

ROTHBURY PARISH COUNCIL CO-OPTION POLICY

INTRODUCTION

STAGE 1

There are two instances under which the Electoral Officer of Northumberland County Council will notify Rothbury Parish Council that it may, if it so wishes, proceed to fill a casual vacancy by co-option:

Insufficiency of candidates at an ordinary election (currently every 4 years) provides the Parish Council with authority to exercise its rights to co-opt any person or persons to fill any vacancies provided this is done within 35 days following the date of said ordinary election.

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.

The Parish Council is not obliged to co-opt to fill any vacancy from the candidates who apply.

However, it is not desirable that electors be left partially unrepresented for a significant period of time. Neither does it contribute to the effective and efficient working of the Council if there are insufficient Councillors to share the workload equally; 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.

Councillors elected by co-option are full members of the Council.

To ensure that a fair and transparent process is undertaken this policy sets out the process to be followed by Rothbury Parish Council when co-option is under consideration.

STAGE 2

APPLICATION PROCESS TO BE FOLLOWED

Within 21 days of receipt of written notification, from the Electoral Officer at Northumberland County Council, that a casual vacancy may be filled by means of co-option, The Parish Clerk will announce the vacancy or vacancies to be filled by co-option by means of displaying a Notice(s) on the Council Noticeboard, website and social media platforms.

The Parish Clerk will advise the Council when the co-option policy has been instigated, sending a memorandum to all Councillors.

The co-option notice will include the closing date for acceptance of requests for consideration (between 14 and 30 days after the date of display).

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.

Although there is no statutory requirement to do so, applications for co-option will be asked to:

- Submit information about themselves, by completing a short application form (a copy of the application form is attached as Appendix 1) together with a written personal statement stating their reasons for wishing to be a Councillor
- and
- Confirm their eligibility for the position of Councillor within the statutory rules (a copy of the confirmation of eligibility is attached as Appendix 2)
- and
- Attend a Council meeting to more fully appreciate the breadth of issues covered

Copies of the application and written summary will be circulated to all Councillors by the Parish Clerk at least 7 days prior to the meeting of the full Council when the co-option will be considered. All documents will be treated by the Clerk and Councillors in accordance with Data protection requirements concerning personal information.

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, Bullying and Harassment Policy, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations of the Council. Candidates will also be informed that they may, if they wish, speak for up to 3 minutes about their application during the public session of that Council meeting.

Applicants can withdraw no later than 24 hours prior to the meeting where the co-options will be considered.

VOTING PROCEDURE FOR EACH VACANCY

Existing Councillors should declare an interest should they be related to any candidate.

At the appropriate business item Councillors will proceed direct to voting unless a candidate has elected to speak. Voting will be according to statutory requirements, in that the successful candidate must receive a majority vote of those present and voting.

- 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, the candidate with the least number of votes will be removed from consideration and the remainder will then be put to the vote again.
- The process will, if necessary, be repeated until a majority is obtained.
- This process will be followed separately for each individual vacancy for which co-option is under consideration.
- If no candidate secures an absolute majority of votes cast for an individual vacancy, then that vacancy remains unfilled (e.g. 9 councillors are present and 5 abstain from voting then there is no absolute majority).

In the case of an equality of votes, the Chairman of the meeting has a second or casting vote.

Candidates will be asked to vacate the room whilst Councillors vote by anonymous paper ballot.

After the vote has been concluded, the candidates will be invited to return and the Chairman will declare the successful candidate(s) duly elected.

ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE

After the vote the successful candidate(s) will be asked to sign that they have read and understood the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations of the Council and agree to the Code of Conduct and Bullying and Harassment Policy. The successful candidate(s) must sign the declaration of acceptance of office before they can act as a Councillor. After signing their declaration of acceptance of Office, that person may take their seat immediately.

The Register of Interest must be completed within 28 days and the Parish Clerk will forward a copy to the Monitoring Officer.

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every four years (or earlier if required by changes to legislation or additional documentation) and amended as necessary based on good practice or evidence taken forward.

APPENDIX 1

Co-option Application Form

Contact Details (BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE)

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Email Address:

Home Tel. No.:

Mobile Tel. No.:

Are you 18 or over? YES/NO

NB: Please attach a written summary covering your reasons for wishing to be a Councillor.

Is there any other information you would like to disclose regarding your application? (e.g. if you are related to an employee of the Council/would require assistance during Council meetings with your mobility, hearing, vision)

Signature

Date

Please return your completed form together with your written summary and the co-option eligibility form to:

Parish Clerk
Rothbury Parish Council
14 Addycombe Close
Rothbury
Northumberland
NE65 7QF

APPENDIX 2

Co-option Eligibility Form

In order to be eligible for co-option as a Parish Councillor for Rothbury you must be a British subject, or a citizen of the Commonwealth and be 18 years of age or over on the 'relevant date' (i.e. the day on which you are nominated or if there is a poll the day of election). You must additionally be able to meet one of the following qualifications:

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

Please tick which of the above applied to you.

Please note that under Section 80 of the Local Government Act 1972 a person is disqualified from being elected as a Local Councillor or being a member of a Local Council if he/she:

- a) Holds a paid office of employment of the local council or a joint committee on which the Council is represented
- b) Is a person who has been adjudged bankrupt or has made a composition or arrangement with his/her creditors
- c) Or has within five years before the day of election, or since his/her election, 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;

- d) Is otherwise disqualified under Part III of the representation of the People Act 1983 for corrupt or illegal practices.

This 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 adjudged 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 was discharged without such a certificate.

In (i) and (ii) above, the disqualification ceases on the date of annulment and discharge respectively. In (iii), it ceases on the expiry of five years from the date of discharge.

I (insert name).....do hereby confirm, that I am eligible to apply for the vacancy of Rothbury Parish Councillor, and the information given on this form is true and accurate.

Signed.....Dated.....

Ward.....