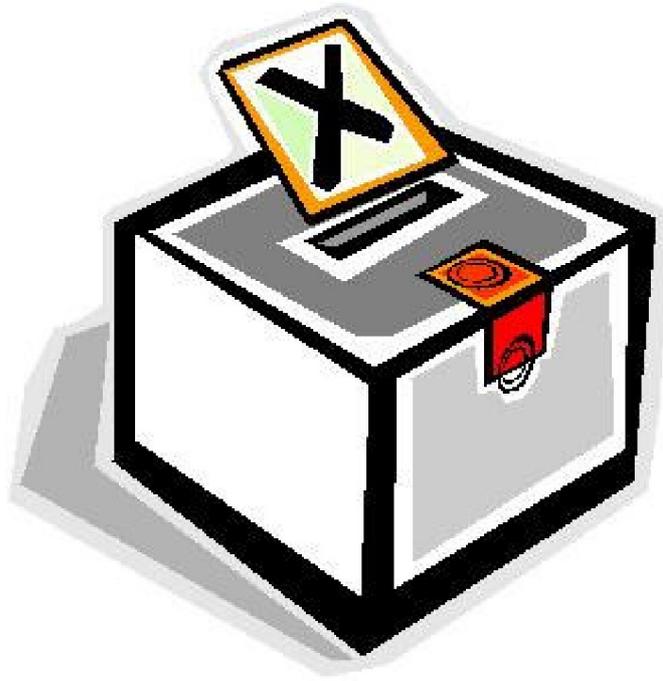


Shropshire Council



Useful Guide to Procedures for Town & Parish Council Elections

www.shropshire.gov.uk

Updated October 2011

TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Introduction to Election Procedures

These notes are to advise Town and Parish Councillors of the practice relating to Town/Parish Council elections. It is for general guidance only and is not intended as a comprehensive statement of the law.

The 1983 and 1985 Representation of the People Acts, together with the Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) Rules 1986, and more recently, the Representation of the People Act 2000 & the Representation of the People Regulations 2001 made several changes to the way Town/Parish elections are conducted. The most important of these changes relate to the computation of the election timetable, combined elections, the extension of absent voting, poll cards and the co-option of members.

The Returning Officer appointed by Shropshire Council is of course responsible for the conduct of, and arrangements for Town and Parish Council elections. However, the Town and Parish Council and its Clerk have an important role to play, especially in giving advice to prospective candidates prior to the four-yearly ordinary elections and in the preliminary arrangements for the filling of casual vacancies, including by-elections.

SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL'S WEBSITE

Information about every vacancy – including Notice of Election, Statement of Persons Nominated, Notice of Poll and Declaration of Results, together with various statutory deadlines – will be published on Shropshire Council's website. Postal and Proxy Voting Application Forms can also be downloaded for each by-election. Specific named Town and Parish Council Elections can be located via the "Search" facility. Please press "Refresh" when viewing these pages to ensure that you are viewing the most up-to-date information.

These notes should be a useful, but not exhaustive, reference if you are involved with Town/Parish Council elections. However, if you need any more information, please contact the **Elections Office** on **0345 678 9015**.

Further guidance can also be received from the **Electoral Commission** – **www.electoralcommission.org.uk** or Tel. **020 727 10500**.

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A. ORDINARY TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS

1. Term of Office

Town/Parish Councillors hold office for a period of four years (or if elected part way through the cycle, for the remainder of that period only) and retire on the fourth day after the ordinary day of election. The newly elected Councillors take office (provided they have made declarations of acceptance of office) on the day on which their predecessors retire (Local Government Act, 1972, Section 16(3)). The Chair of a Town/Parish Council continues in office until their successor becomes entitled to act as such.

2. Combination of Elections

The Representation of the People Act 1983, Section 36 allows for the ordinary elections of Shropshire Councillors to be combined with the ordinary elections of Town/Parish Councillors, if they are held on the same day.

If a Parliamentary General Election is called for the same day as the scheduled ordinary elections of Shropshire and Town/Parish Councillors, the law provides for the Parliamentary and County polls to be combined and the Town/Parish polling day to be postponed for three weeks.

3. The Election Timetable

We will provide Candidates and Town/Parish Clerks with a timetable for each election or by-election. Key dates will also be shown on Shropshire Council's website.

Saturdays, Sundays, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Good Friday or a Bank Holiday are disregarded when the timetable is being calculated before polling day. They are however, included in the calculation of proceedings following polling day. For example, the last day for the delivery of candidates' returns of election expenses, which is calculated as 28 calendar days after the day of election.

4. Absent Voting – Postal and Proxy Applications

New postal vote applications or applications to change a postal vote to a proxy vote (or vice-versa), or to have a postal ballot paper sent to a different address, or to cancel a postal must be made in writing to the Electoral Registration Officer at the Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND by **5 pm on the eleventh day before Polling Day**. New or amended proxy applications must be made by **5pm on the sixth day before Polling Day**. Application forms can be downloaded from our website.

5. Nomination Procedures

It is important that nomination papers are completed correctly. Whilst it is often the case that the Town/Parish Clerk will arrange to distribute and oversee the completion of nomination papers, it is the responsibility of each Candidate and not the Clerk, to ensure that their papers are submitted to the Returning Officer before the deadline specified within the statutory election timetable.

We recommend that you use the pre-printed sheet/label enclosed with your nomination pack, when returning your nomination papers. It is clearly marked with the date and time that the Returning Officer must receive your papers, and you should adhere it to an envelope to alert staff at The Shirehall of its importance upon receipt. If you are posting your papers back to us rather than depositing them personally, please ensure that you pay the correct postage.

If you deliver your ballot papers in person, it is advisable to wait for them to be checked by the Elections Team before you leave. This is because if we discover an error, you will be able to take your paper away with you to correct it and re-submit it before the closing date and time.

Please note that nomination papers cannot be submitted until the date after the Notice of Election has been published.

Any papers which are incomplete, incorrect or received after the close of nominations cannot be accepted as valid.

Please take a few moments to familiarise yourself with the following guidance before you complete your nomination paper:-

About Yourself:

Each candidate must be nominated on a separate **nomination paper** in the prescribed form, the notes to which should be read carefully.

The nomination paper must give:-

- the **full names** (surname first) and **home address** of the candidate and
- may, if desired, give his or her **description**, which must not exceed six words in length and are predominantly for use when the seat is being contested by members of a political party, or when candidates are "Independent".

Please note that your **description** is what will appear on the printed ballot paper. If you therefore write your description as "Farmer - Blue Eyes, Black Hair", this is what will be printed below your name when the ballot papers are produced.

A candidate may not use a description which is likely to lead voters to associate him or her with a Political Party unless that description is authorized by a Certificate signed by or on behalf of the Party's Registered Nominating Officer, which must also be received by the Returning Officer not later than the latest time for the delivery of nomination papers.

If a candidate wishes to use a party's emblem to appear against his or her name on the ballot paper, this must also be requested before the closing time for delivery of nominations.

Guidance on the use of Commonly Used Names:

Great care should be taken when a candidate completes his or her nomination paper if they decide to use a commonly used name. Please follow the guidance overleaf to see how your name will be printed.

Candidate's Actual Name	Candidate's Actual Forename	Commonly used Surname	Commonly used Forename	Appear on Ballot Papers as ...
Banks	Rebecca			BANKS Rebecca Banks
Banks	Rebecca	Banks	Becky	BANKS Becky Banks
Banks	Rebecca	Banksy	Becky	BANKSY Becky Banksy
Banks	Rebecca	Banksy		BANKSY Rebecca Banksy
Banks	Rebecca		Becky	BANKS Becky Banks
Banks	Rebecca	--- (or "None to be Used")	Becky	BECKY
Banks	Rebecca	Banksy	--- (or "None to be Used")	BANKSY

Signing Nominations:

The nomination paper must be subscribed by a:-

- (i) Proposer and
- (ii) Seconder

The Proposer and Seconder must be local government electors of the town/parish, or if the town/parish is divided into wards, the correct ward, and their electoral numbers must be given on the nomination paper.

Proposers/Seconders cannot sign more nomination papers than the number of vacancies to be filled. Whilst the Electoral Team can provide poll numbers, they cannot formally validate a nomination paper immediately, as another candidate may have already submitted a paper bearing a similar Proposer/Seconder.

It is good practice for the Town/Parish Council Clerk not to sign nomination papers or advocate the election of any particular candidate. Strict impartiality will avoid any possible accusation of bias.

Qualifications for Candidature and Consent to Nomination:

To be qualified to be elected a member of a Town/Parish Council, a person must be 18 years of age or over at the date of his or her nomination, and a Commonwealth citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland, or a citizen of another Member State of the European Community, and either:-

- (i) on that day he/she is and thereafter he/she continues to be a local government elector for the area of the parish; or
- (ii) he/she has during the whole of the twelve months preceding that day occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the parish; or
- (iii) his/her principal or only place of work during that twelve months has been in that area; or
- (iv) he/she has during the whole of those twelve months resided either in the parish or within 4.8 kilometres of it.

Candidates must disclose this information on their Consent to Nomination and are advised to complete as many of the relevant qualifications as apply.

A submitted Nomination Paper is **NOT** valid unless the candidate's **Consent to Nomination**, given in writing on or within one month before the last day for delivery of nomination papers, is delivered at the place and within the time appointed for the delivery of nomination papers. The consent must contain a statement declaring that, with reference to the day of nomination the candidate is, and on the day of election will be, qualified to be elected (giving particulars of his or her qualification) and must be attested by a witness. Any person may act as a witness to the candidate's signature. The consent to nomination must also include the candidate's date of birth.

Disqualifications for Candidature:

There are certain disqualifications for election, of which the main (see S.80 of the Local Government Act 1972) are:-

- (a) holding a paid office under the authority;
- (b) bankruptcy;
- (c) having been sentenced to a term of imprisonment (whether suspended or not) of not less than three months, without the option of a fine during the five years preceding the election; and
- (d) being disqualified under any enactment relating to corrupt or illegal practices.

Campaigning and Expenditure:

Election campaigning can be carried out as soon as a person declares himself/herself to be a candidate. It is in the interests of each candidate to undertake their own publicity campaign, so that potential voters know who they are voting for. All election publicity must carry an imprint with details of the **full name and full postal address of the printer and promoter** of the material. There is no longer a requirement to include the details of a publisher. The name and address of any person on whose behalf the material is being published must also be included, if this person is not the promoter. Additional useful information regarding campaigning can be obtained from the Electoral Commission.

Candidates are subject to limits on what they spend during the regulated period in advance of an election. The limit for the local government elections is £600, plus 5p per local government elector in the ward. A record (and receipts) for any expenses incurred should be kept, as towards the end of the election process, each candidate must, by law, complete and return their Election Expenses.

Candidates sometimes believe that they can claim back their campaign expenditure. **No reimbursement of expenses can be made by Shropshire Council to candidates** – it is a record which is required to be submitted by law, and is a public document which is available for public inspection.

6. Statement of Persons Nominated

As soon as practicable after the closing date for receipt of nominations and not later than 12 noon on the seventeenth day before election day, the Returning Officer is required to publish a **Statement of Persons who stand nominated** and of the reasons why any other persons nominated no longer stand nominated.

A copy of this statement will be sent to the Town/Parish Clerk for display locally, and a copy will also be sent to the Town/Parish Chairman. A copy of the notice will also be published on Shropshire Council's website, so you may wish to log on to see who the other candidates are (if any). Please remember to press "Refresh" on your browser bar to ensure that you have the most up-to-date information available.

7. Withdrawal of Candidature

A candidate may withdraw his or her candidature if, not later than noon on the sixteenth day before the Election Day, he or she delivers to the place fixed for the delivery of nomination papers a **Notice of Withdrawal** signed by him or her, and attested by one witness.

A candidate who is validly nominated for more than one ward of the same town/parish **must** withdraw their candidature in all those wards except one by that deadline, otherwise they shall be deemed to have withdrawn from **all** those wards.

It is only at the expiry of the deadline for withdrawals that we will know whether or not there will be a poll.

8. Appointment of Polling and Counting Agents

Whilst it is not usual for a town or parish council election, a candidate may, if they wish, appoint polling agents to detect personation at a polling station and counting agents to observe at the count. A polling agent is **not** the same as a 'teller' (a candidate's helper who takes the numbers of electors leaving the polling station), who has no official standing and is **not** allowed to enter the polling station except to vote.

9. Uncontested Elections

If the number of people remaining validly nominated after any withdrawals does not exceed the number of Councillors to be elected, such people will be declared to be elected as soon as possible after the latest time for the delivery of withdrawals. The Returning Officer will give notice of their names to the Town/Parish Clerk or Chairman and to the public.

Even if there is just one candidate, he/she is not elected unopposed until the after the withdrawal date and time, as he/she may exercise his/her right to withdraw their candidature up until that deadline.

People elected in these circumstances at scheduled elections do not take up office until four days after the day of election (see A.1). In the case of a by-election however, an unopposed candidate will take office immediately after they have been declared to be elected (which is after the latest time for delivery of the close of withdrawals). Refer to "Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 - (Rule 50 (2))".

If there are not enough candidates to fill all the vacancies, the Representation of the People Act 1985, Section 21 allows the elected members, provided there is a quorum (i.e. – one third of the whole number of members with a minimum of three) to co-opt members to fill the remaining vacancies.

If the Town/Parish Council fails to exercise the power to co-opt within seven weeks (35 days computed as under paragraph 3) or if there is no quorum, Shropshire Council may order a fresh election to properly constitute the Town/Parish Council.

10. Contested Elections – Declaration of Result

When the result of the poll is known, the Returning Officer or the appointed Deputy will:-

- (a) declare to be elected, the candidate(s) to whom more votes have been given than to the other candidates, up to the number of Councillors to be elected.
- (b) give notice of the name of each candidate elected to the Town/Parish Clerk or Chairman
- (c) give public notice of the name of each candidate and of the total number of votes given for each (whether elected or not) together with the number of rejected ballot papers

11. Election Expenses

At the end of the election period, even if no poll has taken place, each Candidate (whether successful or not) **MUST** submit a Statement of Election Expenses/Declaration to show the expenses (if any) incurred as part of their election campaign. These documents are available for public inspection and failure to return one (even if it is a 'Nil Return') is a reported electoral offence.

12. Register of Electors supplied to Candidates

Candidates at by-elections are supplied with a Register of Electors as part of their Nomination Pack. Any Candidate who is unsuccessful or decides not to stand for election **must** return their Register to the Returning Officer after the election period.

13. Declaration of Acceptance of Office

A person elected to the office of a Town/Parish Councillor shall:-

- (a) in the case of the Chair, at the meeting at which they are elected; or
- (b) in the case of a Councillor, before or at the first meeting of the Parish Council after their election; or
- (c) in either case if the Council at that meeting allows, before or at a later meeting fixed by the Council.

make in the presence of a member of the Council or of the proper officer of the Council a **Declaration of Acceptance of Office** (see Appendix 1).

Failure to do so will mean their office will become vacant (Local Government Act 1972, Section 83). The person making the declaration is now required to observe the Code of Conduct adopted by the Town/Parish Council.

14. Annual Meeting

A Town/Parish Council must hold an annual meeting each year on any day in May they choose.

Except in the year when ordinary elections are held for all Councillors, when the annual meeting must be held on, or within fourteen days after, the day the new Councillors take office (i.e. the fourth day after the day of the election (usually a Monday)).

15. Candidates Checklist

The timetable that was supplied to you as part of your Nomination Pack shows the actual deadline dates for each event throughout the election. Please refer to this regularly to remind you of the key dates in the election.

Also, please remember to refer to Shropshire Council's website to view the notices published throughout the election timetable – Notice of Election, Statement of Persons Nominated, Notice of Poll and Election Results – as well as to view information regarding polling stations, and registration/absent voting deadlines.

You may wish to run through this Checklist to make sure you have done everything required by the dates set out in the election timetable.

	Tick when complete (or as required)
Nomination Paper and Consent to Nomination:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the nomination paper been completed with Forename and Surname?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If required, has the Commonly Used Name section been completed? (See Section 5).	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is a Description being used, if so, is it less than six words? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the Candidate's Address, Title and Contact Information been completed? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has my Proposer and Secunder signed the Nomination Paper? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the Consent to Nomination been fully completed with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) all the qualification sections that apply; (b) the candidate's signature; (c) the candidate's date of birth; (d) the name, address and signature of a witness? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If using a Political Party Description and Emblem, have the necessary consents been completed, countersigned by the Registered Nominating Officer or Authorised Person, and been submitted by the close of the nomination period? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the Returning Officer Label been adhered to an envelope to alert staff to the closing date for receipt of nominations? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the nomination paper be received by the deadline for receipt of nominations – either via the postal system or by personal delivery? 	
Withdrawal of Candidature	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If withdrawing from the contest after submitting your nomination paper, complete the necessary form and have it witnessed, ready for submission by the due deadline. 	
Appointment of Agents	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If required, complete and return the forms for the appointment of polling agents, counting agents and postal vote opening agents and submit them to the Returning Officer by the due deadline. 	
Declaration and Return of Candidates Election Expenses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the "Declaration by Candidates" and "Return of Election Expenses" forms been submitted to the Returning Officer by the due deadline – even if it is a "Nil" return? (See Section 11). 	
Register of Electors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For unsuccessful candidates, has the Register of Electors been sent back to Shropshire Council's Returning Officer? 	
Declaration of Acceptance of Office and Members Interests	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For successful candidates, has the Declaration of Acceptance of Office been signed and witnessed? (See Section 13). 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For successful candidates, has a Declaration of Members Interests Form been completed and submitted to Shropshire Council's Monitoring Officer as soon as practicable after taking up office? 	

B. FILLING OF CASUAL VACANCIES

Casual vacancies will be filled either by election or co-option. Below is a step-by-step guide to help Town/Parish Clerks.

1. The Vacancy

Firstly, the Town/Parish Council must advertise the vacancy. This should be done by displaying a notice, similar to the notice in Appendix 2. The notices should be displayed in places that are as conspicuous as possible within the parish and a copy of the Notice sent **immediately** to the Returning Officer, Shropshire Council, The Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY2 6ND. The Town/Parish Council may also advertise the vacancy in any other manner they wish. **(Please make sure you inform the Elections Office at the Shirehall of any vacancies – Tel: 0345 678 9015).**

It is important to complete the Notice correctly, paying particular attention to the dates on the Notice and must be displayed for 14 days from the date of the Notice. The 14 days must not include weekends, bank holidays and so on.

2. Filling the Vacancy by Election

During the 14 days of the notice being displayed, ten electors from within the Parish or Ward of the Town/Parish can call for an election to be held. To do this they will need to make their request in writing to the Returning Officer, Shropshire Council, The Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire. SY2 6ND. A sample election request form is in Appendix 3 and can be downloaded from Shropshire Council's website.

In the event of this happening, the Town/Parish Clerk will be notified. The Returning Officer will decide on the date of the election, which must fall within 60 working days (computed in accordance with Appendix 2) from the date of the Notice.

In the case of a casual vacancy occurring within six months before the day on which that Councilor would regularly have retired, an election is not held. The Town/Parish Council may co-opt a person to fill the vacancy and any vacancy not so filled shall be filled at the next ordinary election.

3. Official Poll Cards

Where the poll at a Town/Parish election is not combined with another type of election, the Town/Parish Council may, not later than noon on the nineteenth day before election day, request in writing, the Returning Officer to issue poll cards for that election.

An estimate of the cost of production and postage of poll cards will be supplied on request.

Where a Town/Parish election is combined with a Shropshire Council election, the poll cards will be issued for the County election but refer to the Town/Parish election taking place on the same day.

4. Filling the Vacancy by Co-option

If an election is not requested, the Town/Parish Clerk will be notified that the Town/Parish Council must co-opt a member to fill the vacancy as soon as practicable. The name and address of the person co-opted should be sent to the Returning Officer.

If the number of casual vacancies leaves the Town/Parish Council without a quorum, Shropshire Council will order an election to be held and in the meantime may by order appoint people to fill all or any of the vacancies until other Councillors are elected and take up office.

5. Co-Option, Best Practice

- (i) Advertise the casual vacancies within the parish and local press.
- (ii) Set a date by which prospective candidates must write into the Chairman or Clerk to the Town/Parish Council expressing their interests in these casual vacancies.
- (iii) Notice of the Election (co-option) should be given in the agenda for the meeting of the Town/Parish Council.
- (iv) When the item is reached, the Chairman should call for nominations, which should be duly proposed and seconded.
- (v) Candidates can be either interviewed or their letter of interest read out to a Town/Parish Council meeting.
- (vi) The prospective candidates must fulfil the same criteria requirements as those for qualifications for candidature for an election.
- (vii) When all the nominations have been received a vote should be taken. It is usual for the candidates' names to be put in alphabetical order. (Voting in council on casual vacancies is recommended).
- (viii) A successful candidate should have received an absolute majority vote of those present and voting.
- (ix) It follows that if there are more than two candidates for one vacancy and no one of them at the first count receives a majority over the aggregate votes given to the rest, steps should be taken to strike off the candidate with the least number of votes and the remainder should then be put to the vote again; this process should, if necessary, be repeated until an absolute majority is obtained.
- (x) If there is more than one vacancy and the number of candidates equals the number of vacancies, all the vacancies may be filled by a single composite resolution, but if the number of candidates exceeds the number of vacancies, each vacancy should be filled by a separate vote or series of votes.
- (xi) After the vote has been taken, the Chairman should declare the candidate who received the highest number of votes duly elected.

- (xiii) The person elected must make a declaration of acceptance of office before, or at, the first meeting of the Town/Parish Council following his election in the presence of a member of the Town/Parish Council or the Proper Officer of the Town/Parish Council.

Note: There is nothing preventing Councillors from approaching persons to offer themselves for co-option or even advertising for co-optee applicants. Applications might also be invited to provide a written “application” or invited to speak to the council prior to any voting. If such arrangements are to be applied, they should be carefully drafted and provided to applicants. It is imperative that all applicants are treated alike in order that the arrangements are seen as fair. Applicants under such arrangements should be discouraged from any personal lobbying.

6. Insufficient Nominations

Where an election has been requested to fill a casual vacancy and there are insufficient nominations, a further election will have to be arranged and held within 35 computed days (Representation of the People Act 1983, Section 39(1)) of the date of the original election.

7. Term of Office

A person elected or co-opted to fill a casual vacancy holds office until the person in whose place they are elected or appointed would regularly have retired.

DECLARATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE

I,

having been elected to the office of *

HEREBY DECLARE that I take that office upon myself, and will duly and faithfully fulfil the duties of it according to the best of my judgment and ability.

I undertake to observe the code of conduct, which is expected of members of

..... **Town/Parish Council**

Date (Signed)

This declaration was made and signed before me

(Signed)

Member or Proper Officer of the Council of the

.....

** insert Chairman of the Town/Parish Council or Town/Parish Councillor, as appropriate.*

[Insert parish council arms / logo]

NOTICE UNDER LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972 (Section 87(2))

**VACANCY FOR A
COUNCILLOR**

PUBLIC NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN

that a casual vacancy has occurred in the office of Councillor for the _____ Ward of the Parish of _____ following the resignation/death on _____ of Councillor _____

Rule 5(2) of The Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules, 2006 now applies.

The rule allows TEN ELECTORS for the parish [ward] in which the casual vacancy has arisen to request the Returning Officer to hold an election to fill the vacancy. * That request must be made within FOURTEEN DAYS, calculated in accordance with the rules,** of the date of this notice. The fourteen-day period ends on .

What if a request to hold an election is not received during the permitted time? Rule 5(5) of the above Rules will apply. The Parish Council must, as soon as practicable after the expiry of the fourteen-day period, co-opt a person to fill the vacancy.

The Returning Officer's address is Electoral Services, Shropshire Council, The Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY2 6ND and the telephone number for further guidance is 0345 678 9015

This notice is dated _____ day of _____ 20_____

Clerk to the Council

* There is no form of words for this request, which might simply be a letter headed with such words as "We the undersigned being electors for the [Ward of] ... Parish, call for an election to fill the vacancy arising from the [death][resignation] of ...". It is helpful if the ten signatures are accompanied by printed names and addresses or something similar to the example in Appendix 4.

** In calculating the notice period, day one is the day following the date of this notice; a Saturday, Sunday, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Good Friday or a Bank Holiday or day appointed for public thanksgiving or mourning shall be disregarded, and the period closes at midnight on the fourteenth day after the date of this notice. Rule 5(2) of The Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules, 2006 now applies.

APPENDIX 3

REQUEST FOR AN ELECTION

We are ten Local Government electors for the

Town/Parish of

..... WARD

We request that an election be held to fill the casual vacancy in the office of
Town/Parish Councillor caused by

.....

as published in the notice dated

	Print Name	Signature	Address	Office Use
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

Dated