



BLETSOE
PARISH COUNCIL

Bletsoe Parish Council

Coooption Policy

July 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Policy sets out the process to be followed when a Casual Vacancy occurs for Bletsoe Parish Council (BPC). The process for Cooption is not prescribed in law, but it is important that it is clear and fair, and that all applicants are treated alike. Any applications or queries on Cooption should be made to the Clerk: 07870108315 and/or clerk@bletsoe-pc.gov.uk

2. OCCURRENCE OF A CASUAL VACANCY

- 2.1 In the event of a vacancy occurring due to resignation, death, or disqualification of a current councillor, the Clerk will immediately inform the Democratic Services department at Bedford Borough Council (DSBBC). DSBBC will issue a Vacancy Notice that will be displayed on the BPC noticeboards and website. This notice gives a legally-required time period to allow ten local government electors to request a by-election. At the end of this time period, DSBBC will inform BPC whether a by-election will occur, or whether BPC is free to Coopt.

3. COOPTION PROCESS – PRIOR TO THE COUNCIL MEETING TO COOPT

- 3.1 Following confirmation from DSBBC that Cooption can proceed, the Clerk will advertise the vacancy using a suitable poster on the noticeboards and website, setting a deadline for applications and giving details for applicants to contact for the application process.
- 3.2 Applicants will be asked to complete the Cooption Application Form, which contains questions related to legal qualification/disqualification to determine if they are eligible candidates for the role of parish councillor. The form also contains basic questions on relevant experience and skills for the role to allow current councillors to make judgement on the suitability of the candidate for the role, or to rank one candidate over another in the event of multiple applications for one vacancy.
- 3.3 The Clerk will review the answers to the qualification/disqualification criteria to determine the applicant's lawful eligibility to stand. Ineligible applicants will not be taken forward to the council meeting for cooption and will be informed as such.
- 3.4 To allow councillors enough time for review, applications received after the advertised deadline will not be accepted.

4. COOPTION PROCESS – AT THE COUNCIL MEETING TO COOPT

- 4.1 Candidates will be invited to attend the council meeting for potential cooption. Candidates can lawfully be coopted in their absence, but are encouraged to attend if possible.
- 4.2 Candidates will be invited to introduce themselves to the councillors briefly, but are not expected to repeat the full details they have provided in the application form. Current councillors may ask clarification questions at this point in the meeting, or may rely on the information provided in the application form.
- 4.3 Voting will be carried out by paper ballot completed by each councillor present at the meeting. Councillors who are not present at the meeting lawfully cannot vote.
- 4.4 All eligible candidates will be brought forward into the voting process.
- 4.5 Councillors will also have an option on the ballot paper to not vote for any candidates (abstain).

- 4.6 Ballot papers will be handed to the Clerk to count the votes, overseen by the Chair of the meeting. Successful candidates should have received an absolute majority vote of those present and voting. Therefore, if there are more than two candidates for one vacancy, and none of them at the first count has an overall majority, the candidate with the fewest votes should be eliminated and the remainder put to the vote again. The process should be repeated as necessary until one candidate has an overall majority. In the event of a tie in votes, the Chair's vote will be the casting vote. Should the remaining candidate not receive a majority vote of the council then the vacancy will remain unfilled.
- 4.7 The Chair will announce the successful candidate and invite them to sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and join the council immediately as a councillor. For candidates not present, the Clerk will inform them over email following the meeting.
- 4.8 Where the vacancy has not been filled, the advertising of the role should continue and the process repeated only when new eligible candidates come forward. The new deadline for applications will be three working days prior to the next meeting to coopt to ensure councillors have enough time to review applications. Unsuccessful candidates from previous cooption attempts are not precluded from future cooption.
- 4.9 Coopted councillors have the same rights as the existing councillors and will have a term as councillor running until the end of the 4-year term of office.