



2024 Election Toolkit

SPECIFICALLY FOR THE DORSET COUNCIL AREA

Produced by DAPTC in conjunction with Dorset Council for Parish & Town Councils

Date: 1 January 2024

This is an interactive document with links to websites and important email accounts. If you have printed this document the links will not be active.

Dorset Council Area

Introduction

This toolkit has been produced to help parish and town council clerks (both new and experienced) with key processes and timescales in an election year. The document can be shared with existing councillors looking to re-join council in May 2024 and new candidates interested in becoming a councillor. It is an interactive pdf that has links to websites and reference documents, as well as videos. A printed version will not perform in the same way.

The election process can at times be frustrating for clerks and councillors alike with the need to ensure nomination papers are correctly filled out and submitted in the correct way and ahead of the deadlines. Leaving your submission too late could be problematic if your submission isn't completely accurately.

For the health of local democracy, we encourage councils to do their utmost to achieve a contested election. Failing that, they then try to encourage a competitive co-option to fill casual vacancies.

Good luck with the activities leading up to 2 May 2024 and if you need any help and support—please do get in touch: daptc@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

1. Before the elections for councils:

- ◇ [Budgeting for elections—P3](#)
- ◇ [Pre-election period—P3](#)
- ◇ [Clerk and Council Checklist—P4](#)
- ◇ [Pre-election awareness campaign—P5](#)

2. Elections process and timetable:

- ◇ [Timetable to the Annual Council Meeting—P6](#)
- ◇ [Election Act changes—P7](#)
- ◇ [Principal authority—P7](#)
- ◇ [Contested vs uncontested elections—P8](#)

3. Standing for election:

- ◇ [How to stand for election—P9](#)
- ◇ [5 steps to start campaigning—P10](#)

4. Post election day tasks and processes:

- ◇ [Acceptance of office—P11](#)
- ◇ [Register of Interests—P11](#)
- ◇ [Induction and training available – P11](#)
- ◇ [Resignations—P12](#)
- ◇ [By-elections and casual vacancies – P12](#)

5. Resources and useful links—P13

6. [Appendix—Nomination paper drop off venues—P14](#)

Contents

Budgets for the elections

The Town or Parish precept includes funds for running the current 5 yearly elections, however practice shows that by-elections can be called at any time due to a resignation or death for example. The policy of the Principal Authority charged with running the election is to recharge the Town or Parish Council based on actual costs incurred.

If Town or Parish elections are combined with other polls, in the majority of cases where costs are shared between election types, only 50% or less of the charges will be apportioned, whereas for a stand-alone by-election, 100% of costs will be recharged to the Town or Parish Council. With this in mind, it is worth building some resilience into the budget for this.

The Principal Authority will usually be able to provide an estimate of costs based on previous elections, however due to a number of factors the true cost can only be calculated once the election has been completed. Parish and town council clerks have been issued with a cost calculator in the Autumn of 2023.



Pre-election period

The term 'purdah' has come into popular use across local government to describe the six weeks immediately before an election, up to and including the election day. This is now described as the pre-election period rather than purdah—**we would encourage the old phrase to be discarded.**

Individual councillors can generate their own publicity during this period, but should not use council events to publicise their election campaign.

Councillors can attend events organised by other organisations, but mustn't use them to publicise their election campaign.

The work of the council can go on, councillors can attend events but council cannot give publicity to any councillor's campaign.

Council staff must always be careful not to give the impression of supporting any political party or candidate.

Council newsletters can be circulated as normal provided it is purely about local issues and remains a-political.

Councils should not publish anything on controversial issues or report views in a way that may identify the council with an individual candidate or group.

No election materials, political posters or leaflets must be displayed on any council premises or property, including noticeboards. No councillor is allowed to circulate any such materials before, during, or after, any meeting of the council during this period.

Councils should not publish any material relating, in any way, to a candidate.

Councils should not publish anything which may seek to influence voters.

Important: Councillors are not permitted to use their Town/Parish Council email address for any electioneering / campaigning purposes, campaign material, newsletters or contact cards.

Please ensure you read and clarify any uncertainty you have about the final 'important' note in this section. Talk to your Clerk first.

Resources:

[Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity](#)

[LGA Short guide to publicity during the pre-election period](#)

[All you need to know for the pre-election period](#)

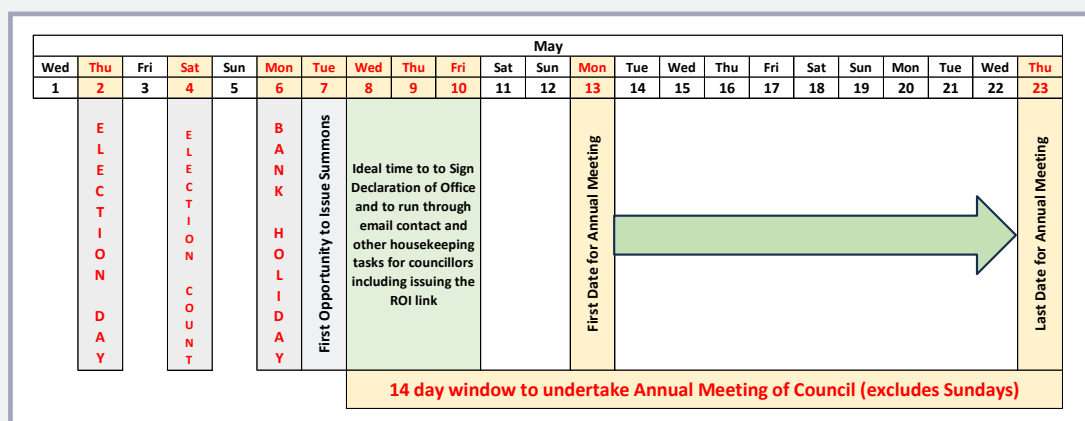
1. Pre-election period and budgeting

Clerk and Council Checklist

The role of the Clerk:

-  Review this information pack and diarise activities and tasks—create your plan
-  Share information pack with current elected members and potential candidates
-  Publish notices as requested by the Returning Officer
-  Encourage local residents to be involved in the election process
-  Assist prospective candidates with any queries about the election process or refer them to the election office contact details
-  After the election: Ensure that the new councillors complete a declaration of acceptance of office and register of interests e-form. There will be refresher sessions for clerks covering how to issue links for councillors to update and complete their register of interests as well as a reminder of the requirements for declaration of acceptance of office. These are on 16 April 2024 [BOOK YOUR PLACE NOW](#)

IMPORTANT—Annual Meeting Timeline May 2024:



-  We advise Clerks that the first date a summons can be issued is **Tuesday 7 May** as councillors formally take up their roles. As such, 3 clear days are 8-10 May and therefore, the first meeting date would be **Monday 13 May 2024**. The last day for the Annual Council Meeting is **Thursday 23 May**.

The role of council:

Actively raise awareness of the elections and agree how that will happen

[Check out the 8 steps to an effective pre-election awareness campaign...on the next page](#)

Promote the work and role of the council

Encourage residents to vote

1. Clerk and Council Checklist

Pre-election awareness campaign

What local councils should do to raise awareness of elections to recruit potential councillors:

1

PLACE articles in local/community newspapers, in newsletters, on Council websites, social media and noticeboards to highlight what local Councils do, why people should vote and why you should stand for election.

2

DISPLAY posters raising awareness of upcoming Elections (suggested places: schools, doctors' surgeries, pubs, shops).

3

ENCOURAGE existing Councillors to do radio and television interviews. Please read the section on the pre-election period carefully to ensure your Council is working within the law.

4

DISTRIBUTE flyers raising awareness of upcoming elections, urging to stand for elections and highlighting the importance of voting and the need to bring photo ID to the polling station

5

HOST an awareness-raising meeting for the public and possible candidates (See Suggested agenda): **CONSIDER** Encouraging potential candidates to attend Council meetings and hold an open day / presentation.

[Access Resources](#)

6

PLACE more articles in local/ community newspapers and on Council media to advise on how and where to get nomination forms including encouragement for voters to take part in their parish and town council elections. Nomination packs are available now on the Electoral Commission website.

What councils should do after elections:

7

WELCOME all newly elected Councillors and as a priority get them to sign the Acceptance of Office form as they cannot act as a Councillor until they have done so.

8

BUILD a team. Arrange a day for the Council and officers to get to know each other and do some strategic thinking.

Consider:

Asking candidates to save a date in their diary for a get together, where council meets after the election and before the annual meeting of council to get to know each other. Possibly organise a parish tour and discuss feedback candidates received whilst campaigning.

1. Pre-election awareness campaign

Timetable to the Annual Council Meeting

2024

Ahead of the immediate run into the election it's important to be clear of what you need to do as a clerk and council to ensure all key tasks are identified and planned for. Don't forget to promote the elections to ensure a contested election takes place and that any new potential candidates know what happens and when.

2. Timetable to the Annual Meeting of Council

2024	Activities & Key Processes
NOW	Nomination Packs for candidates available at — DAPTC Elections 2024 Page (scroll down to resources and important links section)
11 Mar	Publication of Notice of Election and pre-election period starts
12 Mar	Delivery of Nomination papers (by appointment—see appendix)
29 Mar	BANK HOLIDAY—Good Friday
1 Apr	BANK HOLIDAY—Easter Monday
5 Apr	Deadline for delivery of Nomination papers—4:00pm
5 Apr	Deadline for the withdrawal of nomination papers—4:00pm
8 Apr	Publication of Statement as to Persons Nominated—4:00pm
16 Apr	Deadline for receiving applications for voter registration.
17 Apr	Applications to vote by post close at 5:00pm
24 Apr	Applications to vote by proxy close at 5:00pm
2 May	ELECTION DAY 7:00am to 10:00pm
4 May	Parish and town councils—Vote Count from 9:30am
6 May	BANK HOLIDAY—Early May
7 May	Existing councillors retire from office. Newly elected councillors and those from uncontested elections take office. Start getting declarations of acceptance of office signed in presence of the Clerk.
10 May	Councillors to have signed their Declaration of Acceptance of Office in the presence of the Clerk ahead of the Annual Meeting of Council.
13 May	First date that the council can hold its Annual Council Meeting
23 May	Last date that the council can hold its Annual Council Meeting
30 May	Deadline for completion of councillor register of interests—your Clerk will issue a link for completion online
30 May	Last day for the receipt of Candidate Election Spending returns for parish elections—candidates will receive instructions of this process.

Election Act 2022 changes

The Elections Act came into effect in April 2022 and set the scene for a number of changes to the election process.

The biggest change is that in May 2024 all electors will need to show photo identification (ID) when voting at the polling station. Some examples of acceptable ID is to the right. Out of date ID is permissible on the proviso the photo is still a likeness to the person. For the full list of acceptable ID click on the blue link to the right.

If an elector doesn't have the appropriate ID, they will be able to ask for a **Voter Authority Certificate**. They will need to apply for this before the election and will need to verify their identity with their date of birth, national insurance number as well as provide a photo. **Applications can be made online from mid-January. Please contact the Electoral Services team if a paper application form is required.**

The Electoral Registration Officer will need to check each application to make sure the person is registered at the address given, that the details match and that the photo is acceptable i.e. a full face photo has been uploaded.

A certificate will then be posted to the elector for use on election day.

Links:

[Accepted forms of ID](#)

[Apply for a Voter Authority Certificate](#)

[Electoral Commission](#)

- ◆ PASSPORT
- ◆ DRIVING LICENCE
- ◆ BLUE BADGE
- ◆ BUS PASS

For the full list of acceptable ID click the blue link above.



The Returning Officer must ensure that all polling stations are accessible for voters. If you know of any particular issues with a local polling station, get in touch with the elections team at your principal authority.

Principal Authority

THE RETURNING OFFICER

Parish and town council elections are run by the Returning Officer who is a senior officer of the local authority in respect of their electoral functions. You will be able to contact the Returning Officer for your area by contacting your local Electoral Services Team.

The Returning Officer will offer briefings ahead of an election.

THE ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER

The Electoral Registration Officer is responsible for maintaining the register of electors and absent voters' lists for their local authority area.

The Electoral Registration Officer is a senior officer in the local authority and may also be the Returning Officer.

USEFUL CONTACTS:

The Electoral Commission

Tel: 0333 103 1928

[Contact Form](#)

National Association of Local Councils

Tel: 0207 637 1865

Email:

nalc@nalc.gov.uk



DORSET COUNCIL:

Electoral Services Team

Tel: 01305 838299

Email

elections@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk



2. Election Act Changes and Principal Authority

Contested vs. uncontested elections

Uncontested Elections:

If the number of nominated candidates standing for election is insufficient to fill the vacancies on the Council, those candidates are automatically elected as Councillors.

That means they are elected uncontested/unopposed. Uncontested elections regularly occur in parish and town council elections. When this happens, Councillors – who decide on numerous social services – are elected without any votes being cast.

Uncontested elections are not reflective of a healthy democracy. So how do you solve an uncontested election? The first challenge is to make your residents aware of the upcoming election and the role the Council plays in their everyday lives.

If the election is uncontested after the nomination process closes, the Returning Officer will write to all candidates to say they have been elected.

Contested Elections:

Having a contested election allows your Parish/ Town to seek a diverse and dynamic Council that represents the wishes of residents as closely as possible. Even better, contested elections engage the public more.

People are much less likely to vote when they feel an election is already decided. Greater engagement encourages greater transparency and is one way Councils can maintain residents' trust. Remember, it is vital to have competitive, contested elections in order to get your community engaged enough to vote.

A vibrant community engagement strategy in the months leading up to the elections will allow your residents to get a good understanding of what Councils do.

If there are more candidates than seats available, the election will be contested on election day and the counting of votes will begin on 4 May at 10am. This will change if a general election is called at the same time.

Your Clerk is the first person to speak to about becoming a councillor and they can then help you with a variety of resources and the training courses that can be attended.

Training for
Councillors

[READ MORE](#)

Training for
Clerks

[READ MORE](#)

Training for
Council Teams

[READ MORE](#)



The full training schedule for the period May to December 2024 will be visible on our website from March 2024.

2. Contested and uncontested elections

How to stand for election

Check Eligibility

You can be a Councillor for more than one council at the same time: for example Dorset Council and a Parish/Town Council.

You can be a Councillor if you have a full-time job; by law your employer must allow you to take a reasonable amount of time off during working hours to perform your duties as a Councillor.

You do not need to belong to a political party to stand for election and can stand as a candidate to become a Parish/Town Councillor if:

You are over 18 or over on the day you submit your nomination paper and are a British, Commonwealth or European Union Citizen* and at least one of the following:

- ◆ a registered local government elector in the parish area in which you wish to stand as a candidate
- ◆ Occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the parish area during the whole of the 12 months before the day of your nomination and the day of election
- ◆ Your main or only place of work during the 12 months prior to the day of your nomination and the day of election has been in the parish area
- ◆ You have lived in the parish area or within three miles of it during the whole of the 12 months before the day of your nomination and the day of election

*This is expected to change for European Citizens in 2025

Disqualifications

A person is disqualified from being elected or being a Councillor if:

- ◆ You work for the parish council or hold a paid office under the parish council
- ◆ You are subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim orders
- ◆ You have been sentenced to a term imprisonment of three months or more (including a suspended sentence), without the option of a fine, during the five years before polling day
- ◆ You have been disqualified under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (which covers corrupt or illegal practices)
- ◆ You are subject to the notification requirement of, or under Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003

IMPORTANT:

The full range of disqualifications is complex and if you are in any doubt about whether you are disqualified, you must do everything you can to check that you are not disqualified before submitting your nomination papers.

The Returning Officer will not be able to determine whether or not you are disqualified.

3. Standing for election—eligibility

5 steps to campaigning

1

Check for Local Elections Information at Dorset Council:

- ◆ Speak to the Parish or Town Clerk—[Parish & Town Council Contacts](#)
- ◆ Check Dorset Council's Elections Page—[Local & Parish Council Elections 2024](#)
- ◆ Visit the Electoral Commission Website—[Electoral Commission](#)

2

Submit your Nomination Form to Dorset Council Elections Team:

To stand as a candidate, you will need to complete a set of nomination papers for the electoral area you are wanting to represent. Your nomination papers will need to show that you have been formally nominated by a particular number of registered electors in the electoral area you are wishing to stand.

These are a proposer and seconder who support your nomination in the Parish/Town or Ward (if warded) you are wanting to represent. Nomination papers must be hand delivered to Dorset Council. Please check on your local authority website as an appointment is necessary.

Nomination Packs are available now on the [DAPTC Elections 2024 Page](#)

IMPORTANT [Please watch this narrated video about completing your nomination form](#)

3

If the notification is valid:

Dorset Council Elections Team will notify candidates in writing, via email or post. This is the formal 'Notice of Validity'.

4

Nominations made public:

The Statement of Persons Nominated is published on the Dorset Council website following the close of nominations.

If there are more candidates than seats, an election will be held. Should the election be uncontested at this point, all validly nominated candidates are deemed to be elected and will take office 4 days after 2 May (excluding the bank holiday on 6 May), which will be 7 May 2024. **New Councillors must sign the declaration of acceptance of office before they can officiate.**

5

Start campaigning:

A useful source of ideas and guidance can be found on the Electoral Commission website. This includes useful links on spending, attending events and dos and don'ts when campaigning.

- ◆ [Non-party campaigners—where to start](#)
- ◆ [Local Government Association Toolkit—Planning your local campaign](#)
- ◆ [Local Government Association Ideas—Planning Your Communications](#)

GO

You should be ready to go— enjoy campaigning!

3. Standing for election—campaigning

Post election tasks and processes

After the elections a number of actions and activities must take place:

1. Declaration of Acceptance of Office:

If you are elected and do not make a declaration of acceptance of office at or before the first meeting after the election (or a later meeting if that is permitted by the parish Council), your seat will become vacant, and a further notice of casual vacancy will need to be published.

Clerks will be briefed and have refresher training on the process for the declaration of acceptance of office and issuing of the links to councillors for their Register of Interests. 3 Sessions have been booked for 16 April 2024. [BOOK YOUR PLACE](#)

2. Register of Interests (ROI):

Within 28 days of becoming a Councillor you must notify the Monitoring Officer at Dorset Council of any disclosable pecuniary interests and non-disclosable pecuniary interests. If re-elected, or reappointed then the Councillor must notify the Monitoring Officer of any interests not already included in their register.

Councillors are required to keep their register updated within 28 days of any subsequent changes becoming known to them.

Clerks should ensure that the Register of Interest is also displayed on their own parish or town council website. Follow the agreed process set by the Monitoring Officer for Dorset Council.

Clerks will brief councillors or they can watch a sort video explaining how to complete their ROI on the Dorset Council e-form

IMPORTANT: The Monitoring Officer of Dorset Council must establish and maintain a register of interests of the members of the Councils in its area. Such interests include any pecuniary interests and non-pecuniary interests included in the Code of Conduct adopted by a Council.

The Monitoring Officer must ensure that the register of interests is available for inspection at all reasonable hours at a place in the principal authority's area and must publish the register of interests on its website. A parish Council with a website must publish the register of interests of its members and the Monitoring Officer must provide the parish/town council with any data that the Council needs to comply with its duty to publish the register of interests on its website, if it has one.

Useful Read: [NALC Legal Topic Note 80—Members' Conduct and the Disclosure of Interests](#)

3. Councillor induction training:

Councils can contact DAPTC to discuss either whole council training or specific courses and topics they would like new councillors to undertake. This may include refresher training for councillors continuing in role for the new term of office. Click image below to view:



4. Post election day tasks and processes

Post election tasks and processes

4. Resignations

[NALC Legal Topic Note 2](#)

At the start of a new term of office:

The retiring Chair's last responsibility is to preside at the first meeting of the new council (annual meeting of the council) until the successor is elected. The retiring chair must note members who are present, or absent, receive nominations and count votes in the election of a new Chair. If the Chair cannot be present the Vice-Chair will preside. In the event that they are both absent a Councillor, chosen by the Councillors present, presides. The Vice Chairman holds office until immediately after the election of the Chair of the new council.

If the retiring Chair has been re-elected as a Councillor and is present at the meeting, they shall preside until a new chair has been elected. They have an original vote but are not under a duty to cast it. In the event of a tie the retiring Chairman must give a casting vote. The original and/or casting vote may be used to vote for himself/ herself.

If the retiring Chair has not been re-elected as a Councillor and is present at the meeting, they shall preside until a new Chair has been elected. However, they do not have an original vote. In the event of a tied vote, the retiring Chair must give a casting vote.

During a term of office:

The Chair resigns to the Council in writing and must notify the Clerk. The resignation takes immediate effect and a new Chair must be elected as the first order of business at the next Council meeting.

When a councillor resigns:

A councillor resigns to the Chair / Clerk of council in writing.

The Clerk notifies the elections team at Dorset Council and a public notice for the Clerk to display is agreed.

By-elections and casual vacancies:

A by-election is an election that takes place during a term of office. It can take place if a councillor:

- ◆ Fails to deliver the declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time
- ◆ Dies
- ◆ Fails to attend meetings for six consecutive months and apologies for absence have not been accepted
- ◆ Resigns
- ◆ Ceases to be qualified/is disqualified (and ten or more electors sign to call for the seat to be filled by election)

Or if:

- ◆ The election is declared void
- ◆ The period for making an application/appeal against a conviction has ended
- ◆ The principal authority orders a new election under reserve powers
- ◆ There is a vacancy due to membership of the Council increasing

4. Post election day tasks and processes

Resources and useful links

Dorset Council's dedicated local and parish/town council webpage for the 2024 elections:

[Local and Parish Council Elections 2024](#)

This webpage will hold all the latest information during the lead up election day and in the immediate period after. Further information will be added in the last 2 weeks of January 2024—please keep checking.



DAPTC provides training, advice and support to parish and town councils across Dorset.

For more background reading you can visit the dedicated Dorset Council Area Elections Page for DAPTC.

If you have any queries do not hesitate to get in touch.

[DAPTC Parish 2024 Elections Page](#)



Being a member of DAPTC in Dorset ensures you also have membership of our national body NALC.

They have an array of resources for the pre-election period for councils and candidates. This includes social media content and videos from current councillors.



[NALC Make a Change Webpage](#)

IMPORTANT ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING REMINDERS:

- ◆ Don't forget to set a date in the window when the meeting has to be lawfully called—[see timeline on page 6](#).
- ◆ If this is your first Annual Council Meeting after an election as a new clerk—we are happy to help talk through what to include.
- ◆ If you have the General Power of Competence you will need this on the agenda if you have met the criteria plus adopt Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.
- ◆ Make sure the outgoing Chair is available to preside at the start of the meeting and handover to the new Chair of council.
- ◆ We have templates for acceptance of office if you require copies.
- ◆ Anything else—just get in touch daptc@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

5. Resources and useful links

Appendix:

Nomination Papers—Drop Off Venues

County Hall, Colliton Park, Dorchester DT1 1XJ		
2024	Open	Close
Tuesday 12 March to Thursday 4 April	9:00am	4:30pm
Thursday 14 March and Monday 25 March	9:00am	7:00pm
Friday 5 April	9:00am	4:00pm
Westport House, Worgret Road, Wareham, Dorset BH20 4PP		
Monday 18 March	9:00am	4:30pm
Wednesday 20 March	9:00am	7:00pm
Tuesday 26 March	9:00am	4:30pm
Wednesday 27 March	9:00am	4:30pm
Allandale House, Hanham Road, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 1AS		
Tuesday 19 March	9:00am	4:30pm
Thursday 21 March	9:00am	4:30pm
Tuesday 26 March	9:00am	7:00pm
Wednesday 27 March	9:00am	4:30pm
Norden Lodge, 58 Salisbury Road, Blandford Forum DT11 7LN		
Tuesday 19 March	9:00am	4:30pm
Thursday 21 March	9:00am	4:30pm
Monday 25 March	9:00am	4:30pm
Thursday 28 March	9:00am	7:00pm

IMPORTANT: There will be strict appointment only basis for accepting nomination papers as there will be just over 2,000 nominations being received.

6. Appendix—Nomination Venues