

Ickleton PC: Co-option Policy

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Introduction

This document defines our approach to co-option – the process by which vacancies on the Parish Council are filled outside of elections. Unlike the conduct of elections, which are subject to a large range of rules and primarily administered by more-distant authorities, the law gives local councils a much freer rein to make co-options.

This document is written to ensure there is compliance with legislation, continuity of procedures in the co-option and that a fair and equitable process is carried out.

When is co-option required?

Elections for the nine councillor seats on the Ickleton Parish Council are held every four years. However, vacancies may occur at other times: and specifically

- if there are unfilled seats following an election (an ordinary vacancy); or
- a seat becomes available between elections (a casual vacancy).

A casual vacancy may occur for different reasons: when an appointed councillor

- fails to make his declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time,
- resigns,
- dies,

- is disqualified (by committing an offense), or
- fails for six (6) months to attend meetings of the Parish Council

Who is responsible for the co-option process?

Unlike the election or by-election process, the co-option procedure is entirely managed by the Parish Council.

How is co-option initiated?

Determining demand for a by-election

When vacancies occur within six (6) months of an election, electors are not given the opportunity to request an election and the vacancy can be filled by co-option.

However, if this is not the case, the Parish Council has to notify the District Council of a casual vacancy, then advertise the vacancy and give electors for the ward the opportunity to request an election. This occurs when ten (10) electors write to the District Council stating that an election is requested.

The people of the ward have fourteen (14) days (not including weekends, bank holidays and other notable days), to claim the by-election. The Electoral Services Office of South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) will confirm the closing date.

If a by-election is called, a polling station will be set up by SCDC and the people of the ward will be asked to go to the polls to vote for candidates who will have put themselves forward by way of a nomination paper. If more than one (1) candidate is nominated a by-election takes place. However, but if only one (1) candidate is put forward they are duly elected without a ballot.

The Parish Council will pay the costs of the election.

Proceeding with co-option

If ten (10) residents do not request a ballot within fourteen (14) days of the vacancy notice being posted, as advised by the Electoral Services Office, the Parish Council is able to co-opt a member.

Co-option also applies in the case of an ordinary vacancy where the Electoral Services Office has confirmed that there were insufficient nominations to fill all the seats but there are sufficient Parish Councillors elected to constitute a quorum.

Where appropriate a role description and person specification may be agreed to target specific characteristics, skills, or groups. Also, we may highlight the skills needed to be a good councillor: good communication skills, problem-solving, analytical thinking, being a team player and the willingness to play an active role.

The Clerk will advertise the vacancy:

- for a minimum of four weeks.
- in at least one edition of Icene.
- on the Parish Council website and noticeboard.

Details of the statutory criteria of eligibility will also be made available.

Individual councillors are encouraged to bring the vacancy to the attention of candidates that they consider would be suitable.

Who can apply to be a member of the Parish Council?

The eligibility rules for membership applies regardless of whether the member joins through election or co-option. The Parish Council is able to consider any person to fill a vacancy provided that the candidate is:

- 18 or over; and
- a British citizen, a qualifying Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any other member state of the European Union;

and at least one of the following apply:

- an elector for the Parish and continues to be an elector,
- has resided in the Parish for the past twelve months or rented/tenanted land in the Parish,
- has had their principal or only place of work in the Parish for the past twelve months,
- has lived within three miles of the Parish for the past twelve months.

There are certain disqualifications for being a parish councillor, of which the main are (see s80 of the Local Government Act 1972):

- holding a paid office or employment under the Parish Council;
- 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 preceding five years; or
- being disqualified under any enactment relating to corrupt or illegal electoral practices.

How are applications made?

Candidates are required to apply for the role in writing. They should:

- submit information about themselves and their attributes for the role,
- why they wish to become a Parish Councillor,
- confirm their eligibility for the position of Parish Councillor.

Following receipt of applications, the next Parish Council meeting will have an agenda item titled 'Parish Councillor vacancy and co-option'. Eligible candidates will be invited to attend the meeting. Candidates do not have to be present at the meeting in which the co-option will be considered but should provide some information about themselves.

Copies of the eligible candidates' applications will be received and circulated to all Parish Councillors by the Clerk at least three (3) clear working days (not including weekends, bank holidays and other notable days) prior to the meeting of the full Parish Council, when the co-option will be considered.

From this date no other applications will be accepted, the exception being if the co-option is deferred for any reason, the process should continue, whereby the vacancies are again advertised.

All such documents will be treated by the Clerk and all Parish Councillors as strictly private and confidential.

Proceeding with co-option

The co-option is formalised in first available full Parish Council meeting and will be the last item of business on the agenda before the date of the next meeting.

All applicants are invited to attend the meeting, although are not required to be present.

Where applicants do attend, each will be invited to speak if they wish to, in alphabetical order by Surname, for a maximum of five (5) minutes each.

The process will be carried out in the public session and there will be no private discussions between members prior to a vote being taken. However, where the Parish Council is discussing the merits of candidates and inevitably their personal attributes, this could be prejudicial, and the Parish Council should resolve to exclude the members of the press and public.

The voting process

As soon as all candidates have finished giving their submissions, the Parish Council will proceed to a vote by ballot paper. A vote by ballot will also take place if there is only one candidate or the number of candidates equals the number of vacancies.

In order for a candidate to be co-opted to the Parish Council, it is necessary for them to obtain an absolute majority of votes cast (50% + 1 of the votes available at the meeting).

If there are more than two candidates and there is no candidate with an overall majority in the first round of voting, the candidate with the least number of votes will drop out of the process. Further rounds of voting will then take place to achieve an absolute majority. If this cannot be achieved, the Chair will get the casting vote.

Formalising the selection

If present, a candidate who is co-opted will sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office, including an undertaking to abide by the Parish Council's Code of Conduct, and may take office thereafter.

If not present, a co-opted candidate will sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office either before or at the next meeting of the Parish Council.

The Clerk will notify the District Council Electoral Services Office of the co-option of the new Parish Councillor.

The co-opted Parish Councillor will complete a Register of Parish Members Financial and Other Interests form to be sent to the Monitoring Officer at South Cambs District Council and Clerk within 28 days of the co-option.

Other considerations

If insufficient candidates are co-opted, the process should continue, whereby the vacancies are again advertised.

If the co-option is deferred for any reason, the process should continue, whereby the vacancies are again advertised.

A person elected or co-opted to fill a casual vacancy holds office until the person in whose place they are elected or appointed would regularly have retired.

Related documents

This document is one of the Policies which define the operational processes and procedures for our Parish Council.

Other Policies are published on the Ickleton Parish Council website and are also available on request from the Parish Clerk.

In maintaining this document we reference the following:

- NALC: Co-opting for Democracy

<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/publications/lcr-1/last-issue-2022/3824-co-opting-for-democracy/file>

- NALC: Make a Change, Become a Councillor

<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/local-elections>

- Representation of the People Act 1985, Section 21

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1985/50/section/21>

Version History

The version history panel provides a history of the changes made to the document from the initial draft to the current version.

Version	Changes made	Date	Made by
0.1	First draft	21 January 2024	Steven Heaney
0.2-draft	Draft for review and approval	16 March 2024	Steven Heaney
0.3	Revised draft for review and approval	5 th March 2026	Barbara Benn
1.0	Reviewed and adopted at the May 2026 meeting.	20 th May 2026	Barbara Benn