



Co-option Policy

Scope

This Policy sets out the way in which Haversham-cum-Little Linford Council ('the Council') identifies and manages its Parish Councillor ('Councillor') vacancies and the process which it follows to co-opt Councillors as and when required.

Vacancies

Councillor vacancies may arise due to either:

1. Insufficiency of candidates at an ordinary election; or
2. A casual vacancy due to:
 - a. A Councillor fails to deliver their declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time;
 - b. A Councillor resigns;
 - c. A Councillor dies;
 - d. Disqualification;
 - e. Election is considered void; or
 - f. A Councillor fails to attend meetings for six consecutive months.

Notice of vacancy and application

While the Council is not obliged to give public notice if a vacancy arises due to the insufficiency of candidates at an ordinary election, the Council may decide to do so. In the event of a casual vacancy public notice will be given as soon as practicable. If no by-election is called, the Council will look to co-opt.

Public notice will have been deemed to be given in the posting of a notice on all noticeboards in the Parish and on the Council's website. The notice will have a closure date and provide the Clerk's email for contact.

Application requirements

Upon being contacted by the applicant, the Clerk will request that applications provide a curriculum vitae and covering letter, in which the Council may request, at a minimum, the applicant's rationale for applying to become a Councillor. The Council may specify that other details relevant to the vacancy are included in the application i.e. detail of particular skills, expertise or interest.

Eligibility for co-option

To be eligible to be elected a Councillor a person must be:

- 18 years of age or over
- a British subject or citizen of the Republic of Ireland; and
- meet at least one of the following four qualifications:

- (a) be a local government elector of the Parish; or
- (b) have during the whole of the twelve months preceding the day of being nominated as a candidate occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the Parish; or
- (c) have their principal or only place of work in the twelve months preceding the day of being nominated as a candidate in the Parish; or
- (d) have resided in the Parish during the whole of the 12 months preceding the day of being nominated as a candidate.

There are also certain disqualifications for election, including:

- (a) holding a paid office under the local authority;
- (b) bankruptcy;
- (c) 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
- (d) being disqualified under any enactment relating to corrupt or illegal practices.

Co-option process

At the next Council meeting after the closure date has passed, which may be either a general or extraordinary meeting, the Clerk reports any eligible applications received. In the event that an application is not compliant with the application requirements specified, the Council in its absolute discretion may decide not to proceed with the application at this stage.

If the applicant has not already done so, they will then be asked to observe a Council meeting and, separately, join an informal meeting with the Chair of the Council and other Councillors as agreed by the Council to discuss the role of a Councillor.

After which the Council will decide to either co-opt directly or invite the applicant(s) to appear at the next Parish Meeting to discuss their application. In both cases, the decision to co-opt shall be voted on by the Council and this may take place at a general or extraordinary meeting and, only if strictly necessary, the Council may exclude the press or public from such a vote.

Additional considerations

The Council will at all times adhere to the principles of its Equal Opportunities Policy during the co-option process. The Council wishes to promote a true representation of its community on the Council, for instance, relating to geographical representation, and will also consider the match of applicant skills to areas where there is a need as well as an interest in a broad range of topics that the Council addresses in its day-to-day business. Such factors may become relevant especially in instances where the Council needs to fairly consider who to co-opt in the event that there are more applicants than vacancies.

Declaration of Office and Interests

Elected persons must make a Declaration of Acceptance of Office before, or at, the first meeting of the Council following their co-option in the presence of a Councillor or the Proper Officer of the Council. A completed Declaration of Interests Form must be provided to the Clerk within 28 days of co-option.