



Ventnor
Town Council

Created date - October 2023

Co-Option Policy

Review date – December 2025



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Purpose of the policy

This policy will apply when an election has not been called for by ten or more electors from the parish ward in which a vacancy has occurred, or if after a town council election there are vacancies remaining owing to insufficient candidates.

Principles

The council prefers that vacancies are filled by election, but will fill them by co-option when the electoral process has not been triggered during the required time period.

The opportunity to be co-opted to the council will be advertised locally, and all eligible applicants will be interviewed prior to a decision to co-opt being made at an ordinary or extraordinary meeting of the full council.

The decision will be made on objective criteria relating to the applicants' abilities, motivation and experience, and in full conformance with the Equalities Act 2010.

This policy reflects best practice as recommended by NALC. If a vacancy results in the council becoming inquorate, or if a vacancy occurs within the six months before scheduled elections, different rules will apply.

Advertisement

The vacancy will be advertised locally (on council noticeboards, its website, and on social media), requesting people to put their names forward for co-option by letter or email to the Town Clerk. Details of the statutory criteria of eligibility should be made available.

The council will aim to advertise the vacancy within one month of hearing from Isle of Wight Council Returning Officer that an election has not been called, or within one month of an election in which there have been insufficient candidates. If a vacancy arises due to the death of a member, the publication of the notice of vacancy may be postponed until such time as the Town Clerk feel is reasonable (often this will be after the funeral).

The opportunity will remain open for a period of at least three weeks. The closing date for applications will set for 5pm on a weekday. Decisions on the advertisement and application timetable are delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

Potential applicants will be asked to provide a written expression of interest, setting out their reasons for wishing to be a councillor, supported by details of any previous community or council work and the other skills and experience that they can bring to



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the Council. Applicants should provide their contact details and note that it is a condition of being a councillor that a means of contact by telephone and/or email will become public information.

All replies received on or before the closing date will be circulated by the Town Clerk to all members for consideration. The Clerk will be responsible for checking that applicants are qualified to become a local councillor and are not disqualified as set out in the Local Government Act 1972.

Late applications will only be accepted if there are exceptional circumstances and at the decision of the HR Committee.

Interview

The HR Committee will appoint a panel of three councillors who, supported by the Town Clerk, will interview all of the eligible applicants. Prior to the interviews, other councillors will be invited to share any views they have about the applications.

The panel should exclude anyone who is familiar with any candidates in a social or external organisational context such that a fully informed member of the public would consider them to be a friend or colleague of that councillor.

The three pillars of exclusion to serve on an interview panel are blood-related, direct or indirect business association and knowing a candidate socially, (for example, regular social meetings for food/drink, visiting a candidate's home for social purposes, holidaying previously or currently with a candidate).

The interviews will be held within a month of the advertised closing date for applications, ideally all on the same day, at a time that is convenient for both panel and applicants.

Recommendation

The councillors on the panel will decide a recommendation to put to the full council or, if it considers that there is no suitable candidate, will recommend that the vacancy be re-advertised.

In reaching a recommendation, the interview panel should use objective criteria, derived from the person specification below and agreed before the interviews. The most important attribute is to care about the community and be willing to take an active role. The panel may take account of any imbalances in its current membership based on demographic characteristics or geographical coverage within the parish, and of whether or not the applicants live within the ward.

The Town Clerk will make and keep a written record of the basis for the decision to recommend or not recommend each candidate.



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After the interviews, and before the candidates are advised as to the outcome, an informal meeting open to all councillors will be arranged for the panel to share and explain the basis for its recommendation. At this meeting councillors will consider whether the recommendation is put to the next meeting of the council for decision, or whether further steps in the selection process (for example, a second interview, or an opportunity for all councillors to meet the recommended candidate) might be appropriate before this is done.

Once the selection process is completed, the Clerk will contact the member recommended for co-option, to confirm that they are willing to accept the position making clear that the final decision rests with the full council. If the candidate is no longer willing to be co-opted, the panel will meet again to agree an alternative recommendation or that the vacancy be re-advertised.

Decision

The decision to co-opt (or to re-advertise) will be the first substantive item on the agenda for the next ordinary or extraordinary meeting of the full council. The discussion and vote will take place in public and the normal rules for debate and voting will apply, as set out in the council's Standing Orders.

If the co-option is agreed, the new member (if present) may immediately sign the declaration of acceptance of office and then join that meeting as a member of the council. Failure to make the declaration or failure to make the declaration at the required time or in the correct manner will mean that the office will become vacant. Within 28 days, the new councillor must complete a declaration of interests form which must be sent to and published by the Town Clerk. The council will consider what induction, training, and other support should be given to the new councillor.

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

Person Specification

A town councillor is likely to have or develop knowledge and skills in the following areas:

- familiarity with their ward and the town, and with its diversity of people, organisations and activities;
- an understanding of the Council's services, management arrangements and procedures, and some awareness of relevant legislation;
- knowing who to contact within and beyond the Council to pursue an enquiry;



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- people skills including the ability to listen, influence, mediate, communicate, present arguments, challenge, co-operate, and manage relationships;
- the ability to analyse written and numerical information;
- political skills, including liaison with colleagues, and dealing with the media;
- personal organisation skills.

In addition, each person will bring their own individual mix of skills, experience and understanding drawn from their employment, home or social life and other work within local communities. Councillors should be able and willing to attend meetings and events including during the evening and at weekends.

Guidance and additional information

For enquiries relating to this policy, contact the Town Clerk, at 1 Salisbury Gardens, Dudley Road, Ventnor PO38 1EJ, telephone 01983 853775 or via www.ventnortowncouncil.gov.uk