

ELECTIONS

Qualification to Vote

1. A number of changes were made to electoral arrangements by the Electoral Administration Act 2006 (“the 2006 Act”). Relevant amendments have been incorporated into this Note.
2. Section 2(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (“the 1983 Act”) provides that a person is entitled to vote as an elector at a local government election in any electoral area if on the date of the poll he –
 - a. is registered in the register of local government electors for that area;
 - b. is not subject to any legal incapacity to vote;
 - c. is a Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of the European Union; and
 - d. is of voting age (that is, 18 years or over).
3. A person is not entitled to vote as an elector –
 - a. more than once in the same electoral area at any local government election; or
 - b. in more than one electoral area at an ordinary election for a local government area which is not a single electoral area.

The Register of Electors

4. In accordance with section 13 of the 1983 Act, the register of local government electors is published annually not later than 1 December or such later date as provided for by regulations. Section 4 of the 1983 Act provides that any person on the register is entitled to vote at all elections in the 12 months until the next register is published. Changes to the register used to be made annually. Alterations can now be made at any time to add or remove a name from the register – see section 13A of the 1983 Act. Consequently, the register is now referred to as a “rolling register”. The process should allow changes to be made more quickly although the qualifying date will always apply.

5. A person may be on more than one register if resident in more than one parish or community. Section 2(2) of the 1983 Act provides that a person may vote in each parish or community where he or she is on the register, but not in more than one ward within a parish or community.
6. Part 2 of the 2006 Act makes a number of provisions to improve the electoral registration process by:
 - establishing a new duty on Electoral Registration Officers to take steps to register eligible electors. This should ensure that registers are as complete and accurate as possible;
 - establishing a scheme of anonymous registration for people for whom the publication of their name and address on the electoral register would pose a threat to safety;
 - moving the closing date for registration closer to the date of the poll;
 - allowing for the correction of clerical errors and changes following court decisions to be made up to, and including, polling day; and
 - extending the provision for public objections to registration, so that such objections may be made after a person has been registered as an elector, not just before registration. It also empowers a registration officer to remove ineligible entries from the register at any time.

Qualifications for election and holding office as a Councillor

7. Section 79(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 (“the 1972 Act”) provides, unless disqualified (see paragraph 11 below) a person is qualified to be elected and to be a councillor if he is a qualifying Commonwealth citizen or a EU citizen, if on the day on which he is nominated and, if there is a poll, the day of the election he is 18 years of age or over (amended by section 18 of the 2006 Act) which came into force on 7 January 2007) and:
 - a. on that day he is and thereafter he continues to be a local government elector for the area of the authority; or
 - b. he has during the whole of the twelve months preceding that day occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in that area; or
 - c. his principal or only place of work during that twelve months has been in that area; or
 - d. he has during the whole of those twelve months resided in that area; or

- e. in the case of a member of a parish or community council he has during the whole of those twelve months resided either in the parish or community or within three miles of it. [The Electoral Commission's interpretation of this provision (namely section 79(1)(e) of the 1972 Act) is that all persons qualify to be elected and to be a member of a parish or community council if they have resided for the relevant 12 months in the parish or community or within three miles of it.]
8. A person is a qualifying Commonwealth citizen if he is a Commonwealth citizen who either-
- is not a person who requires leave under the Immigration Act 1971 to enter or remain in the United Kingdom, or
 - is such a person but for the time being has (or is, by virtue of any enactment, to be treated as having) indefinite leave to remain within the meaning of that Act.
9. But a person is not a qualifying Commonwealth citizen if he does not require leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom by virtue only of section 8 of the Immigration Act 1971 (exceptions to requirement for leave in special cases). This amendment was introduced by paragraph 43 of Schedule 1 to the 2006 Act.
10. With reference to paragraph 7(c) above, a person is qualified for re-election under paragraph 7(c) if he is already a councillor. The Court of Appeal held in *Parker v Yeo* (1992) 90 LGR 645 that being a councillor was "work" and that the work was carried on in the area where the councillor was an elected member.
11. In accordance with section 80 of the 1972 Act, a person is disqualified from being elected or being a councillor if he:
- a. holds any paid office or employment (other than the office of chairman, vice chairman or deputy chairman) to which he has been appointed by the council or any committee or sub-committee of the council, or by a paid officer of the council, or by any joint committee on which the council is represented; or
 - b. is the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order (section 267(1) of the Enterprise Act 2002); or
 - c. has within five years before the day of election or since his election been convicted of any offence and has had passed on him a sentence of imprisonment of at least three months (whether suspended or not) without the option of a fine; or

- d. has been found guilty of corrupt or illegal practices (see paragraphs 24 and 25 below), or was responsible for incurring unlawful expenditure and the court orders his disqualification.
12. In relation to paragraph 11(a) above, when dealing with an office of profit, it is irrelevant that no profit was actually received.

The Election Procedure

13. Section 37 of the 1983 Act provides that ordinary elections of local councillors take place on the first Thursday in May every four years, but under section 16 of the Representation of the People Act 1985, are postponed for 3 weeks if the polling day coincides with that for a parliamentary general election or a European Assembly election. For most local councils, election year is 2011, 2015 etc. but where the principal authority councillor is elected in some other year that is also the year of the local council election.
14. Reorganisation of local government may cause alteration of the election day and election year in some cases.
15. In accordance with Schedule 2, Part 1, paragraph 1 of the Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 ("the 2006 Rules") the election timetable is as follows:
- **Publication of notice of election**
Not later than the twenty-fifth day before the day of election.
 - **Delivery of Nominations papers**
Not later than noon on the nineteenth day before the day of election.
 - **Publication of list of candidates**
Not later than noon on the seventeenth day before the day of election.
 - **Delivery of notices of withdrawals of candidature**
Not later than noon on the sixteenth day before the day of election.
 - **Notice of Poll**
Not later than the sixth day before the day of election.

- **Polling**

Between the hours of 7 in the morning and 10 at night on the day of election.

16. In calculating the timetable the following days are disregarded; Saturday, Sunday, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Good Friday, a Bank Holiday and a day appointed for public thanksgiving or mourning.

Nomination

17. Schedule 2, Part 2, paragraph 2 of the 2006 Rules provides that a prospective candidate must deliver or send by post to the Returning Officer a valid nomination paper. The form is obtained from the Officer. The candidate's surname, forenames, residence and description (if required) must be entered and his or her number and prefix letter from the current register of electors. The Returning Officer has a copy of this register, and the clerk of the local council normally has one.
18. Schedule 2, Part 2, paragraph 6 of the 2006 Rules provides that the nomination paper must also contain similar particulars of a proposer and a seconder. They must be electors for the area for which the candidate seeks election (e.g. the parish, community or town or the ward if it is divided into wards): and they must sign the nomination paper.
19. Schedule 2, Part 2, paragraph 7 of the 2006 Rules provides that the nomination is invalid if the candidate does not sign a Consent to Nomination in the presence of a witness. This consent must state that the candidate wants to stand for election and meets the necessary qualifications. The formula is usually printed at the foot or on the back of the nomination paper.
20. Schedule 2, Part 2, paragraph 6(4) (b) of the 2006 Rules provides that a returning officer can be required to prepare a nomination paper for signature.
21. It is the responsibility of the candidate or his supporters to get the signed nomination paper back to the Returning Officer in time, even where he has prepared papers for signature. He cannot accept any nomination which, whatever the reason, reaches him too late.

22. It is not the responsibility of the clerk (or the Returning Officer) to see that candidates comply with the nomination rules.

Expenditure by Candidates

23. Section 76(2) (b) of the 1983 Act provides that expenditure by a candidate on an election is currently limited to £600 plus 5p for every entry in the Register of Electors used at the election. The aforementioned amount is reduced by one fourth for two joint candidates and by one third for three or more joint candidates (section 77 of the 1983 Act). The limit is regularly revised upwards and candidates should check the up to date figure with The Returning Officer.

Corrupt and Illegal Practices

24. According to the provisions contained in the 1983 Act, various corrupt or illegal practices in relation to legal elections are criminal offences. Corrupt practices include bribery, impersonation, treating and false declaration of election expenses. Illegal practices include illegal payments (e.g. for paid canvassers and for payments for the conveyance of voters to or from the poll), illegal broadcasting and improper conduct (e.g. the publication of false statements about the conduct or character of a candidate).
25. It is also an illegal practice to print or publish an election document (e.g. a poster or a manifesto) which does not bear on its face the words "Printed and Published by" together with the name and address of both the printer and publisher. The "publisher" is the person who is responsible for issuing the document. Printing includes any form of reproduction other than copying by hand. This requirement is sometimes overlooked by candidates at local council elections.

Voting

26. The normal method of voting is by personal attendance at the appropriate polling station. However, under Schedule 4, paragraph 4 of the Representation of the People Act 2000, a person may be allowed to vote by post, or by proxy, for an indefinite period or for a particular election if the person can show that he cannot reasonably be expected to vote in person. The rules governing absent voting are somewhat complex and are outside the scope of this Note. Detailed information, and an application form, can be obtained from the electoral registration officer.

Poll Cards

27. At ordinary local council elections (e.g. those held every four years) there is no requirement that poll cards be issued. However, it is now common for details of local council elections to be included on the mandatory poll cards issued for ordinary principal council elections which are held on the same day.
28. At local council by-elections poll cards may be issued (see below, paragraph 41).

Term of Office

29. Section 16(3) and 35(2A) of the 1972 Act provides that a local councillor elected at an ordinary election serves for four years unless before the end of that period he resigns, becomes disqualified or otherwise vacates office. A councillor elected at a by-election or by co-option to a casual vacancy serves until the next ordinary election.
30. As indicated above, a candidate for election must specify on his nomination form the nature of his qualification to be elected a councillor. It is not unknown for a candidate to specify only one qualification when he has more. In such a case, if he loses that qualification he does not cease to be qualified to be a councillor provided that he retains at least one other. A person who is qualified by residence, by occupation of premises or by place of work does not lose his qualification by moving away after election.

Insufficiency of Candidates at Ordinary Election (Co-option)

31. Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act 1985 provides that where an insufficient number of candidates is validly nominated at an ordinary local council election to fill the vacancies on the council, those who have been validly nominated are automatically elected as councillors. Provided that those elected constitute at least a quorum (three or one third of the total number of councillors, whichever is the greater), the council (e.g. those elected unopposed) may co-opt any person or persons to fill the vacancies. If the power of co-option is not exercised within 35 days (in calculating which the days specified in paragraph 16 above are excluded), the principal authority may then exercise its powers to hold a further election or to take other appropriate action to fill the vacancies. A principal authority has wide reserve powers to do anything necessary to constitute a council properly, including the temporary appointment of councillors pending a further election.

32. Before exercising the power of co-option, the council does not have to give public notice of the vacancy or vacancies, although it may do so if it wishes. In practice, the giving of public notice is a sensible way to attract possible candidates for co-option. Legal Briefing L15-08 gives guidance for good practice on the selection of candidates for co-option.
33. Legal Topic Note 7 (Non-Councillor Members of Committees) deals with the appointment of non-councillors to a council's committees.

Return of Election Expenses

34. Section 78 of the 1983 Act provides that within 28 days (in calculating which the days specified in paragraph 16 above are excluded) after the election, each candidate must make a declaration as to election expenses in statutory form and send it to the clerk. Failure to send in the declaration is an illegal practice (see paragraphs 24 and 25 above).

Costs of Holding Elections

35. The cost of holding a local council election is paid by the local council if the principal authority so requires. Where a local council election is combined with a principal council election the cost of the combined polls (excluding the costs attributable solely to one election) is apportioned equally between the elections (section 36(3B) of the 1983 Act).

By-Elections

36. A by-election of a whole council takes place:
 - a. where a new council comes into existence in a year other than that in which the principal authority councillor for the parish or community is elected – sections 89 (2) and 95 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007; or
 - b. where an election is declared void following an election petition – section 135 of the 1983 Act; or
 - c. where a principal authority orders a new election under reserve powers – section 39 of the 1983 Act.

37. A by-election to fill a particular vacancy can occur when the membership of the council is increased.
38. A by-election is held in same way as an ordinary election except in relation to poll cards. At a by-election the local council may, not later than noon on the 19th day (calculated by excluding the days specified in paragraph 16 above), require the returning officer to issue official poll cards – rule 25 of the 2006 Rules. The cost of providing the cards is payable by the parish or community council in question.

Casual Vacancies

39. According to section 87 of the 1972 Act a casual vacancy occurs when:
 - a. a councillor fails to make his declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time (see paragraph 47 below); or
 - b. a councillor resigns; or
 - c. a councillor dies; or
 - d. a councillor becomes disqualified (see paragraph 11 above for circumstances in which this may occur); or
 - e. the election is declared void; or
 - f. a councillor fails to attend meetings for six consecutive months (see paragraph 44 below).
40. In cases (a) to (c) and (f) the council must immediately and in cases (d) and (e) as soon as practicable, give public notice of the vacancy by posting the notice in some conspicuous place or places within the parish or community - sections 87 and 232 of the 1972 Act refer.
41. In accordance with rule 5(3) of the 2006 Rules, if within 14 days (calculated by excluding those specified in paragraph 16 above) after public notice has been given, at least ten electors give written notice to the proper officer of the principal authority of a request for an election to fill the vacancy, then a by-election must be held *except* where the vacancy occurs within six months before the date when the councillor in question would have regularly retired (e.g. four days after the next ordinary election). If a by-election is called, and an insufficient number of candidates is nominated those nominated are elected (see section 39(5) (b) of the 1983 Act) and the district council

must call a further by-election to fill the remaining vacancy or vacancies (see section 39(1) (b) of the 1983 Act).

42. If no by-election is called the council must as soon as practicable after the expiry of the 14 day period fill the vacancy by co-option. If the vacancy falls within the six month period the council may but need not, fill the vacancy. It must, however, in the latter case, give public notice of the vacancy.
43. The council may co-opt whom it pleases (see the Legal Briefing L15-08 referred to in paragraph 32 above) to fill a vacancy, provided the person is qualified to be a councillor (see paragraph 7) The person co-opted must receive a majority of the votes of those councillors present and voting at the meeting where the co-option takes place. Where there are more than two candidates for one vacancy, this rule means that a person must get a majority of votes over all the other candidates. Thus where candidate A receives four votes, and candidates B and C each receive two, A is not elected because he has the same number of votes as B and C put together and does not have a majority over their combined votes. Where there are more than two candidates it is desirable to eliminate the candidate with the least number of votes, so that the final vote is between two candidates only. If a council does not have appropriate standing orders, Model Standing Order 12 on page 102 of NALC's Publication "Standing Orders for Local Councils" (2010) may be adopted in respect of filling a casual vacancy.

Failure to Attend Meetings

44. Under section 85 of the 1972 Act, a councillor vacates office if he fails to attend any meeting of his council for six consecutive months after his last attendance, unless before the expiry of that period the council approves a reason for his absence. The following are relevant meetings:
 - a. a meeting of a council committee or sub-committee; or
 - b. a meeting of a joint committee or similar body by which any of the council's functions are for the time being discharged; or
 - c. a meeting of an advisory committee appointed by the council; or attendance as a representative of the council at a meeting of any body of persons (e.g. the annual meeting of the County Association) counts as attendance at a council meeting.

45. A council cannot approve a reason for a councillor's absence from a meeting if no reason is given. To simply record in the minutes of a meeting that a councillor was absent does not amount to approval for his absence. A councillor must give a reason for his absence from a meeting and the minutes of that meeting must document that approval for a councillor's absence was agreed by resolution and, where possible, the reason for absence.

Declaration of Acceptance of Office

46. In accordance with section 83 of the 1972 Act, on being elected to office, a councillor must before or at the first meeting of the council after election sign a declaration of acceptance of office in the form prescribed in the Local Elections (Declaration of Acceptance of Office) Order 2012 in the presence of another councillor or the clerk. The council may at the meeting permit the declaration to be signed before or at a later meeting fixed by the council. If a councillor fails to sign the declaration at the due time, he thereupon vacates office and a casual vacancy arises. There is no provision allowing a declaration to be signed retrospectively. (For Chairmen, see paragraph 49 below). Pursuant to s.30 of the Localism Act 2011, in England a person must within 28 days of becoming a councillor notify the Monitoring Officer of any "disclosable pecuniary interests" as defined in the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 No.1464. The definitions of disclosable pecuniary interests are given in NALC's Legal Briefing L10-12. Upon re-election or re-appointment, the councillor must also within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of 'disclosable pecuniary interests' not already included in his or her register of interests. In England, the code of conduct adopted by a council under s. 27(2) of the 2011 Act may require a councillor to, within 28 days of his election to office, give notification of interests which are not disclosable pecuniary interests. This will be case if a council has adopted NALC's template code of conduct (set out in Legal Briefing L09-12). Further guidance relating to a councillor's obligations about interests can be found in Legal Topic Note 80 (Members' conduct and the registration and disclosure of their interests (England)). The model Code of Conduct for community councils is set out in the Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) (Wales) Order 2008 (No.788) which came into force on 18 April 2008.

Election of Chairman

47. Sections 15 and 34 of the 1972 Act provides that the Chairman of a local council must be elected from among the councillors as the first business of the statutory annual

council meeting in May. He remains in office until his successor is elected (at the following meeting unless in the interim he resigns, dies or otherwise vacates office).

48. Schedule 12, paragraphs 11 and 27 of the 1972 Act provides that since the chairman of the council must preside at all council meetings which he attends, he must if present preside at the election of his successor (who may, following re-election, be himself/herself). As chairman, he has, as well as his ordinary vote, a casting vote, in the event of a tie between candidates for his post and he must exercise the latter. Section 15 of the 1972 Act provides, where following an ordinary election, the chairman ceases to be a councillor he nevertheless remains chairman of the council until his successor takes office. If present at the annual council meeting he must preside at the election of his successor but has only a casting vote. As soon as his successor is elected, he vacates office, must leave the chairman, and can no longer participate as a councillor in the meeting.
49. On being elected to office, the chairman of a local council must sign a declaration of acceptance of office at the meeting at which he is elected or, if permitted by the council, before or at a later meeting fixed by the council. Failure to sign at the due time results in automatic vacation of office. It must not be forgotten that a chairman is elected annually and therefore a declaration must be made every year by whoever is elected as chairman – see section 83(4) (a) of the 1972 Act.

Vice-Chairman

50. Section 15(6) and 34(6) of the 1972 Act provides that a council may, but need not, elect one of their number to be a vice-chairman. In accordance with schedule 12 paragraph 11(2) of the 1972 Act, if the chairman is absent from a meeting, the vice-chairman will preside if he is present.
51. A vice-chairman does not have to sign a declaration of acceptance of office (although as a councillor he must of course do so (see paragraph 46 above)).

Changes Introduced (or to be introduced) by the 2006 Act

52. Part 1 of the 2006 Act contains provisions for the establishment, by order made by the Secretary of State, of one or more Co-ordinated On-line Record of Electors (CORE) schemes. A CORE scheme would consolidate into a centralised record for the area covered by the scheme, such of the electoral registers and related information

maintained by the local electoral registration officers in that area as is specified in the scheme. The details of the scheme have not been fully worked out but it appears that it could cover local councils.

53. Part 3 of the 2006 Act contains anti- fraud measures. It provides for the collection of personal identifiers from persons applying to vote by post or proxy. Personal identifiers are specified as signatures and dates of birth. Postal and proxy vote applicants will be required to provide their date of birth and signature on their application forms. This Part provides for the retention of identifiers by registration officers and sets out the purposes for which they may be used. The clause provides for registration officers to require existing postal and proxy voters to provide their signature and date of birth.
54. Section 37 of the 2006 Act amended Schedule 1 to the 1983 Act, with the effect that postal voters at elections will be required to provide their signature and date of birth on the postal voting statement that postal voters must complete and return with their postal ballot paper. All postal voters, including proxy postal voters, will be subject to this requirement. Under the provisions, a postal ballot paper will not be deemed to be valid if the postal voting statement does not include both a signature and date of birth.
55. Section 15 of the 2006 Act amended section 13D of the 1983 Act to create an offence of providing false information for the purposes of registration or when applying for a postal or proxy vote.
56. Section 16 of the 2006 Act amended section 16 of the 1983 Act to establish a framework for local authorities to review polling places regularly over a four-year cycle, to ensure that they provide proper access to people.

Statutory References

57. Wherever the masculine gender is used in this Note, this should be interpreted as also meaning the feminine gender where appropriate.
58. The word chairman, as opposed to chair, is used because this is the word used in the statutory reference e.g. the Local Government Act 1972. It is recognised that some councils prefer to use the words chair and vice-chair.

Other Legal Topic Notes (LTNs) relevant to this subject:

LTN	Title	Relevance
7	Non-Councillor Members of Committees	Sets out the powers of councils to appoint non-members to committees.
80	Members' conduct and the registration and disclosure of their interests (England)	Sets out the arrangements under the Localism Act 2011

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