

Hartington Upper Quarter Parish Council

Councillor Co-option Policy

1. Introduction

This policy sets out the procedure to ensure there is compliance with legislation and consistency of process when there is to be co-option of new members to vacancies on the Parish Council. The co-option procedure will be entirely managed by the Parish Clerk and this policy will ensure that a fair and equitable process is carried out.

2. Background to Co-option

The co-option of a new Councillor occurs when a casual vacancy has arisen on the Council and no by-election has then been called. A casual vacancy occurs when:

- A councillor fails to make their Declaration of Acceptance of Office at the proper time;
- A councillor resigns or dies;
- A councillor becomes disqualified; or
- A councillor fails for 6 months to attend any meetings of the Council, or attend as a representative of the Council a meeting of an outside body.

The Borough Council will advertise the casual vacancy, giving electors the opportunity to request a by-election. If insufficient electors make such a request, the Borough Council will advise the Parish Clerk to instead arrange for co-option into the vacancy. Councillors who are co-opted become full members of the Parish Council.

3. The Co-option process

The Parish Clerk will advertise the opportunity for co-option on the Council's noticeboards and website, with a closing date for applicants approximately 4 weeks after the notice is posted.

A candidate is eligible to apply provided that he/she fulfils the criteria laid down in section 79 of the Local Government Act 1972, and is also not disqualified by the criteria specified in section 80 of the same Act.

Candidates will be requested to:

- Submit information about themselves to the Parish Clerk, by way of submitting a short CV.
- Confirm their eligibility for the position of Councillor (as per the criteria in the 1972 Act).

Following the closing date for applications, the next suitable Council meeting will have an agenda item 'To receive written applications for the office of Parish councillor and to co-opt candidate(s) accordingly'. Copies of the candidates' applications will be circulated to all Councillors by the Clerk; these documents will be treated by the Clerk and all Councillors as Strictly Private & Confidential.

Candidates will be sent an agenda of the meeting at which they are to be considered for co-option, together with a copy of the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations of the Parish Council. Candidates will also be informed that they will be invited, if they wish, to speak (max. 5 mins.) about their application at the meeting.

It is not desirable that electors in a particular Ward be left under-represented for a significant length of time. Neither does it contribute to effective and efficient working of the Council if there are insufficient councillors to share the workload equitably, or achieve meeting quorate without difficulty. Therefore, the Council will usually co-opt any candidate for co-option who fulfils the eligibility criteria, if they are the only candidate for the vacancy.

If there is more than 1 candidate for a vacancy, the Council will proceed to a vote, with each councillor present stating their preferred candidate (considering, as appropriate, the criteria at Appendix A). In order for a candidate to be co-opted, it will be necessary for them to receive a majority of votes cast. If there are more than two candidates and there is no candidate with an overall majority in the first round of voting, the candidate with the least number of votes will drop out of the process. Further rounds of voting will then take place, with the process repeated until a candidate has an absolute majority. In the case of an equality of votes, the Chair of the meeting has a second, or casting, vote.

After the voting has been concluded, the successful candidate will be declared duly co-opted and, after signing their Declaration of Acceptance of Office, may take their seat immediately.

The Clerk will notify the Borough Council of the new Councillor appointment. The successful candidate must complete their Registration of Interests form within 28 days of being elected. The form should be given to the Parish Clerk for forwarding to the Borough Council.

4. Lack of candidates

If no candidates come forward for co-option, the Clerk will re-advertise the opportunity for co-option, with a new closing date.

APPENDIX A

POSSIBLE CRITERIA TO CONSIDER WHEN ASSESSING CANDIDATES FOR CO-OPTION

- Sound knowledge and understanding of, and interest in, local affairs and the local community
- Forward-thinking
- Can bring a new skill, expertise or key knowledge to the Council
- Ability to pick up and run with a variety of projects
- Ability and willingness to represent the Council and the community
- Ability to listen constructively
- Ability to communicate succinctly and clearly
- Good interpersonal skills, and able to contribute opinions at meetings whilst willing to see others' views and accept majority decisions
- Ability and willingness to work closely with other members and to maintain good working relationships with all members and staff
- Ability and willingness to work with the Council's partners (e.g. voluntary groups, other Parish Councils, principal authority, charities)
- Ability and willingness to undertake induction training and other relevant training
- Ability and willingness to attend meetings of the Council (or meetings of other local authorities and local bodies), including events in the evening and at weekends
- Experience of working or being a member in a local authority or other public body
- Experience of working with voluntary or local community/interest groups
- Basic knowledge of legal issues relating to Parish Councils or local authorities

(End)