

CO-OPTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

1. INTRODUCTION This policy is based on the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) Legal Briefing L15-08 – Good Practice for the Selection of Candidates for Co-option to Local Councils.

Parish and Parish Councils are permitted to exercise the power to co-opt a person onto the Council to fill a casual vacancy when the requirements to hold an election have not been met (i.e. the vacancy has been the subject of a public notice and fewer than 10 registered electors have requested an election by a deadline date specified by the Cheshire East Council Returning Officer).

Although seeking ‘expressions of interest’ is not a legal requirement, NALC recommends that councils always give public notice of vacancies because this makes the process of co-option open and transparent and should attract more potential candidates. Whenever the need for co-option arises, Doddington District Parish Council will seek and encourage applications from anyone in the parish who is eligible to stand as a parish councillor. Councillors or parishioners can legally approach individuals to suggest that they might wish to consider putting their names forward for co-option. The notice 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 and where information can be sourced electronically.

The co-option policy will be reviewed at the beginning of each new council term (usually four years)

2. Co-option –

Stage 1 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. A casual vacancy occurs when one of the following occurs during the council’s term of office:

- a councillor fails to make their declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time;
- a councillor resigns;
- a councillor dies;
- a councillor becomes disqualified; or
- a councillor fails for six months to attend a meeting when summoned to do so and their apologies are not accepted.

Doddington District Parish Council will notify Cheshire East Council of a casual vacancy and then give public notice of the vacancy to give electors the opportunity to request an election. This occurs when ten electors write to Cheshire East Council stating that an election is requested.

If a by-election is called, a polling station will be organised by Cheshire East Council and polling cards sent to residents. Doddington District Parish Council will be expected to pay the costs incurred with a by-election. If more than one candidate is nominated, a by-election will take place. When there is only one candidate they are duly elected without a ballot. If ten residents do not request a ballot within the fourteen days of the public notice being posted, Cheshire East Council will inform Doddington District Parish Council that they can proceed with co-option, as follows:

- Advertise the vacancy for four weeks on the council notice boards and website.
- Advise the council that the co-option policy has been instigated.

3. Co-option – Stage 2 Insufficiency of candidates at an ordinary election also provide the parish council with authority to exercise its rights to co-opt any person or persons to fill any vacancies within thirty-five days following the date of the ordinary election.

4. Eligibility of Candidates The parish council can consider any person to fill a vacancy provided that:

- they are on the parish electoral register; or
- they have resided in the parish for the past twelve months or rented/tenanted land in the parish; or
- their principal place of work is in the parish; or
- they live within three miles (direct) of the parish.

There are certain disqualifications for election, as follows:

- holding a paid office under the local authority;
- bankruptcy;
- 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;
- being disqualified under any enactment in relation to corrupt or illegal practice.

Eligibility of the candidates will be confirmed at Full Council by the Clerk, as per the Local Government Act 1972, s79 and s80. All eligible candidates will be invited to attend a meeting of the Full Council following the application deadline. If candidates are unable to attend, the meeting will not be rearranged.

5. Applications To assist candidates, a co-option criterion has been prepared - please refer to Appendix A. This will provide candidates with guidance on areas they may wish to include on their application forms. Candidates will be requested to:

- confirm their eligibility for the position of parish councillor within the statutory rules (please refer to Appendix B) and
- submit information about themselves by completing an application form.

Following receipt of application(s) and at the next Full Council meeting there will be an agenda item, as follows: 'To receive and consider written applications for the office of Parish Councillor and to co-opt a candidate to fill the vacancy for the parish of Doddington District.' Prior to Full Council, where applications for co-option will be considered, applications will ideally be circulated to all councillors at least three clear days prior to the meeting. If this is not possible, then applications will be tabled at the meeting and enough time allowed during the meeting for councillors to consider the applications.

All applications will be marked 'strictly confidential' prior to circulation.

6 Full Council – Co-option Meeting Candidates will have five minutes to introduce themselves to members, give information on their background and experience and explain why they wish to become a member of Doddington District Parish Council. After presentations have been made, members will have the opportunity to ask candidates a few questions before proceeding to vote.

Note: If a candidate is unable to attend the meeting, the application can still be considered and voting will be based on the application only.

The process will be carried out in a public session and there must be no discussion between members prior to a vote being taken.

Note: where the council are discussing the merits of a candidate and personal attributes, this could be prejudicial, and the council should resolve to exclude members of the press and public.

If a candidate is a relative of a councillor, that councillor should declare a prejudicial interest and withdraw from the meeting.

When all candidates have finished giving their submissions, the council will proceed to vote with each candidate being proposed and seconded by the councillors in attendance and a vote by a show of hands.

A recorded vote may be requested (Local Government Act 1972, section 12, para. 39).

In order for a candidate to be elected to the council, it will be necessary for them to obtain an absolute majority of votes cast (50% plus 1 of the votes available at the meeting). If there are more than two candidates and there is no candidate with an overall majority in the first round of voting, the candidate with the least number of votes will drop out of the process. Further rounds of voting will then take place with the process repeated until a candidate has an absolute majority. Only those parish councillors present at the meeting may vote upon a person to fill the vacancy.

Councillors will have one vote per vacancy to be filled. The Chair has the casting vote. Votes cannot be made by proxy.

The Clerk will notify Electoral Services of the new councillor appointment, initiate 'Acceptance of Office' paperwork and 'Registration of Interests' within twenty-eight days of being elected.

If insufficient candidates come forward for co-option, the process should continue whereby the vacancies are advertised again. 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.

Note: if the number of candidates exceeds the number of vacancies each vacancy must be filled by a separate vote or a series of votes. Doddington District Parish Council is not obliged to fill all vacancies but must take steps to advertise for further co-options or hold an election, where applicable, to fill vacancies.

Any candidate(s) found to be offering inducements of any kind will be disqualified. 6. Elected Councillors – Co-option Successful co-opted candidates become councillors with immediate effect and are no different to any other member.

Co-opted members will be asked to sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office and agree to abide by the Local Government Code of Conduct introduced under the Localism Act 2011. They may take their seat at council and are then able to be appointed to a committee.

Any application can be considered in a candidates(s) absence but, if successful, members would need to agree for him/her to sign the Declaration of Office in accordance with Local Government Act 1972, section 83(3), either before or at the next Full Council meeting.

7. Applying for a Casual Vacancy Candidates who are interested in applying for a casual vacancy need to wait until the public notice appears. Candidates can write to the parish council directly expressing their interest in the casual vacancy and request that it considers their application when it has authority to co-opt (please refer to item no. 2 - Co-option Stage 1).

8. REVIEW This policy was reviewed by the Full Council on 21st November 2022. The next review date is November 2025.

9. REFERENCES

Data Protection Act 1998

Equality Act 2010

Employment Rights Act 1996

The Human Rights Act 1998

Local Government Act 1972 sch12, para 39

Local Government Act 1972, s79 and s80 Local Government Act 1972, s83(3) NALC
Legal Briefing L15-08

Signed:

Chair of Doddington District Parish Council

Date:22nd November 2022

For review November 2025