

DEEPING GATE PARISH COUNCIL

CO-OPTION POLICY

Adopted, 10th September 2024
Minute: 24.90.3.a

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Section 87 of the Local Government Act 1972 a casual vacancy occurs when:

- A councillor fails to make his declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time
- A councillor resigns
- A councillor dies
- A councillor becomes disqualified
- A councillor fails for six months to attend meetings of a parish council committee or sub-committee or to attend as a representative of the Parish Council a meeting of an outside body.

The Parish Council is required to notify Peterborough City Council of a Casual Vacancy and then advertise the vacancy and give electors the opportunity to request an election. This occurs when ten electors write to Peterborough City Council stating that an election is requested. If more than one candidate is then nominated a by-election takes place but if only one candidate is put forward, they are duly elected without a ballot.

2. CO-OPTION TO THE PARISH COUNCIL

If ten residents do not request an election within fourteen days of the vacancy notice being posted, as advertised by Peterborough City Council, the Parish Council is able to co-opt a volunteer.

Eligibility of Candidates

To qualify to be a parish councillor the person must be:

- A British citizen, or a citizen of the Commonwealth or the European Union and;
- At least 18 on the day they are nominated as a candidate and either;
- Be a registered local government elector within the parish or;
- Be an occupier (owner or tenant) of land or premises in the parish for the previous 12 months, or
- Have their place of work in the parish for the previous 12 months, or
- Have resided in the parish for the previous 12 months, or
- Have resided within three miles of the parish boundary for the previous 12 months.

A person is disqualified from holding office as a parish councillor (Section 80 of the Local Government Act 1972) if:

- They hold a paid office, or other place of profit in the council.
- They are the subject of a bankruptcy restriction order or interim order.
- They have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment of three months or more (including a suspended sentence), without the option of a fine, during the five years before polling day.

Candidates found to be offering inducements of any kind will be disqualified.

Parish councillors can also be co-opted in line with Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act 1985 which allows the parish council to fill vacancies remaining unfilled following an ordinary election if the council believes that it is in the interests of the parish.

Applications

Members may point out the vacancies and the process to any qualifying candidate(s).

Applicants will be asked to:

- Complete and complete and sign the candidate's qualification form
- Submit information about themselves by way of completing a short application form outlining their reasons for wishing to become a Parish Councillor and outlining any knowledge, skills and experience they would bring to the Council.

The forms are available from the Parish Clerk and the Council's website. Copies of the application forms and personal statements will be circulated to all Members for consideration at a meeting of the Parish Council. At the meeting of the Parish Council consideration of applications will be dealt with in public session.

3. CO-OPTION COUNCIL MEETING AND THE VOTING PROCESS

At the co-option meeting, candidates will be given five minutes maximum to introduce themselves to Members, give information about their background and experience, and explain why they wish to become a Member of the Council. Where the Council wishes to discuss the merits of candidates and inevitably their personal attributes, this could be prejudicial, and the Council will resolve to exclude members of the press and public.

As soon as candidates have finished giving their submissions, the council will proceed to vote on the acceptability of each candidate utilising the 'person specification' criteria set out in the Appendix and any personal statements provided by the candidates, with each candidate being proposed and seconded by the councillors in attendance and a vote by a show of hands. The vote will be recorded to show whether each Councillor present and voting gave his/her vote for or against that question.

Voting will be according to the statutory requirement in that a successful candidate must receive an absolute majority of the votes cast (50% + 1 of the votes available at the meeting). If there are more than two candidates for one vacancy and no candidate receives an absolute majority in the first round of voting, 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. For example, if Candidate A receives four votes and Candidates B and C receive two each, Candidate A is not elected as he has the same number of votes as B and C together. In such a case it is necessary to conduct a ballot between the tied candidate to eliminate one of them. This process must, if necessary, be repeated until an absolute majority is obtained. In the case of an equality of votes, the Chair of the meeting has a casting vote.

In each round of voting Councillors will be provided with ballot papers and have one vote each. Ballot papers will be collected by the Clerk who will then count and record the votes using the Verification and Count Sheet.

After the vote has been concluded, the Chair will declare the successful candidate duly elected and after signing their Declaration of Acceptance, may take their place immediately.

The Clerk will notify Peterborough City Council Electoral Services of a new Councillor appointment. The successful candidate(s) must complete their 'Registration of Interests' within 28 days of being elected. A link will to the electronic form will be provided by the Clerk.

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

Appendix: PERSON SPECIFICATION

COMPETENCY	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE
Basic Requirements	• Ability and willingness to undertake New Councillor induction training at the earliest opportunity, and other training as required. • Ability and willingness to set up and use a Council specific email address (supplied by the Clerk) • Competency to communicate electronically • Ability and willingness to attend meetings of the Council (or meetings) at any time including evenings • Ability and willingness prepare for meetings of the Council, including reading the meeting papers and bringing a copy of the agenda	
Relevant knowledge, Education, Professional Qualifications and Training	• Sound knowledge and understanding of local affairs and the local community • Forward thinking • Can bring a new skill, expertise or key local knowledge to the Council.	• A levels/Degree level or • Specific Vocational training or • professional qualification (e.g. accountant, teacher, surveyor, architect).
Experience, Skills, Knowledge and Ability	• Ability and willingness to listen constructively • Ability to communicate succinctly and clearly • Good interpersonal skills and able to contribute opinions at meetings whilst willing to see others' views and accept majority decisions. • A good team player • Ability and willingness to work closely with other members and to maintain good working relationships with all members and staff. • A solid interest in local matters • Ability and willingness to contribute to a variety of Parish projects • Ability and willingness to represent the Council and the community • Ability and willingness to work with the Council's partners (e.g. voluntary groups, other Community Councils, principal authority, charities).	• Knowledge of HR, procurement, contract management, financial control or risk management and compliance, public relations • Experience of working in another public body or not for profit organisation • Experience of working with voluntary and or local community/ interest groups • Basic knowledge of legal issues relating to town and parish councils or local authorities. • Experience of delivering presentations. • Experience in financial control/budgeting • Experience of staff management • Experience of working or being a member in a local authority or other public body • Experience of working with voluntary and or local community / interest groups • Basic knowledge of legal issues relating to town and Community Councils or local authorities