

Blofield Parish Council - Co-option Policy

1. Background

The process for co-option is only partially prescribed in law but there is best practice advice and guidelines around certain aspects of the process. Items marked in bold are prescribed in law.

2. 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.

3. When a vacancy arises

A co-option vacancy arises when a member of the Council leaves, and the position is formally advertised for 14 days. At the end of this 14-day period if insufficient names have submitted a request to the District / Borough Council to call for an election (this is 10 names) then the Council can fill the vacancy by co-option. (Refer Local Government Act 1972 s86 and 87(2)(b))

3.1 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. Co-option vacancies will be advertised on the website and on the noticeboards and in media releases.

The advertisement for the co-option will include:

- a) Method by which applications can be made; in writing to the Clerk by email clerk@blofield-pc.gov.uk or by letter.
- b) The closing date for applications; circa 3 to 4 weeks.
- c) Contact point for potential candidates to obtain more information; the Clerk.
- d) Advice that further information is available electronically from the Parish Council website, including a form to complete; www.blofield-pc.gov.uk/becoming-a-councillor
- e) Where more general information is available; www.local.gov.uk/becoming-councillor

3.2 Application process

Parishioners are asked to make initial contact with the Clerk to register their interest in becoming a parish councillor. There is lots of information regarding the Parish Council on the website including minutes, agendas and governance documents.

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Parishioners are asked to attend at least two parish council meetings before they consider applying to the Council.

Following this, a meeting will be arranged with a couple of councillors / clerk to find out more about the role and responsibilities and commitments of a parish councillor. This is an opportunity to find out more and ask any questions.

Application Forms will be requested 10 days prior to the next council meeting when the co-option agenda item will be added to the agenda. When applications are received, the Clerk will confirm eligibility. Any candidate found to be offering inducements will be disqualified.

3.3 Attendance following an application

All eligible candidates will be invited to attend the next council meeting following the application deadline. They will be asked to confirm their attendance at the meeting. In the event of candidates being unable to attend, this meeting will not be rearranged. All members receive copies of applications ahead of the meeting. Applications are to be treated as confidential. A candidate, on confirming that they will attend the meeting, will be sent a copy of the agenda and agenda papers.

4. Commitment

The Council is keen that potential candidates understand the commitment which is required from councillors. Anyone interested in standing will be encouraged to look at the website for more information on the role of being a councillor. Candidates will also be told that if elected (or co-opted), they are expected to attend an Induction Training event which may be held externally, in the parish or online.

5. The process of Co-option at the Council meeting

There is an early agenda item at which each candidate will be asked to make a brief verbal presentation on why they would like to be a councillor and the skills they can offer the Council (3 minutes maximum per candidate). All of this, including the voting for the candidate will be in public. Candidates may be asked questions by members. In the event of a candidate being unable to attend, the individual's 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.

6. Voting

Only councillors present at the meeting may vote. There will be one vote per vacancy to be filled (Chairman may have a casting vote). Councillors will vote by a show of hands, or if at least two members so request, by paper ballot. **The successful candidate must receive an absolute majority of those present and voting** (Local Government Act 1972 Sch 12). If there are more than two candidates for one vacancy and neither one of them at the first count receives a majority over

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the aggregate votes given to the rest, steps must be taken to strike off the candidate with the least number of votes and the remainder must then be put to the vote again. The process is to be repeated until an absolute majority is obtained.

7. Any previous election

The Council does not consider claims of candidates who were unsuccessful at previous elections.

8. 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 fact that the new member has not received a summons does not make their attendance as a councillor illegal** (Local Government Act 1972 Sch 12, para 10(3)). Where appropriate and accepted by them, they will also be appointed to any council committee. If an absent candidate is successful, members must agree to them 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 'Register of Interests' forms will need to be completed within 28 days of co-option.

9. Filling a Co-option vacancy

The Council should strive to fill co-option vacancies as soon as practicably possible.

Date reviewed – May 2024