



Policy on Co-option in the event of a Casual Vacancy

Adopted by Full Council July 2020
(Minute Reference FC20/21-58)

Reviewed and adopted by Fully Council May 2021 with no changes
To be reviewed at the Annual Meeting of Council in 2024 or before

Introduction

The circumstances in which the Town Council may co-opt to fill a casual vacancy are laid out in the Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (otherwise known as “the 2006 Rules”). If an election is required the election will be run by Milton Keynes Council. If no election is required Bletchley and Fenny Stratford will control the process of co-option. This policy lays out the Town Council’s current approach to this process.

It is especially important that all applicants be treated equitably so that the arrangements are seen as open, fair and transparent.

Whenever the need for co-option of a member to full council or the co-option of a non-member to a committee arises, Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council will seek and encourage applications from anyone in the Town who is eligible to stand. Councillors or parishioners can legally approach individuals to suggest that they might wish to consider putting their names forward for co-option. The Town Council has resolved that it will advertise the vacancies in the local area via the Town Council noticeboards, the Town Council website and media releases.

The Town Council is not obliged to co-opt to fill any vacancy this means that even if candidates have made applications the Council is not obliged to select any of them. However, it is not desirable that electors in a particular ward be left partially or fully unrepresented 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 interest and to achieve meeting quorums without difficulty.

The co-option procedure and policy will be reviewed every four years.

Co-option Policy

1. The advertisement to co-opt will include:
 - the method by which applications can be made
 - the closing date for all applications
 - a contact point to obtain more information
 - show that further information is available electronically via the website, to include application forms, nomination forms and information about the roles and responsibilities of the council (in the case of co-option to the Town Council this will include a Town Councillor job description and person specification and application form)
2. Existing Members may point out the vacancies and the process to any qualifying candidate(s)
3. In the case of candidates applying for co-option to become a Member of the Town Council each candidate must complete a signed undertaking confirming that they meet the eligibility criteria a copy of which will be included in the application pack.
4. In the case of all applications to become a Member of the Town Council each potential candidates will be requested to provide the following information in writing as part of their application
 - i. reason for wishing to be Councillor
 - ii. previous Community/Council work;
 - iii. other skills they can bring to the Council

<h2>Co-option of Members to Council</h2>
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1. All candidates shall be invited, by letter, to attend the next full Town Council meeting following the application deadline.
2. If candidates are unable to attend, this meeting will not be rearranged.
3. All members will receive copies of candidate applications, along with the summons to attend the next full Town Council meeting following the application deadline.
Candidate applications are strictly confidential.
4. An agenda item will be set aside for candidates to make a brief verbal presentation to members, outlining their relevant skills and experience. Each candidate will be

allocated a maximum of three minutes. These presentations will be open to the public.

5. Members may ask questions of the candidates before proceeding to a vote. (If a candidate is unable to attend the meeting, this process will still take place and voting will subsequently be based on this meeting and application form).
6. The Chair will then place the names of candidates in alphabetical order and proceed to vote.
7. The Town Council will appoint the co-opted members by voting according to Standing Orders.
8. Only Town Councillors present at the meeting may vote upon a person to fill the vacancy. Councillors will have one vote per vacancy to be filled.
9. If a Candidate is a relative of a Councillor, that Councillor may declare a prejudicial interest and withdraw from the meeting.
10. A successful candidate must have received an absolute majority vote by those Councillors present.
11. It follows that if there are more than two candidates for one vacancy and not one of them at the first count receives a majority over the aggregate votes given to the rest, steps must be taken to strike off the candidate with the least number of votes and the remainder must then be put to the vote again.
12. This process must, if necessary, be repeated until an absolute majority is obtained.
13. The Chair has the casting vote.
14. If there is more than one vacancy and the number of candidates equals the number of vacancies, all the vacancies may be filled by a single composite resolution, but if the number of candidates exceeds the number of vacancies each vacancy must be filled by a separate vote or series of votes.
15. The Council is not obliged to fill all vacancies, but will take steps to advertise for further co-options.
16. Successfully co-opted candidates become Councillors in their own right, with immediate effect, and are no different to any other member.
17. The co-opted members will be asked to sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office to agree to be bound by the Council's adopted Code of Conduct. They may then take their seat at Council and will be appointed to a committee and as a representative to local organisations.

18. Any application can be considered in the candidate(s) absence, but if successful, members would need to agree for him/her to sign the Declaration of Office either before or at the next meeting.
19. As soon as practicable following their co-option, members will be invited to attend an Induction and Training session with the Town Clerk.

Co-option of Non-Members to a Committee

1. The committee will determine eligibility criteria for candidates.
2. All candidates shall be invited to attend the next committee meeting following the application deadline.
3. If candidates are unable to attend they may be co-opted in their absence.
4. All committee members will receive copies of candidate applications. Candidate applications are strictly confidential.
5. An agenda item will be set aside for consideration of the co-option. Members of the committee may ask questions of the candidates before proceeding to a vote. The Chair will then place the names of candidates in alphabetical order and proceed to vote.
6. The committee will appoint the co-opted members by resolution following voting according to Standing Orders.
7. Only Town Councillors present at the meeting may vote upon a person to fill the vacancy. Councillors will have one vote per vacancy to be filled.
8. If a Candidate is a relative of a Councillor, that Councillor may declare a prejudicial interest and withdraw from the meeting.
9. The Chair of the Committee has the casting vote.
10. If there is more than one vacancy and the number of candidates equals the number of vacancies, all the vacancies may be filled by a single composite resolution, but if the number of candidates exceeds the number of vacancies each vacancy must be filled by a separate vote or series of votes.
11. The Council is not obliged to fill all vacancies, but will take steps to advertise for further co-options.

12. Co-opted members of committees do not become councillors and are not eligible to vote but their views will be taken into account by the voting members.
13. Co-opted members will be asked to complete a register of interests' form and to inform committee colleagues if they have a pecuniary interest in any item of business being considered by the committee.