

Elections

Parish councillors are elected for a term of four years¹. Elections are held on the first Thursday in May.

The right to vote at a local government election is dependent upon the person's name having been included in the current Electoral Register.

Ordinarily, the election of parish councillors is conducted by means of nomination of candidates by two electors and, if necessary, a poll.²

The conditions for a person to be able to stand for election to the Parish Council (PC), in England, are, as follows:

- The person must be at least 18 years old.
- They must be a British citizen, an eligible Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any member state of the European Union.

They must also meet at least one of the following four qualifications:

- Registered local government electors.
- Those whose main or only place of work is in the parish area.
- Owners or tenants who occupy any land or other premises in the parish area.
- Living in the parish area or within three miles of it.

Casual Vacancies

A **casual vacancy** occurs when a Parish Councillor fails to deliver their declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time resigns, dies, becomes disqualified, or fails to attend meetings for six consecutive months without approval ([How casual vacancies occur](#) | [Electoral Commission](#)).

The vacancy can be filled via election or co-option.

The Council must advertise via public notice of a casual vacancy as soon as possible in accordance with section 232 of the Local Government Act 1972. At SPC this will be shared on the noticeboard, the SPC website, social media platforms and at local community hubs.

The Clerk will publish '**a notice of vacancy**' giving 14 days within which a **by-election** may be called.

Where no by-election is called, the PC must meet and fill the vacancy within a reasonable period of time. *The only exception is where a by-election is not called and the vacancy occurs within 6 months of when the Councillor would retire, then the post may be left vacant.*

Following expiry of the 14 days' notice, the principal Council (**Somerset Council**) will advise the PC if a **by-election** is to be held or if the vacancy is to be filled by **co-option**.

¹ The current PC members are representing terms until 2027, as a result of the formation of the Unitary Council.

By-Election

If a by-election is called and there are fewer candidates than there are vacancies, the candidate(s) are uncontested. Any remaining vacancies can then be filled by co-option. The Parish Council (PC) will incur the costs that arise from staging an election, regardless of whether it is contested or not.

Here's a timetable for a Parish Council Casual Vacancy Election, following the rules set out by the **Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) Rules 2006**, and guidance from the **Electoral Commission** ([Home Page](#) | [Electoral Commission](#)) and Somerset Council ([Council and democracy](#)).

Stage	Deadline	Details
1. Declaration of Vacancy	As soon as possible after vacancy arises	The Clerk notifies the Returning Officer (RO) at Somerset Council and publicly posts a Legal Notice of vacancy.
2. Opportunity for Election to be Called	Within 14 working days (excl. weekends/bank holidays) of Notice of Vacancy	If 10 electors from the Parish request an election in writing to the Returning Officer, an election must be held. If not, the PC can co-opt a councillor instead.
3. Notice of Election Published	<i>At least 25 working days</i> before the election day	Issued by the Returning Officer after receiving valid election request. Triggers formal election process .
4. Receipt of Nominations	Up to 19 working days before election day by 4 pm	Candidates submit nomination papers.
5. Deadline for Withdrawals	Same as nomination deadline	Last point at which candidates may withdraw .
6. Statement of Persons Nominated	No later than 18 working days before election day	The RO publishes a list of validly nominated candidates.
7. Register to Vote Deadline	12 working days before election day	New or unregistered voters must apply by their deadline.
8. Postal Vote Deadline	11 working days before election day by 5 pm	Electors must apply for a postal vote by their time.
9. Proxy Vote Deadline	6 working days before election day by 5 pm	Applications to vote by proxy must be received.
10. Polling Day	On a date set by the Returning Officer – usually a Thursday	Polls open 7 am to 10 pm . <i>Must be within 60 working days of valid election request.</i>
11. Counting of Votes	Usually, the same night or following day	Carried out by the RO . Results published asap after the count.
12. Return of Election Expenses	28 calendar days after the result	Candidates must submit their expense returns to the RO for payment no later than 35 calendar days after the result of election is declared.

Co-option

The co-option process allows a PC to appoint a new councillor when there is a vacancy that hasn't been filled through a formal election (either due to an uncontested election or because an election was not called).

If there is no call for an election, the **co-option process** can proceed. A co-option takes place in a **quorate public meeting** of the full council. Candidates can apply and the existing council members vote on membership. The voting process for co-opting a councillor to a PC is designed to be as fair and transparent as possible.

Candidates who have expressed interest in the role and applied will be invited to attend the public meeting and make a short speech about why they should be selected.

At Street Parish Council, the vote follows the **majority voting** format, whereby existing members vote for their preferred candidate by **ballot**. Voting will be in accordance with statutory requirements. A successful candidate must receive an absolute majority, i.e. **receive more than 50% of the votes cast**. Where there are more candidates to consider than vacancies, the voting process continues and repeats where the candidate with the fewest votes is removed from the vote each time, until the vacancies are filled.

The newly appointed councillor must **sign a declaration of their acceptance of office**, in the presence of another councillor or the Clerk. The declaration must be delivered before or at the first meeting of the council after co-option.

If no candidate receives a majority after several rounds of voting, the PC may agree to delay the co-option process and reconsider other candidates or readvertise for the vacancy. The PC carries **empty vacancies** in the meantime.