



Co-Option Policy

Responsibility: Full Council

Review Cycle: Every four years, or earlier in the event of legislative changes

<u>Date of Adoption / Renewal</u>	<u>Resolution Number</u>	<u>Date of Next Review</u>
15 th February 2021	FCL_2021.02.14i	February 2025
15 th February 2024		February 2028

Introduction

Local (parish and town) councils can only be as helpful as the people elected to run them. Capable, enthusiastic and engaged Councillors are needed to reflect their communities. Making co-options is an opportunity for councils to address shortfalls and imbalances in membership. Steps are taken to identify the nature of these gaps and to conduct a recruitment process that specifically targets them. There are two ways that co-options can occur:

- There have been insufficient candidates to fill all of the available seats at an election.
- A casual vacancy has arisen between elections, and there is no demand to hold a by-election.

A Notice of Vacancy will be issued by the District Council. If no request for an election is received by Wealden District Council by the date on the Notice of Vacancy, Democratic Services will advise the Parish Council that it may co-opt to the vacancy. Co-option is the process by which the Parish Council selects a new Councillor. Co-option is carried out as an agenda item within a Parish Council meeting, as according with agreed procedures. The successful candidate is a councillor in their own right and is no different to any other member; co-option is a legitimate form of election as part of the election process.

The Parish Council manages the process of co-option by itself and strives to demonstrate that it is fair and equitable by following the procedure set out below:

What is the process for co-opting a councillor?

Procedure

1. Herstmonceux Parish Council invites interested candidates to write a one-page statement giving details of their experience and skills and stating why they wish to become a Parish Councillor. This Expression of Interest is to be received by the Clerk by a specified date.
2. The Clerk will check that all applicants are eligible for the post. Prospective councillors qualify for membership of the Council under one of the provisions of S 79 of the Local Government Act 1972, if they.,
 - a) they are on the electoral register for the Parish;
 - b) they have owned or rented land in the Parish for twelve months;
 - c) they have worked in the Parish for twelve months; or
 - d) they have lived in the Parish or within three miles/4.8 kilometres of the Parish boundary for twelve months.

In addition they should be a qualifying Commonwealth citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland or a citizen of another Member State of the European Community and have attained the age of 18.

3. The written statement must be sent to the Clerk at least seven days prior to the meeting where co-option is to be considered by the Council. Letters received are circulated to Councillors ahead of the meeting at which a Parish Councillor is to be co-opted. These letters form part of the meeting pack which Councillors receive for every Parish Council meeting.
4. At the Full Council meeting, all candidates are invited to say something about themselves and Councillors have the opportunity to ask questions of the candidates. This will happen on an individual basis with no other candidates being present. Each candidate will be allocated a maximum of three minutes. Any Member not present for the verbal statements will not be entitled to vote on the co-option.

5. After all candidates have completed their statements, the session can be closed to the public for Members to resolve whether to proceed with the vote. If Members consider that none of the applicants are suitable, they will defer the co-option and re-advertise the vacancy.
6. Following the discussion, the public are invited back into the meeting before the voting takes place. Members will vote by a show of hands unless a **signed ballot** is called. If a signed ballot is called, the ballot will be counted, and the result announced by the Clerk. The successful candidate will then sign the acceptance. The details of the votes for and against will not be disclosed unless formally requested by a Councillor during the meeting. At the end of the meeting, ballot papers are destroyed by the Clerk.

Voting

7. Candidates and any members of the public shall remain present. If there are more than two candidates for one position, the Chairman will request the Councillors present, to nominate any of the candidates. Candidates will require a proposer and seconder to progress to the voting stage. If there is only one vacancy, a Councillor may only nominate or second one candidate. One candidate needs to receive an absolute majority of votes.
8. Voting will be in accordance with Standing Orders by a show of hands and will continue until one candidate has received an absolute majority of those Councillors present. At this stage, the successful candidate will be declared co-opted.
9. Should no single candidate receive a majority on the first vote, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated. Voting will then take place for the remaining candidates until

one person receives an absolute majority. In the event of a tied vote, the Council Chairman has a second and deciding vote, should he/she wish to exercise it.

10. The successful candidate is then declared co-opted to the Parish Council and upon acceptance **must** sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office before becoming a Councillor. They will then be asked to join the meeting.