expenditure on sanitary administration and all other expenses, which are not expressly declared to be special, are paid out of a common fund to which all the parishes within the districts contribute by a common rate. But where any areas receive special benefit by the Council's providing strictly local services such as sewerage, water-supply, recreation grounds, allotments or dwelling accommodation, those areas are alone liable for the special expenses incurred on these services. Each council employs a Medical Officer of Health and an Inspector of Nuisances for the enforcement of the Public Health regulations and a surveyor for the maintenance of the highways, etc.

Urban District Councils.

In town areas an Urban District Council replaces the rural council. The functions of the urban council are of the same nature as those of the rural council but a little more extensive owing to certain "adoptive" Acts which are applicable to towns but not to rural areas. One important difference occurs in towns with a population of over 20,000 in that the Council is made the local authority for elementary education. The rating system is the same

except in the matter of certain exemptions. Both Urban and Rural Councils have borrowing powers subject to Government supervision.

Municipal and County Boroughs.

The Municipal borough is a glorified Urban Council boasting a Mayor and Corporation in place of the Councillors and needs no special description. But in the County boroughs (which are, speaking roughly, towns with a population of over 50,000) the duties and responsibilities are largely increased, as the County borough is excluded from the administrative area of the County in which it is situated geographically and its Council undertakes in addition to its functions as a borough most of the functions of the County Council described in the next paragraph.

County Councils.

The County Councils are elected bodies containing representatives from all part of the County. They were instituted with the intention that they should be supervising authorities over the minor local authorities, but in addition to their duties of supervision they are also burdened with special duties in relation to sanitation, housing, town planning, highways and bridges, education and economic and social matters (old age pensions, health insurance, etc.). The County Council is in charge of all main roads and county bridges and looks after cattle disease, asylums, small holdings and allotments, maternity and child welfare, tuberculosis treatment and certain other matters. The principal County officials are (1) the Clerk of the Council who is also Clerk of the Peace, (2) the Medical Officer of Health whose duty is to co-ordinate the work of the Health Officers of the minor bodies, to inspect their work, and to move the County Council and the Ministry of Health in case his advice is rejected upon matters essential to public health, (3) the surveyor who is in charge of all county roads and buildings (4) the public analyst, (5) the coroner, and (6) inspectors to comply with the requirements of numerous enactments.

Other Local Bodies.

There are other local bodies appointed for special purposes such as burial boards and joint boards for drainage, waterworks and other services which may be common to more than one local authority, but they are no part of the prevailing system.

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION IN QUEBEC AND ONTARIO

The projected outlay for new main roads this year in the Province of Quebec is \$17,390,000, of which the Dominion government will put up \$5,000,000 and the balance found by the Provincial government and the municipalities affected. The plans include the following highways:

Hull to Montreal; Montreal to Levis; Levis to Rimouski; Rivière du Loup to Edmundston, connecting with the St. John Valley highway.

Montreal to Sherbrooke, via Granby and Magog.

Montreal to Malone, N. Y. via Chateaugay and Huntingdon.

Montreal through the Laurentians to Mont Laurier.

In addition to the above it might be stated that three standard highways of the Province have just been completed, namely: the King Edward Highway, Montreal to Rouses Point, the Quebec and Montreal North Shore highway, and the road from Lévis to Jackman, Maine.

PROVINCE OF ONTARIO.

Under the same Plans the Province of Ontario is to have \$22,290,000 spent on its roads of which the Dominion government will contribute \$6,800,000, the Provincial government \$12,000,000 and the municipalities \$3,40,000.

The Ontario plan provides for the following main highways: Windsor to the Quebec boundary at Coteau via Chatham, London, Brantford, Hamilton, Toronto, Belleville and Kingston, with branches from Hamilton to Niagara Falls and from Prescott to Ottawa.

Fort Erie, through Simcoe and St. Thomas to Windsor.

Toronto to Sarnia, via Brampton, Guelph and Stratford.

Toronto to Muskoka, Ottawa to Pembroke, Ottawa to Point Fortune, connecting with the road to Montreal.

Ottawa to Kingston, via Perth and the Rideau Lakes.