

Co-option Policy

- a. When a casual vacancy has been declared (e.g. on receipt of a letter of resignation, death, ineligibility or a seat has been left vacant because no eligible candidate stood for election) the Town Clerk will immediately notify the Returning Officer at the Dorset Council, issue the public notice and advise council members accordingly.
- b. If the required 10 electors of a ward have not called for a poll within the legally specified time period (currently 14 days), following public notification of a Notice of Vacancy, the Returning Officer will notify the Town Clerk who will then instigate the following co-option procedure:
 - i. Advise council members by memo/email that a poll has not been claimed and that the co-option process is being activated by the Town Clerk.
 - ii. Prepare notices for Town Council notice boards, the website and social media platforms.
 - iii. Place advertisement in local press/publications, including the following information:
 - The method by which applications can be made
 - The closing date for all applications
 - The date of the Town Council meeting at which co-option will occur
 - A contact point to obtain more information
 - A link to the website with further information
- c. Legal requirements to be a local councillor are as follows (*check for any amendments prior to any publication*):

To be eligible to stand for election you must be:

- 18 or over on the day of nomination
- And a UK, Commonwealth or EU citizen

You must also be a registered voter in the electoral area or:

- registered as a local government elector for the area of the parish; or
- *during the whole of the 12 months preceding that day or those days occupied as owner or tenant land or other premises in the parish; or*
- principal or only place of work during those 12 months has been in the parish; or
- during the whole of those 12 months resided in that parish or within 4.8 kilometres of it.

- d. Copies of applicants' letters and CVs to be circulated to all Councillors with a minimum of 7 days' notice of the full Town Council meeting.
- e. All applicants to be invited to the full Council meeting to give a brief address of up to five minutes maximum to introduce themselves to the Councillors, give information on their background and experience and explain why they wish to become a member of the Town Council. They must then answer any questions asked by serving Councillors and the Town Clerk.

- f. If a Candidate is a relative of a Councillor, that Councillor may declare a prejudicial interest and withdraw from the meeting.
- g. The process will be carried out in a public session and there must be no discussion between members prior to a vote being taken. However, where the council are discussing the merits of a candidate and personal attributes, this could be prejudicial, and the Town Council should resolve to exclude members of the press and public, prior to Councillors voting by written ballot and the outcome being announced.
- h. The person co-opted must receive an absolute majority of the votes of those councillors present and voting at the meeting where the co-option takes place. Where there are more than two candidates for one vacancy, this rule means that a person must get a majority of votes over all the other candidates. Thus, where candidate A receives four votes, and candidates B and C each receive two, A is not elected because he has the same number of votes as B and C put together and does not have a majority over their combined votes. Where there are more than two candidates it is desirable to eliminate the candidate with the least number of votes, so that the final vote is between two candidates only.
- i. After the vote has been taken, the chair should declare the candidate who received the highest number of votes duly elected.
- j. The person elected must make a declaration of Acceptance of Office before, or at, the first meeting of the Town Council following their election in the presence of a member of the Town Council or the proper officer. The declaration is then retained in the council records.
- k. The person elected will also need to undertake to abide by the Town Council's code of conduct and must complete an electronic declaration of Interests form which is submitted to, and published by, the Dorset Council's monitoring officer.
- l. The council should also consider what induction, training, and other support should be given to the new councillor.
- m. The Town Council is not obliged to co-opt to fill any vacancy. Even if the council invites applications for co-option it is not obliged to select anyone from the candidates that apply. However, it is not desirable that electors in a particular ward be left partially or fully unrepresented for a significant amount of time.