



Councillor Co-Option Policy



1. Introduction

This policy sets out the procedure to ensure there is compliance with legislation and continuity of procedures in the co-option of members to Halebank Parish Council (HBPC). The co-option procedure is entirely managed by HBPC, and this policy will ensure that a fair and equitable process is carried out.

2. Co-option

The co-option of a Parish Councillor occurs when either:

- i. Vacancies exist after Full Council elections.
- ii. A casual vacancy has arisen on the Council and no poll (by-election) has been called.

3. After full elections

The procedure to fill the vacancies and the co-option will take place at the first possible Parish Council meeting.

4. Casual vacancies

A casual vacancy occurs when:

- a. A councillor fails to make his declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time.
- b. A councillor resigns.
- c. A councillor dies.
- d. A councillor becomes disqualified or
- e. A councillor fails for six (6) months to attend meetings of a council committee or subcommittee or to attend as a representative of the Council a meeting of an outside body.

The Clerk to HBPC will notify Halton Borough Council (HBC) of a casual vacancy and then advertise the vacancy provided by HBC. This gives electors the opportunity to request an election and occurs when a minimum of ten electors write to the Borough Council stating that an election is requested.

If a by-election is called, a polling station will be set up by HBC and the people of the parish will be asked to go to the polls to vote for candidates who will have put

themselves forward by way of a nomination paper. HBPC will pay the costs of the election. The people of the parish have fourteen days (not including weekends, bank holidays and other notable days), to claim the by-election, and the electoral officer will advise the clerk of the closing date.

If more than one candidate is nominated, a by-election takes place but if only one candidate is put-forward they are duly elected without a ballot.

If ten residents or more do not request a ballot within fourteen days of the vacancy notice being posted, as advised by HBC, HBPC is able to co-opt a new councillor.

5. Confirmation of co-option

On receipt of written confirmation from the Electoral Services Office from HBC, the casual vacancy can be filled by means of co-option. The Clerk will:

- Advertise the vacancy for four weeks on the Council notice boards and website stating the reasons for the vacancy, the rules for eligibility, a deadline for applications and the date of the meeting where the co-option will take place.
- Advise HBPC that the Co-option Policy has been instigated.

HBPC is not obliged to fill any vacancy. Even if the Council invites applications for co-option, it is not obliged to select anyone from the candidates who apply. However, it is not desirable that electors in a particular ward be left partially or fully underrepresented for a significant length of time. Neither does it contribute to effective and efficient working of the Council if there are insufficient councillors to share the workload equitably; to provide a broad cross-section of skills and interests; or to achieve the meeting quorums without difficulty. Councillors elected by co-option are full members of HBPC.

6. Eligibility of candidates

HBPC can consider any person to fill a vacancy provided that they:

- Are an elector for the parish; or
- Have resided in the parish for the past twelve months or rented/tenanted land or other premises in the parish; or
- Have their principal place of work in the parish; or
- Live within three miles (direct) of the parish.

There are certain disqualifications for election, of which the main are (see 5. 80 of the Local Government Act 1972):

- 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; and
- Being disqualified under any enactment relating to corrupt or illegal practices.

Nominees must also be made aware that canvassing of Council members will disqualify them from standing for the vacancy. Candidates found to be offering inducements of any kind will be disqualified.

7. Applications

Members may point out the vacancies and the process to any qualifying candidate(s). Although there is no Statutory Requirement to do so, candidates will be requested to:

- Submit information about themselves, by way of completing a short application form
- Confirm their eligibility for the position of Councillor within the statutory rules.

Following receipt of applications, the next suitable council meeting will have an agenda item 'To receive written applications for the office of Parish Councillor and to Co-opt a candidate to fill the existing vacancy'.

Copies of the candidates' applications will be circulated to all Councillors by the Clerk at least 3 clear days prior to the meeting of the Full Council, when the Co-option will be considered. All such documents will be treated by the Clerk and all Councillors as Strictly Private and Confidential.

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

8. At the co-option meeting

The successful candidate becomes a councillor and is no different to any other member. Co-option is a legitimate form of election as part of the election process.

All candidates will be sent a full agenda of the meeting at which they are to be considered for appointment, together with a copy of the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations of HBPC. Candidates will also be informed that they will be invited to speak about their application at the meeting.

This part of the process will be carried out by adjourning standing orders at the Full Council meeting to allow the candidates to speak. As this could be prejudicial, the Council will resolve to exclude the members of the press and public.

Candidates will be given five minutes maximum to introduce themselves to Members, give information on their background and experience, explain why they wish to become a Member of HBPC and answer questions from Councillors.

Following the discussion, the public are invited back into the meeting before the voting takes place. Councillors will have one vote per vacancy to be filled.

The Chairman will request the Councillors present to nominate any of the candidates. The Chairman will then ask for a seconder and then the Chairman will invite further votes in support of the candidate.

For a candidate to be elected to HBPC, it will be necessary for them to obtain an absolute majority of votes cast (50% + 1 of the votes available at the meeting). The Chairman will place the names of those nominated into alphabetical order and proceed to vote. Voting will be in accordance with Standing Orders by a show of hands and will continue until one candidate has received an absolute majority of those Councillors present.

Should no single candidate receive a majority on the first vote, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated. Voting will then take place for the remaining candidates until one person receives an absolute majority. The successful candidate is then declared co-opted to the Parish Council and will be asked to join the meeting.

The vote will be recorded to show how each Councillor present voted.

In the case of an equality of votes, the Chairman of the meeting has a second of casting vote.

After the voting has been concluded, the Chairman will declare the successful candidate duly co-opted and after signing their declaration of acceptance of office, may take their seat immediately.

The Clerk will notify Electoral Services of the new Councillor appointment. The successful candidate(s) must complete the 'registration of interests' at the meeting. The form should be handed to the Clerk for forwarding to the Monitoring Officer.

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