

ANNUAL MEETING Q&A - 2025

Schedule 12, paragraph 7(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 provides that “A *parish council shall in every year hold an **annual meeting**.*” It is the “annual meeting” of the council, not the “Annual General Meeting”, and certainly not to be confused with the Annual Parish Meeting, which is a meeting of the electors in the parish.

The procedure for annual meetings is very straightforward in practice but the nuances of local government law can lead to all sorts of complexity! This document sets out answers to the most frequently asked questions.

Q1. When should the Annual Meeting be held?

By law every council must hold an annual meeting in May. In an election year, the meeting must be held on the day that the councillors take office, or within 14 days thereafter. For 2025 therefore, the earliest date that the annual meeting can be held is 6 May 2025, and the latest date is 22 May 2025. An annual meeting held outside those dates would be procedurally unlawful and any decisions made at it could be challenged.

Q2. What business should be done at the Annual Meeting?

By law the first item on the agenda must be to elect a chair. This must be done before apologies are taken or any other business - it must be the first item. Apart from the election of chair there is no other business that must be done at the annual meeting, but it can be a useful meeting to do other things that are required to be done on an annual basis, such as a review of important documents and policies, or the appointment of committees.

Q3. Who presides over the election of chair - is it the clerk?

No! To illustrate what should happen let's say that Cllr Smith is the current chair and Cllr Jones is the current vice chair. It will be Cllr Smith that opens the annual meeting and presides over the first item of business, to elect a chair. Cllr Smith, if staying on the council, has an original vote and (in the case of a tie) a second and casting vote. They may vote for themselves. If they are declared re-elected as chair they stay in the chair, sign their declaration of acceptance of office of chair and then proceed to the next item of business. Let's say though that Cllr Smith has a challenger, Cllr Williams. If Cllr Williams is declared elected as chair, then at the point that Cllr Williams signs their declaration of acceptance of office of chair the office passes from Cllr Smith to Cllr Williams, and it is therefore Cllr Williams that takes the chair and presides over the remainder of the meeting.

Q4. Our current chair is retiring from the council - so who chairs then?

Continuing the scenario above, if Cllr Smith is retiring from the council but wishes (or is willing) to attend the annual meeting of the council then they preside, since they are still the chair of the council until their successor has been elected. This time Cllr Smith does not have an original vote in the election of the new chair but must, in the case of a tie, give a casting vote. If Cllr Smith cannot or does not wish to attend the annual meeting then Cllr Jones, as vice chair, should preside over the election of the new chair and the exact same rules apply as if they were chair.

Q5. Both the current chair and vice chair are unable to come to the annual meeting - what now?

Business must go on, so those councillors present must choose one of their number to preside over the election of chair and that person has an original and (in the case of a tie) a second and casting vote and may vote for themself.

Q6. Can the council elect someone as chair in their absence?

Yes. Any councillor can be elected as chair, whether or not they are present. It obviously won't be possible for the council to receive their declaration of acceptance of office at the annual meeting, so the council should resolve that the declaration be made at a subsequent meeting and should proceed with the remainder of the meeting.

Q7. Nobody wants to be chair of the council - can we just elect a chair from meeting to meeting?

A council is not properly constituted without a chair and as stated above, it must be the first item of business at the annual meeting. Therefore, if the council fails to elect a chair, then the meeting cannot progress and should be adjourned. A new meeting would be convened and, again, the first item on the agenda must be to elect a chair of the council. In the scenario above Cllr Smith would technically remain chair of the council until that next meeting. In the meantime, no business could be transacted, and no payments can be authorised. Councillors must appreciate that the council cannot function unless one of them is prepared to accept the office of chair of the council at the May meeting.

Q8. Do we have to elect a vice chair?

No. Councils may elect a vice chair but don't have to, although as illustrated above, having a vice chair can be very useful procedurally.

Q9. When should the declaration of acceptance of office forms be signed?

The newly elected chair should immediately sign a declaration of acceptance of office of chair. All councillors are also required to sign a declaration of acceptance of office. A councillor's declaration of acceptance of office can be signed at or before a meeting but must be signed in the presence of a member or the proper officer of the council. The council may resolve to permit the declarations to be made at or before a later meeting. An item on the agenda would therefore be "*To receive councillors declarations of acceptance of office or, if not received, to decide when they shall be received*". Thus, if a councillor is unable to attend the annual meeting, they could sign their declaration beforehand in the presence of a member or the clerk and ask the clerk to "deliver" it to the annual meeting. Sample declaration of acceptance of office forms are available on the Northants CALC website at <https://northantscalc.gov.uk/councillor-forms-and-documents>.

Q10. Can we conduct ordinary business at the Annual Meeting?

Yes, there is no reason why not. Standing Orders may set out the order of business at the annual meeting but there is no reason why other business cannot be added to the annual meeting agenda. Historically, some councils issue two agendas, one for the annual meeting and one for an ordinary meeting to follow immediately after the annual meeting. There is no reason to do this; all the items can appear on the one agenda for the annual meeting.

Q11. We've already held our Annual Meeting, haven't we?

Don't forget that there are two annual meetings, one is a meeting of the parish council (the Annual Meeting), and the other is a meeting of the electors of the parish (the Annual Parish Meeting, aka Annual Parish Assembly). These two meetings serve very distinct and different purposes and should not be confused. It is good practice to hold them on separate evenings to avoid confusion.

Q12. Who signs the minutes of the previous council meeting at the annual meeting?

The minutes of the council's previous meeting (i.e. the one held in March or April 2025) should be signed by whoever is presiding at the annual meeting. If a new chair has been elected under the first item, then that person will be presiding, if present, when it comes to the item to approve for signature the minutes of the previous meeting. It matters not that there is a new chair, and the new chair doesn't even need to have been at the previous meeting. The new chair is signing the minutes based on a resolution of the council, not on their personal recollection of events.

If you have a question that is not answered above, please contact info@northantscalc.gov.uk.