

Co-option Policy and Procedure

1. Introduction

This policy sets out the procedure the Parish Council will follow when filling a councillor vacancy by co-option, in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 and NALC guidance. The aim is to ensure a fair, open, and transparent process.

2. When Co-option May Be Used

Co-option may be used when:

- A casual vacancy arises and the Returning Officer confirms that no election has been requested by ten electors within the statutory 14 working days; or
- A vacancy exists following an ordinary election due to insufficient nominations.

The Council must not co-opt until formal confirmation has been received from the Returning Officer.

3. Public Notice of Co-option

Once co-option is permitted, the Clerk will publish a **Co-option Notice** inviting written applications from eligible residents. The notice will:

- State the number of vacancies
- Provide the eligibility criteria
- Give the closing date for applications
- Explain how to apply

The notice will be displayed on parish noticeboards, the Council website, and other communication channels as appropriate.

4. Applications

Applicants must submit a written expression of interest including:

- Full name and address
- Confirmation of eligibility to stand as a councillor
- Brief statement explaining why they wish to serve
- Skills, experience, or interests relevant to the role

The Clerk will acknowledge all applications and circulate them to councillors prior to the meeting at which the co-option will be considered – please see attached form.

5. Consideration of Candidates at a Council Meeting

Co-option will take place at a properly convened meeting of the Parish Council.

The procedure will be:

1. The Chair will introduce the item.
2. Each candidate (if present) may speak for up to **three minutes**.
3. Councillors may ask **factual questions** for clarification.
4. Candidates will then withdraw from the room while councillors debate and vote.

The meeting will remain open to the public throughout.

6. Voting Method

- All voting for co-option must be done by **written ballot**.
- Each Councillor at the meeting will be provided with a ballot slip listing the eligible candidates.
- Councillors must mark their preferred candidate on the ballot slip and return it to the Clerk.

Ballot Management

- The Clerk will act as **Returning Officer** for the purposes of the ballot.
- The Clerk will ensure that all Ballot Slips are completed and count the votes.
- Ballot slips will be retained by the clerk for the period required under the Council's document retention policy.

Determining the Outcome

- A candidate must receive an **absolute majority** of votes cast to be co-opted.
- If no candidate receives a majority on the first ballot:
 - The candidate with the lowest number of votes will be removed from the ballot.
 - Further rounds of voting will take place until one candidate receives a majority.
- In the event of a tie between the two final candidates, the Chair will have a **casting vote**, in accordance with legislation.

Transparency

- The Chair will announce the result of the written ballot at the meeting.
- The number of votes for each candidate will be recorded in the minutes, but **individual voting choices will remain confidential**.

7. Appointment

Once a candidate has received an absolute majority:

- The Council will resolve to co-opt the candidate.
- The successful candidate will sign the **Declaration of Acceptance of Office** before taking their seat.
- The Clerk will provide the Code of Conduct and Register of Interests form.
- The Register of Interests must be completed and returned within **28 days**.

Unsuccessful candidates will be thanked for their interest.

8. Confidentiality and Data Handling

Eligibility forms and personal data will be handled in accordance with GDPR.

Forms for unsuccessful candidates will be destroyed as confidential waste.

9. Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed every four years or sooner if legislation or best practice changes.

Policy Adopted:

Guidelines for Councillors When Considering Co-option Candidates

Competency	Essential	Desirable
Knowledge, Education & Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A genuine interest in local issues and the wellbeing of the community • Understanding of the role of a parish councillor and willingness to learn • Awareness of the Council's responsibilities and the Code of Conduct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience in community organisations, voluntary groups, or public service • Knowledge of local government or parish council functions
Experience, Skills & Personal Qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to communicate clearly and respectfully • Willingness to work collaboratively with councillors, staff, and partners • Good listening skills and an open, fair approach to decision-making • Ability to read and consider reports and make informed judgements • Commitment to attending meetings and preparing for them • Willingness to undertake training and development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of committee work, governance, or strategic decision-making • Experience of working with budgets or financial information • Confidence speaking in public or presenting information • Experience of partnership working (e.g., with councils, charities, community groups)
Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for different views and ability to represent the whole community • Willingness to engage with residents appropriately and constructively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience organising community events or initiatives • Established links with local groups or networks
Conduct & Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to abide by the Code of Conduct and uphold high standards of behaviour • Reliability, integrity, and respect for confidentiality • Commitment to the principles of public life (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated leadership in community or professional settings
Practical Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to attend evening meetings and occasional events • Access to email and willingness to use digital communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good IT skills (email, documents, online meetings)

Shepherdswell *with* Coldred Parish Council

Co-option Application Form

1. Personal Details

Full Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

2. Eligibility to Serve as a Parish Councillor

To be eligible for co-option, you must meet *at least one* of the following criteria and **not** be disqualified under relevant legislation.

Please tick all that apply:

- ☐ I am registered as a local government elector for the parish.
- ☐ I have lived in the parish, or within 3 miles of it, for the past 12 months.
- ☐ I occupy as owner or tenant land or premises in the parish for the past 12 months.
- ☐ My principal or only place of work has been in the parish for the past 12 months.

Please confirm you are not disqualified from holding office:

- ☐ I confirm I am not disqualified under the Local Government Act 1972 or other relevant legislation.
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3. About You

Why would you like to become a parish councillor?

(Please outline your motivation and what you hope to contribute.)

What skills, experience, or interests would you bring to the council?

(Community involvement, professional background, local knowledge, etc.)

4. Declarations

Are you willing to attend council meetings regularly and undertake training as required?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Are you willing for your name to be published as an applicant?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5. Signature

I declare that the information given in this application is true and complete.

Signature: _____

Date: _____