

WEST DEREHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Co-option Policy

Scope and purpose

This policy aims to explain the procedure regarding co-option. The information contained in it is to be used by members of the council and members of the public. The aim of the policy is also to show that the council endeavours to treat all applicants fairly and alike, and to ensure that the process is also seen as fair, open and transparent. This policy details the processes to be followed regarding co-option.

Background

Ordinary elections are held every 4 years, in 2019, 2023, 2027 etc. and councillors are elected to serve a 4 year term of office. A casual vacancy occurs when a parish/town councillor resigns, dies, ceases to be qualified, or becomes disqualified, at any time during the 4 year period.

The vacancy must be filled, either by election, or co-option, except during the last 6 months of the 4 year term, when the council may co-opt.

Qualifications to be a Councillor

A person is qualified to be elected and to be a councillor if they are a British, Commonwealth, Irish or European Union citizen and on the relevant day (that is, the day of nomination or election) they are 18 or over.

In addition, the person must meet at least one of the following criteria

1. on the relevant day and thereafter they continue to be on the electoral register for the parish, or
2. during the whole of the twelve months before that day they have owned or tenanted land or premises in the parish, or
3. during the whole of the twelve months before that day their principal or only place of work has been in the parish, or
4. during the whole of the twelve months before that day they have resided in the parish or within three miles of it.

Except for qualification (1), these qualifications then continue for the full term of office, until the next ordinary elections.

Certain people are disqualified from standing, and these include paid officers (including the Clerk) of the council, bankrupts and those subject to recent sentences of imprisonment.

The Causes of a Casual Vacancy and the Effective Date of the Vacancy

1. Failure to complete a declaration of acceptance of office within the proper time. This must be done before or at the first meeting of the Council, unless the council permits otherwise. The effective date of the vacancy is the closing date for making declarations of acceptance of office.
2. When a notice of Resignation has been received. A councillor may at any time resign their office by written notice delivered to the chairman of the parish council, the chairman resigns to the Council – delivered to the Clerk. There is no special form for the notice. There is no procedure for withdrawing a resignation
3. Holds any paid office or employment (other than the office of chair, vice chair or deputy chair) to which he has been appointed by the council or any committee or sub-committee of the council, or by a paid officer of the council, or by any joint committee on which the council is represented

4. Is the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order (a bankruptcy restrictions order is not issued for every bankrupt as it depends on the behaviour of the bankrupt whether it is applied or not)
5. Has within five years before the day of election or since their election been convicted of any offence and has had passed on them a sentence of imprisonment of at least three months (whether suspended or not) without the option of a fine
6. Has been found guilty of corrupt or illegal practices, or was responsible for incurring unlawful expenditure and the court orders his disqualification.
7. A Councillor ceases to hold office if they fail to attend any meetings of their council for a period of six months, and their apologies have not been received or approved by the council. In this case a casual vacancy would then exist.

Notice of the Casual Vacancy must be given

As soon as practicable a notice of casual vacancy should be put on noticeboards in the parish. Copies of the notice are supplied by Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk Electoral Services Team.

The notice allows ten electors of the parish to request that an election be held to fill the vacancy. There is no form of words for this request, which might simply be a letter headed with such words as "We the undersigned being electors for the Parish, call for an election to fill the vacancy arising from the [death] [resignation] of ...". It is helpful if the ten signatures are accompanied by printed names, addresses and electoral numbers from the current electoral register.

The request is sent to the Returning Officer of Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk and must be received within fourteen days computed in accordance with the election rules. The election must then be held within sixty days of the date of the notice of casual vacancy.

If no request is received, then, after the expiry of the fourteen day period, the council shall co-opt a person to fill the vacancy as soon as is practicable.

In the case of a casual vacancy occurring in the last six months before the ordinary elections, the council is required to give a notice of the casual vacancy but an election is not held. The council may co-opt if it wishes, leaving any unfilled vacancies to be filled at the ordinary elections.

If an election is called for

The Returning Officer will set a date for polling day, and the election process will begin with the publication of a notice of election, copies of which will be supplied to the clerk. That notice informs the electors where they may obtain nomination papers and the date by when they should be delivered. It gives the dates by which applications to vote by post or proxy must be made. It also gives the date of the poll in the event of a contest.

Co-option

The council may co-opt whoever it pleases to fill a casual vacancy. However, that person must be qualified to serve as a councillor.

Applications

We aim to encourage applications from anyone in the parish who is eligible to stand. Councillors or parishioners can approach individuals to suggest that they might wish to consider putting their names forward for co-option. When a vacancy arises, the Parish Council will consider how best to advertise the vacancy and decide upon applications.

Attendance following an application

All candidates will be sent a copy of the agenda and agenda papers.

Voting to Co-opt a Councillor

In the event of a candidate being unable to attend, his / her application will still be considered by members. In the event of a candidate being related to a councillor, then the councillor would be expected to declare an interest and request a dispensation to speak and vote.

Voting will take place by the way of a paper ballot. Members of the public present at the meeting will be able to view ballot papers if they request to do so. The decision must be made by a majority of members who are present and voting. Where there are more than two candidates for the vacancy, it may be necessary to run a series of votes, each time removing the candidate who has the least number of votes until one candidate secures an absolute majority. If there is more than one vacancy then each vacancy must be filled by a separate vote or series of votes. The person presiding over the meeting may vote, and if there is an equality of votes they may exercise their casting vote.

The council's debate and vote on the co-option must be conducted in the public section of its meeting. It follows that the candidates, as members of the public, will be entitled to be present during the proceedings.

Starting as a Councillor

The successful candidate(s) are asked to start as a councillor immediately after completing their declarations of acceptance of office. The new member should have received an agenda however the fact that they have not received a summons does not make his / her attendance as a councillor illegal. (Local Government Act 1972 Sch 12, para 10(3)). Where appropriate they will also be appointed to any Council committee. If an absent candidate is successful, members must agree to him / her signing the declaration of acceptance of office before or at the very start of the next meeting. New councillors will also be made aware of the fact that Interests Forms will need to be completed within 28 days of co-option.

Co-option Application Form

Name.....

Address for Correspondence.....

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..... Postcode.....

Tel..... Mobile.....

Are you over 18? Yes/No

Please detail any experience you have that may be relevant to West Dereham Parish Council. (If necessary please continue on a separate sheet of paper)

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Is there any other information you would like to provide regarding your application? (if necessary please continue on a separate sheet of paper)

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

Please return your completed form, together with the Co-option Eligibility Form to:

Mrs Sharon Sweet (West Dereham Parish Council Clerk), 2 Grimshoe Road, Downham Market, Norfolk, PE38 9RA. No later than :

Co-option Eligibility Form

1. In order to be eligible for co-option as a West Dereham Parish Councillor you must be a British subject, or a citizen of the Commonwealth, or the European Union. You must also be 18 years of age or over on the "relevant date", that being the day on which you are nominated, or if there is a poll, then the day of the election. You must additionally be able to agree with the following qualifications set out below.

Please circle which of the following four points applies to you.

- a. I am registered as a local government elector for the parish; or
 - b. I have, during the whole of the twelve months preceding the date of my co-option, occupied as owner or tenant, land or other premises in the parish; or
 - c. My principal or only place of work during those twelve months has been within the parish; or
 - d. I have, during the whole twelve months, resided in the parish, or within 3 miles of it.
2. 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 any paid office or employment of the local council (other than the office of Chairman) or of a joint committee on which the Council is represented; or
 - b. Is a person who has been adjudged bankrupt or has made a composition or arrangement with his/her creditors (but see below); or
 - c. 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; or
 - 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.

- i. 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;
- ii. If the person is discharged with a certificate that the bankruptcy was caused by misfortune without misconduct on his/her part
- iii. If the person is discharged without such a certificate.

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

I (INSERT NAME)..... **hereby confirm, that I am eligible to apply for the vacancy of West Dereham Parish Councillor, and that the information given on this form is a true and accurate record.**

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