Local Government for Langton Green, Speldhurst, Ashurst and Old Groombridge

CO-OPTION POLICY

Introduction

Speldhurst Parish Council consists of thirteen councillors and an election is held every four years. Should a councillor leave the council mid-term[1] the clerk will immediately inform the parishioners of the casual vacancy[2] by posting a notice on all notice boards; on the website and, if time allows, in the village magazines. The announcement (which is open for 14 working days) will advise that there is a vacancy and if ten electors wish to give notice in writing to the Returning Officer an election will be held (within 60 days).

The aim of this policy is to explain the procedure for co-opting a councillor when an election has not been requested by the public.

Procedure

Notices are posted advising the community that the Parish Council will now co-opt. Qualified[3] persons are invited to contact the clerk within 14 working days. An interview panel[4] will be established by the council to conduct interviews. The panel will normally consist of a minimum of three councillors and no more than five.

Interview and Voting Process

The principle of fairness is paramount and any councillor who knows an applicant personally should make this known prior to the interview. The panel is obliged to ask each applicant the same questions and all interviewers will take notes which will be retained by The Clerk. At the end of the interviews councillors will vote for the candidate they consider to be the best qualified

The successful candidate must receive an absolute majority of the votes from councillors on the panel. In cases where there are more than two applicants a process of elimination may need to be employed to arrive at an absolute majority.

Example 1
Candidate A gets 4 votes
Candidate B gets 3 votes
Candidate C gets 1 vote
Candidate A is not elected because he does not have a clear majority over the other two candidates votes put together. Candidate C is eliminated and a final vote is taken between Candidates A & B.

Example 2
Candidate A gets 3 votes
Candidate B gets 1 vote
Candidate C gets 1 vote
Candidate A is elected because he has more votes than the other two put together.

Applicants will be informed of the decision within three days of the interview.

Becoming a Councillor

The successful candidate will be invited to attend the next council meeting when councillors will vote to accept the recommendation of the panel. The applicant becomes a councillor when he/she has signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and must complete the Registration of Interests form within 28 days of that meeting.

[1] A vacancy normally occurs if a councillor resigns; dies; fails to sign a declaration of acceptance at the proper time; fails to attend meetings for six consecutive months

[2] Unless the vacancy occurs within the six months before an election Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006, SI 2006 No. 3305, r5 (3)

[3] The applicant must meet the criteria for eligibility to be a member of the Council: the main reasons are that he/she must

- be a UK, EU or Commonwealth citizen and be over 18 years old
- be a resident of the Parish for at least one year prior to application (or live within 3 miles) or
- have a place of work within the Parish for at least one year
- not be subject to a bankruptcy ruling
- not hold a paid office or other place of profit in the gift or disposal of the Council
- not be convicted in the last 5 years or convicted of failing to register disclosable interests

[4] Should only one applicant apply an interview is still held to assess whether the candidate has the skills expected and is suitable for co-option. The Council is not obliged to invite him/her and no reason needs to be given.