

Burwash Parish Council

Co-Option Policy – Adopted July 2016

Introduction

- 1.** There are two circumstances under which the Parish Council may, if it so wishes, proceed to fill a casual vacancy by co-option:
 - a.** when a ward seat has been left vacant because no eligible candidate stood for election at the full elections for a new council (currently every four years), or
 - b.** during the life of the Council, a ward seat falls vacant but the required 10 electors of the ward have not called for a poll (by-election) within the legally specified time period following publication of the Notice of Vacancy.
- 2.** The Parish Council is not obligated 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 who apply.
- 3.** 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 Members to share the workload equitably; to provide a broad cross-section of skills and interests; or to achieve meeting quorums without difficulty, given that some absence is unavoidable at times.
- 4.** To ensure a fair and transparent process is undertaken, this policy outlines the procedure to be followed by Burwash Parish Council when co-option is under consideration.

Application process

- 5.** On receipt of written notification from the Democratic Services Manager at Rother District Council that a casual vacancy may be filled by means of co-option:
 - a.** the Clerk will advertise the vacancy or vacancies to be filled by co-option within 21 days of receipt of the written notification
 - b.** the co-option advertisement will include the closing date for acceptance of requests for consideration (between 14 and 30 days after the date of the advertisement) and the number of vacancies, and will be displayed on the Council notice boards and website and if possible the local magazines
- 6.** Members may point out the vacancies and the process to any qualifying candidate(s). Candidates found to be offering inducements of any kind will be disqualified.
- 7.** Applicants for co-option will be asked to:
 - a.** submit one side of A4 on information about themselves including a description of their interest in becoming a Councillor and specifying any skills or qualifications which may benefit the Council
 - b.** confirm their eligibility for the position of Councillor within the statutory rules, a copy of which will be attached to the application form

8. Copies of the applicant's application form will be circulated to all Members by the Clerk at least three clear working days prior to the Full Council meeting where the co-option will be considered. The application forms and any supporting documents will be treated by the Clerk and all Members as strictly private and confidential.
9. Candidates will be sent a full agenda of the meeting at which they are to be considered for appointment, and will be informed they may, if they so wish, speak for up to three minutes about their application during the co-option item on the agenda at that meeting.
10. If Councillors wish to ask candidates questions these will be asked to all candidates to ensure transparency and an equal opportunity for all candidates to answer. Two minutes will be allowed for this.
11. After this time Councillors will move straight to a vote.

Voting procedure

12. Voting will be according to the agreed procedure:
 - c. Where more than two persons have been nominated for a position to be filled by the Council and none of those persons has received an absolute majority of votes in their favour, the name of the person having the least number of votes shall be struck off the list and a fresh vote taken. This process shall continue until a majority of votes is given in favour of one person. A tie in votes may be settled by the casting vote exercisable by the Chair or in their absence the Vice-Chair.
 - d. This will mostly be a satisfactory procedure, but if several candidates have obtained the same number of least votes and the aggregate of the others is less than a normal quorum (eg. 3:2:2:2:2) it may be thought wise not to strike off all of those with the least votes together but, if negotiations for withdrawals fail, to strike them off one by one, in an order determined by vote.
 - e. 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.
13. The vote will be by a show of hands unless as per the Standing Orders two councillors request a balloted vote.
14. The Council is not obliged to consider claims of candidates who were unsuccessful at a previous election.
15. After the vote has been concluded, the Chairman will declare the successful candidate duly elected. A Member elected by co-option is a full Member of the Council, but is not eligible for the Basic Parish Allowance or Chairman's Allowance.

Acceptance of office

16. The successful candidate(s) must sign their declaration of acceptance of office before they can act as a Councillor. The Register of Members Interests form must be completed within 28 days and the Clerk will forward a copy to the District Monitoring Officer.