

Somerset County Council; City, Town and Parish Council Elections **Thursday, 5 May 2022**

On 5 May 2022, registered electors across Somerset will have the chance to vote in the first elections for a new unitary Council in Somerset. 110 councillors will be elected to the County Council using existing divisions and will take responsibility for all current County Council services and local government reorganisation. These Councillors will be elected for five years with the next scheduled elections taking place in 2027.

City, Town and Parish elections will also be taking place on that day. These are being brought forward so that, in future, they will align with Somerset Council elections.

Although the draft Structural Change Order states that City, Town and Parish Council elections will take place on 5 May 2022 this will not be formally confirmed until it has been approved in the Houses of Parliament, which we anticipate will happen in early March 2022. Therefore, until the Order has been approved, City, Town and Parish Councils will need to treat any vacancies that arise as they would under normal circumstances. This could of course mean that an election may be requested for a seat that will only be filled for a matter of weeks until it is contested again on the 5 May. Unfortunately, until the Order is approved there is no legal mechanism to avoid such a scenario if the criteria to request a by-election have been fulfilled. For further advice, on such a situation, please contact the Elections office at Mendip District Council.

For the first 'transition' year (5 May 2022 to end of March 2023), the 110 elected in May 2022 will sit as county councillors and will oversee the process to unitary status.

Under the Structural Changes Order, from 1st April 2023, the County Council and four District Councils will be disbanded and will become a new Somerset Council.

In April 2023, the new Somerset Council assumes responsibility for the majority of local government functions for Somerset, including those of the current district councils, together with further transformation work.

Present district councillors will remain in post until the end of March 2023.

Mendip District Council's elections services team will be administering the elections within the District, working alongside Somerset County Council's Governance team.

The annual canvass to identify all those eligible to vote was held between July and November 2021 and the annual revised register of electors was published on 1 December 2021. There was a period of sustained messaging via various communication methods at the time to raise awareness. Current electoral numbers for Mendip District Council area (as at 1 February are 89,874 of which 18,208 were postal voters and 72 proxy voters).

Individual candidates (and/or their political parties) are responsible for all political canvassing and/or manifesto information.

The Declaration of Results of uncontested City, Town and Parish areas will be made after close of nominations on 5 April and before Polling Day on 5 May.

Pre-election period (formerly known as Purdah) - Once an election is called, local authorities are placed into what is termed the 'pre-election period'. This means that a local authority shall not publish any material that, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect support for a political party. During this period, the main focus is on the publicity that certain actions or decisions may create. It certainly does not mean that all council activity grinds to a halt, that all committee decisions cannot be made, nor non-contentious consultations launched.

The pre-election period mechanism is really directed at Principal Councils - the organisation – and that the organisation should not be seen to be promoting one party, individual candidates, groups of candidates or view points and such Councils should remain totally politically impartial. The pre-election period starts from the publication of the notice of elections – Monday 21 March until after the elections on Thursday, 5 May.

Publicity is defined as 'any communication, in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or to a section of the public'. Examples are newspapers articles, photographs in local press etc.

Why can't Mendip District Council give us a resume of those persons standing for election?

The District Council can only give the most basic information about who is standing for the elections such as name, address, and description. What we do is display the statutory notice on all valid candidates upon the publication of nominations, but we cannot help in the promotion of individual candidates or what their policies or manifestos are.

What can Mendip District Council do to help?

Alongside Somerset districts and County Council, we are encouraging local media to report on who is standing but we have no control over that or its content. Pre-election publicity for candidates is very much in the hands of the individual candidates or their political party, either in the form of canvassing or via the local press.

We are running three complementary PR/media campaigns across traditional and social media.

- Why these elections are different – a once-in-generation opportunity to shape the future of democracy in Somerset; election representatives to a new council.
- Stand for election – encouraging people from all walks of life and experience to stand for election, especially from under-represented sections of communities
- Voter engagement – trying to address the level of understanding of why it is important to use your democratic rights and increase turnout figures. This is the nuts and bolts campaign, making sure that residents are registered to vote, know the key dates for applying for postal votes, proxy votes etc.

Key dates:

Monday, 21 March	The Notice of Election is published.
Tuesday, 22 March (weekdays between 09:30 and 16:30 hrs)	The first day that a candidate or candidates can deliver their nomination papers to Mendip District Council offices, Cannards Grave Road, Shepton Mallet, BA4 5BT (<u>in person</u> , by either candidate or their agent). Please note: Papers that arrive by mail will <u>not</u> be accepted.
Tuesday, 5 April (between 09:30 hrs and 16:00 hrs)	Last day for nomination papers for Mendip area divisions and City, Town and Parish Councils to be handed in at Mendip District Council offices, Cannards Grave Road, Shepton Mallet, BA4 5BT (<u>in person</u> , by either candidate or their agent).
	Last day that candidates can withdraw from the election.
	Last day that County Council candidates can notify Mendip District Council who their election agent is.
Wednesday, 6 April (no later than 16:00 hrs)	The Statement of Persons Nominated is published.
Thursday, 14 April (no later than midnight)	Deadline for residents to apply to be included on the Register of Electors to be used in the election on 5 May 2022.
Tuesday, 19 April (no later than 17:00 hrs)	Last day for residents to apply for new postal vote; postal proxy application; and for changes to existing postal or proxy votes. If residents have applied for a permanent postal vote in the past, this will arrive automatically.
Tuesday, 26 April	Publication of the Notice of Poll. This document includes the date and hours of poll; the number of councillors to be elected in the division; the particulars of the candidates; the names of the subscribers (the 10 people who sign the nomination paper) and locations of polling stations.
Tuesday, 26 April (no later than 17:00 hrs)	Receipt of Proxy Vote Applications – this is the deadline for receiving new applications to vote by proxy (but not postal proxy or emergency proxies).
Thursday, 5 May 07:00 hrs until 22:00 hrs	Polling Day.
Thursday, 5 May 22:00 hrs onwards	Verification of Votes for Somerset County Council, City, Town and Parish Councils – it is anticipated that this will take until 03.30 hrs on Friday, 6 May.
Friday, 6 May starting at 10:00 hrs	The count for Somerset County Council election (Mendip divisions).
Saturday, 7 May starting at 09:30 hrs	The counts for contested City, Town and Parish councils within the Mendip area.

The Somerset Divisions within the Mendip area are:

Frome East	Frome North	Frome West
Glastonbury	Mendip Central and East	Mendip Hills
Mendip South	Mendip West	Shepton Mallet
Street	Wells	

Somerset County Council Count – Friday, May 6th (starting at 10:00 hrs)

The count for Somerset County Council election (Mendip area divisions) is being held in The Pavilion, The Royal Bath and West Showground, Shepton Mallet, BA4 6QN.

The declaration of the results counted at the Showground will be made by the Deputy Returning Officer, Stuart Brown, and will take the form of: Candidate – description – number of votes cast.

City, Town and Parish Council Count – Saturday, May 7th (starting at 09:30 hrs)

The count for contested City, Town and Parish council areas within Mendip will be held in The Pavilion, The Royal Bath and West Showground, Shepton Mallet, BA4 6QN.

The declaration of the results will be made either by the Returning Officer, Stuart Brown, or one of his Deputy Returning Officers and will take the form of: Candidate – description – number of votes cast.

City, Town and Parish councils will be counted in an order to be decided between the close of nominations and Polling Day.

Results – will be loaded onto The Mendip District Council website on a rolling basis and posted around the count venue.