

Appendix R

PARISH COUNCILS AND THEIR ELECTION

The Local Government Act 1894 created Urban District Councils and Rural District Councils. Rural District Councils consisted of a chairman and councillors. The councillors were elected for a three-year term (in a similar way to councillors in urban districts). Rural district councillors were elected for parishes or groupings of parishes, and were also the representatives for those areas on the local Board of Guardians.

In all parishes with a population of 300 or more, a Parish Council had to be elected. In parishes with more than 100 but less than 300 population, the parish meeting could request the County Council to make an Order to establish a Parish Council.

The membership of a Parish Council varied from 5 to 15 members, the number being fixed by an Order of the County Council. The 1894 Act stipulated that the entire council was to be elected annually. To be eligible for election to the council, a person was required to be resident within the parish, or within three miles of it, for a period of at least twelve months prior to the election.

The Parish Councillors (Tenure of Office) Act 1899 changed the term of office of parish councillors from one to three years from the elections held in 1901, with elections being held thereafter in 1904, 1907 etc. The term of Parish Councillors elected in 1899 was extended until 1901 (the election due in 1900 being abolished).

Parish councillors were nominated at the parish meeting on printed or written forms supplied by overseers. Each nomination had to be signed by two parish electors. If the chairman decided that a nomination paper was valid, no one could afterwards object to it. If he wrongly decided that a nomination was invalid, it would be possible, though very expensive, to reverse the decision by an election petition.

The nominations were handed to the chairman, who read them out in alphabetical order. A person nominated could withdraw before the voting took place, but not after it, unless a poll was demanded. Before the voting, any elector could ask questions of the candidates, and all candidates had a right to be present and to reply to the questions. It was the duty of the chairman to allow time for this to be done.

At the meeting the candidates were voted for by a show of hands. Candidates, if electors, could vote for themselves. In practice electors could vote for as many candidates as they liked since, although the law said they should not vote for more than the number of councillors to be elected, the chairman had no power to refuse any elector's vote. Any one elector, but not a candidate (unless an elector) could demand a poll. Candidates could withdraw after a poll was demanded by a formal letter to the Returning Officer, up to six days before the poll. (The nominators of a candidate could not withdraw the candidate.)

Any casual vacancies were filled by co-option, the choice of new councillor being made by the remaining councillors.