

Officers' report to Full Council on 25 September 2025
Subject: Poll cards for the upcoming casual vacancy election

Purpose of the report

To consider the Returning Officer inquiry and invite a decision on whether to request poll cards for the forthcoming stand alone parish election to fill a casual vacancy. The report summarises custom and practice, cost and delivery considerations to support an informed choice.

Background

The requirement to issue poll cards does not extend to Parish elections. The Returning Officer has asked the Parish to confirm whether it requests poll cards for the upcoming election to fill a casual vacancy. For parish elections, poll cards are generally not produced for stand alone parish contests unless the parish council specifically asks for them and accepts the recharge of costs.

Context and practice

Statutory election notices will be published by the Returning Officer and will set out the key information for voters. The Electoral Commission guidance confirms that the prescribed forms and informatives for parish elections are set out in legislation and must be followed by the Returning Officer. This framework exists whether or not a parish chooses to have poll cards issued.

Financial implications

Epping Forest District Council has confirmed a cost of **£7,341.60** for the printing and distribution of poll cards. This single item exceeds the Parish budget of £5,000 that has been set aside for election costs that will be recharged by the principal authority. The quoted figure does not include other election costs such as hire of venues used as polling stations and staffing costs such as polling and count staff. If poll cards are requested the overall recharge to the Parish would therefore be expected to rise well above the current allocation.

Communications

Regardless of whether poll cards are issued, the Returning Officer and the Parish would provide clear and timely information by statutory notices and normal communication channels

Risk considerations

Requesting poll cards introduces a confirmed additional cost that already exceeds the budget allocation and would come on top of other necessary election expenses. Not requesting poll cards relies on statutory notices and normal communication channels to inform electors. Council practice in several areas indicates that stand alone parish elections commonly proceed without poll cards.

Timescale

A resolution is required at this meeting so that the Clerk can notify the Returning Officer

Options

- Request poll cards for all eligible electors and accept the printing and delivery recharge of £7,341.60 from the principal authority. This would result in spending in excess of the existing approved allocation and a virement would be necessary
- Follow common practice and do not request poll cards

Recommendation

That the Council does not request poll cards for the forthcoming stand alone parish election.