

# ELECTIONS TIMETABLE FOR MAY 2019 AND SOME ADVICE ON PURDAH



Vanessa Ricketts FSLCC, Town Clerk and RFO to Ferndown TC and a former Elections and Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer, offers a personal view on the impact of the forthcoming elections and the meaning of 'purdah' for our sector.

The Notice of Elections will be published in March anytime from 15-26 (check with your principal authority for the exact date), this begins the pre-election or 'purdah' period. Around 4th April will see the publication of persons nominated and you should receive your notice of poll around 24th April, with the elections taking place on Thursday 2nd May.

The most commonly asked question is always, "When should I hold the Annual Council Meeting after the election?". Schedule 12 para 7 to the Local Government Act 1972 provides as follows, 'In a year of ordinary elections of parish councillors, the annual meeting of a parish council shall be held on, or within 14 days after, the day on which the councillors elected at that election take office. Para 10(2) provides that the notice and summons to attend the meeting should be published at least three clear days before a meeting of a parish council. Three "clear days" excludes the day of the summons and the day of the meeting and means working days. S 16(3) of the LGA72 provides that the whole number of parish councillors shall retire together in every ordinary year of elections of such councillors on the fourth day after the ordinary day of election of such councillors, and the newly elected councillors shall come into office on the day on which their predecessors retire. Under S 243(1) where the day on which anything is required (to be done) is a bank holiday, the requirement shall be deemed to relate to the first day thereafter.'



So, translating the technical blurb above means that, with the election being Thursday 2nd May 2019, the fourth day after is Monday 6th May (a bank holiday) but falls back to Tuesday 7th May. Within 14 days after means on or before 21st May. For a meeting to be valid, at least three clear days' notice and summons must be given. As you cannot give a summons to a person who is not a councillor that cannot happen until 7th May. Therefore, the earliest day for the meeting is Monday 13th and the last is Tuesday 21st May.

A councillor can only act after he or she has made the Declaration of Acceptance of Office so you will need to ensure that all members have signed prior to the start of the Annual Council Meeting. Members also only have 28 days to submit their Declaration of Pecuniary Interests, therefore this deadline expires on 3rd June.

Purdah, the pre-election period, runs from 15th March until the end of the day of poll. For our sector the guidance relates to publicity, so we should be mindful not

to publicise controversial issues, or report views or proposals in such a way that identifies individual or groups of members. This includes council newsletters, magazines, press releases and social media. Any quotes made during this period should come from the clerk/proper officer. Council business should carry on as normal with minutes of meetings not identifying individual councillors, as is normal good practice.

The Annual Parish Meeting must take place between 1st March and 1st June (S 12, 14(1)). For larger councils, or those councils which are political, I believe this meeting takes place outside of purdah in order that it is not used as a political platform.

If you have any queries regarding the timetable, or the issue of purdah, I'm happy to answer calls on 01202 892249.

**Further general guidance on Elections by the National legal Advisor can be found at [add link to pages 30/31 of January 2015 edition](#) – Ed.**

# ENCOURAGING CANDIDACY



Danny Moody PSLCC, Chief Executive of Northants County Association of Local Councils, explains how candidates can be encouraged to come forward in local elections

**M**ost advertisements promoting candidacy for parish and town council elections are dull. A picture of Kitchener followed by a boring list of the statutory qualifications for being a councillor just doesn't cut the mustard anymore.

But before thinking about *\*how\** to attract candidates, we need to think about *\*who\** we are trying to attract. Based on input from over one hundred clerks, the following person spec for the "perfect" councillor was developed:

**COMMUNICATION SKILLS** – good listener, responds to e-mails sent by clerk, open to new ideas, computer literate and willing to work electronically.

**PERSONAL QUALITIES** – honest, decent, confident, visionary, forward thinking, proactive, strategic, flexible, respectful of professional knowledge and objectivity of officers, leadership, supportive, polite, patient but tenacious, sense of humour!

**COMMITMENT** – prepared for meetings, team player, punctual, available and accessible for scheduled and ad hoc meetings, takes role seriously, willing to participate, interested, enthusiastic, positive outlook.

**KNOWLEDGE** – understands council's strategy, knows financial rules and regs, understands roles and responsibilities of officers and members, knows council is an employer, understands council's powers, willing to learn and develop and

undertake training, understands the Code of Conduct.

**COMMUNITARIAN** – passionate about community, focused on whole community (not a single issue), has a track record of contributing in the community

**BASICS** – stays awake in meetings, has good personal hygiene and respect for personal space, treats others with dignity, has reasonable and respectful dress standards for council meetings, doesn't turn up smelling of alcohol!

Using the person spec as a basis, it is possible to create an advertisement that hits the key notes, and a carefully crafted election advertisement will go a long way to attracting good candidates. Consider the following text for example:

As a councillor representing your community you will help keep it a great place to live and work. You will be supported in your role and will be expected to undertake training. You should be comfortable working electronically. You should have a positive outlook and a can-do attitude and be willing to work as part of a team.

That short text says so much! It will catch the eye of a modern, forward thinking person who is willing to contribute to the community if they receive support in return. Put that text in big letters with an eye-catching graphic and then include the Clerk's contact details or, better still, a



web address for further information. No need to include the boring local government stuff. In the unlikely event you receive an enquiry from someone who is not eligible to stand for election you can always talk that through with them and together think of other ways they can contribute to the council.

And once you've designed your brilliant advertisement put it EVERYWHERE. If I had a penny for every time a Clerk has said *"I put up a notice of the date of election in the noticeboard, but no one came forward"* I would be a rich man! Send copies of the advertisement to the secretaries of all the local groups and organisations, ask the school to put them up (and get children to take them home in the book bags), and make electronic versions available on the front page of the web site and across all social media channels. Create a hit list of people you think might make good councillors and send it to them directly with a short *"saw this and thought of you"* message and challenge all your councillors to do the same.

*There are good candidates out there, believe me!*