



COWFOLD PARISH COUNCIL

Councillor Co-option Policy and Procedure

1. Introduction

This policy sets out the procedure for the co-option of members to Cowfold Parish Council (CPC). Although the process for co-option to vacancies of local councils is not prescribed in law, the NALC Legal Briefing L15-08 – Good Practice with the later 2021 NALC Update: How do I co-opt a good councillor provide guidance for selection of candidates for co-option to local Councils.

2. Co-option

The Co-option of a Parish Councillor occurs when a casual vacancy has arisen on the council and no poll (by-election) has been called. A casual vacancy occurs when:

- A councillor fails to make his declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time;
- A councillor resigns;
- A councillor dies;
- A councillor becomes disqualified;
- A councillor fails for six (6) months to attend meetings of a council committee or subcommittee or to attend as a representative of the council a meeting of an outside body.

CPC has to notify the District Council of a Casual Vacancy which is then advertised to give electors the opportunity to request an election. This occurs when ten electors notify the District Council stating that an election is requested.

If a by-election is called, a polling station will be set up by the District Council and the electors will be asked to vote for candidates who will have put themselves forward by way of nomination paper. CPC will pay the costs of the election. The electors have fourteen days (not including weekends, bank holidays and other notable days) to claim the by-election but the Electoral Officer will advise the clerk of the closing date.

If more than one candidate is then nominated a by-election takes place but if only one candidate is put forward, they are duly elected without a ballot.

If ten residents do not request a ballot within fourteen days of the vacancy notice being posted, as advertised by the District Council, CPC is able to co-opt a volunteer.

3. Confirmation of Co-option

On receipt of written confirmation from the Electoral Services Office of the District Council the casual vacancy can be filled by means of Co-option.

The parish clerk will:

- Advertise the vacancy for four weeks on the council notice boards and website;
- Advise CPC that the Co-option Policy has been instigated.

Whilst CPC is not obliged to co-opt to fill any vacancy. Even if the council invites applications for co-option, it is not obliged to select anyone from the candidates that apply.

However, despite this it is not desirable that electors be left underrepresented 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; to provide a broad cross-section of skills and interests; or to achieve meeting quorums without difficulty.

Councillors elected by co-option are full members of CPC.

4. Eligibility of Candidates

CPC is able to consider any person to fill a vacancy provided that:

- He/she is an elector of the parish; or
- has resided in the parish for the past twelve months or rented/tenanted land or other premises in the parish; or
- had his/her principal place of work in the parish; or
- has lived within three miles (direct) of the parish.

There are certain disqualifications for election, of which the main are:

- Holding a paid office under the Local Authority;
- Bankruptcy;
- Having been sentenced to a term of imprisonment (whether suspended or not) of not less than three months without the option of a fine during the five years preceding the election; and
- Being disqualified under any enactment relating to corrupt or illegal practices.

Candidates found to be offering inducements of any kind will be disqualified.

5. Applications

candidates will be requested to:

- Submit information about themselves by way of completing a short application form (Appendix A)
- Confirm their eligibility for the position of Councillor within the statutory rules (Appendix B)
- Applicants may be required to meet with representatives of CPC to discuss their suitability for the role and to assess whether they possess any skill sets that might be of benefit to the council's activities.
- Following receipt of 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 a candidate to fill the existing vacancy".

- Copies of the application will be circulated to all Councillors by the Clerk at least three clear days before the meeting of the full Council when the Co-option will be considered. All such documents will be treated as strictly confidential by the Clerk and Councillors.
- Candidates will be sent a full agenda of the meeting at which they are to be considered for appointment together with a copy of the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations of CPC.
- Candidates will also be informed that they will be invited to speak about their application at the meeting.

6. At the Co-option

At the Co-option meeting candidates will be given three minutes maximum to introduce themselves to members, give information on their background and experience and explain why they wish to become a member of CPC.

- In order for a candidate to be elected to CPC it will be necessary for them to obtain an absolute majority of votes cast (50% + 1 of the votes available at the meeting).
- 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 absolute majority.
- In the case of an equality of votes the Chairman of the meeting has a casting vote.
- Assuming that the co-option position/s is/are filled, the Chairman will declare the successful candidate/s duly elected and, after signing their Declaration of Acceptance of Office, he/she may take their seat immediately.
- The Clerk will notify Electoral Services of the new appointment. The successful candidate(s) must complete their 'Registration of Interests' within 28 days of being elected or the co-option will be void. The form should be handed to the Clerk for forwarding to the Monitoring officer.

If insufficient candidates come forward for co-option, the process should continue and the vacancies advertised again.

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Parish Councillor. Please complete Appendix A and B and return to clerk@cowfold-pc.gov.uk

APPENDIX A

APPLICATION FOR CO-OPTION

Full Name and Title	
Home Address	
Home Telephone	
Mobile Telephone	
Email Address	

About you

Please provide the council with some background information about yourself including your reasons for wishing to join the council. Please list the skills and experience that you consider may be useful to the council.

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APPENDIX B

CO-OPTION ELIGIBILITY FORM

In order to be eligible for co-option as a Cowfold Parish Councillor you must be a British subject and 18 years of age or older; and additionally able to meet one of the following qualifications set out below. Please tick which applies to you:

- I am registered as a local government elector for the Parish; or
- I have, during the whole of the twelve months preceding the date of my co-option, occupied as owner or tenant land or other premises in the parish; or
- My principle or only place or work during those twelve months has Been within the parish; or
- I have during the whole twelve months resided within 3 miles of The parish

Please note that under Section 80 of the Local Government Act a person is disqualified from being elected as a local councillor or being a member of a local council if he/she:

- Holds any paid office or employment of the local council (other than the office of Chair) or of a joint committee on which the council is represented; or
- Is a person who has been declared bankrupt or has made a composition or arrangement with his/her creditors (but see below); or
- Has within five years before the day of co-option, or since his/her co-option, been convicted in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man of any offence and has been sentenced to imprisonment (whether suspended or not) for not less than three months without the option of a fine; or
- Is otherwise disqualified under Part III of the representation of the People Act 1983 for corrupt or illegal practices.

The disqualification for bankruptcy ceases in the following circumstances:

- If the bankruptcy is annulled on the grounds that either the person ought not to have been declared bankrupt or that his/her debts have been fully discharged;
- If the person is discharged with a certificate that the bankruptcy was caused by misfortune without misconduct on his/her part;
- If the person is discharged without such a certificate.

Declaration. I hereby confirm that I am eligible for the vacancy of Cowfold Parish Councillor, and the information on this form is true and accurate.

Signed

Date