

	RUGELEY TOWN COUNCIL MANUAL	
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Councillor Co-option Policy

Date Created	Date Adopted	Date last Reviewed	Next Review Date
October 2019	27 th November 2019		

Councillor Co-option Policy

Rugeley Town Council

Introduction

This policy sets out the procedure to ensure there is compliance with legislation and continuity of procedures in the co-option of members to the Town Council. The co-option procedure is entirely managed by the Town Council and this policy will ensure that a fair and equitable process is carried out.

The Town Council is composed of four wards: Etching Hill and the Heath; Hagley; Western Springs North and Western Springs South.

Co-option

The co-option of a town councillor occurs in two instances:

1. When an ordinary vacancy has arisen on the Town Council after the ordinary elections held every four years;
2. When a casual vacancy has arisen on the Town Council and no poll (by-election) has been called.

Ordinary Vacancy

An ordinary vacancy occurs when there are insufficient candidates to fill all the seats on the Parish Council at the ordinary elections held every four years. Any candidates who were nominated to a ward with insufficient candidates, are automatically elected to the Parish Council and any remaining vacancies are known as "ordinary vacancies".

Provided there are enough parish councillors to constitute a quorum, the Town Council is usually able to co-opt a volunteer to fill the vacancies. In some cases, the District Council (Cannock Chase District Council) may under s.39(4), RPA 1983 by order make an appointment or direct the holding of an election (but this power may not be exercised before the expiry of 35 days beginning with the day on which the election was held).

Casual vacancy

A casual vacancy occurs when:

- A councillor fails to make his declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time;
- A councillor resigns;
- A councillor dies;
- A councillor becomes disqualified; or
- A councillor fails for six (6) months to attend meetings of a council committee or subcommittee or to attend as a representative of the council a meeting of an outside body unless their absence has been previously agreed by the Council.

The Town Council has to notify the District Council of a casual vacancy and 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.

If a by-election is called, a polling station will be set up by Cannock Chase District Council 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. The Town Council will pay the costs of the election. The people of the ward have fourteen days (not including weekends, bank holidays and other notable days), to call the by-election, but the Electoral Services Office of Cannock Chase District Council will advise the Clerk of the closing date.

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If more than one (1) candidate is then nominated a by-election takes place but if only one (1) candidate is put forward they are duly elected without a ballot.

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.

Confirmation of Co-option

On receipt of written confirmation from the Electoral Services Office that no by-election has been claimed, the casual vacancy can be filled by means of co-option. The Clerk will:

- Advertise the vacancy for four weeks or such other period as the Parish Council may agree on the Town Council notice boards and website
- Advise Cannock Chase District Council that the co-option policy has been instigated

This procedure will also apply 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. In some cases, the District Council (Cannock Chase District Council) may under s.39(4), RPA 1983 by order make an appointment or direct the holding of an election (but this power may not be exercised before the expiry of 35 days beginning with the day on which the election was held).

Eligibility of Candidates

The Town Council is able to consider any person to fill a vacancy provided that:

- he/she is 18 or over; and
- he/she is 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:

- he/she is an elector for the Parish and continues to be an elector; or
- has resided in the Parish for the past twelve months or rented/tenanted land in the Parish; or
- has had his/her principal or only place of work in the Parish for the past twelve months; or
- 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 Town 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.

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Applications

Candidates will be requested to:

- Submit information about themselves, by way of completing a short application form (a copy of the person specification and application form is attached as Appendices A and B);
- Confirm their eligibility for the position of parish councillor within the statutory rules, (a copy of the eligibility form is attached as Appendix C).

Following receipt of applications, the next suitable Town Council meeting will have an agenda item 'To receive written applications for the office of Town Councillor and to co-opt a candidate to fill the existing vacancy'. Eligible candidates will be invited to attend the meeting. Copies of the eligible candidates' applications will be circulated to all town councillors by the Clerk at least 3 clear days prior to the meeting of the full Parish Council, when the co-option will be considered. All such documents will be treated by the Clerk and all parish councillors as strictly private and confidential.

At the Co-option Meeting

At the co-option meeting, candidates will be given five minutes maximum to introduce themselves to the parish councillors (members), give information on their background and experience and explain why they wish to become a member of the Town Council. 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 Town Council is discussing the merits of candidates and inevitably their personal attributes, this could be prejudicial and the Town Council should resolve to exclude the members of the press and public.

As soon as the discussions have finished, the Town Council will proceed to a vote with each candidate being proposed and seconded by the councillors in attendance (as defined in the Standing Orders) and a vote by a show of hands (LGA 1972 Sch. 12. Para 13). A recorded vote may be requested under Standing Order 9 so as to show whether each councillor present and voting, gave his/her vote for or against that candidate.

If there is only one vacancy, this will be done by means of an exhaustive ballot. In order for a candidate to be co-opted to the Town Council, it will be 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.

Should there be more than one vacancy available, a secret ballot will be taken.

Further rounds of voting will then take place with the process repeated until a candidate has an absolute majority.

Should there be more than one vacancy available, a secret ballot will be taken, with each member being able to vote for a number of candidates, up to but not exceeding the number of vacancies. If a vote is cast for more than the number of vacancies, that ballot paper will be deemed void.

If present, a candidate who is co-opted will sign at the co-option meeting a Declaration of Acceptance of Office, including an undertaking to abide by the Town 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 Town Council.

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The Clerk will notify Cannock Chase District Council Electoral Services Office of the co-option of the new town councillor. The co-opted Town Councillor will complete a Notification of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests form which the Clerk will lodge with the Monitoring Officer at Cannock Chase District Council within 28 days of the co-option.

If insufficient candidates are co-opted, the process should continue, whereby the vacancies are again advertised but only if the vacancy falls before the 6 months immediately prior to an ordinary election.

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Appendix A

Co-option of Town Councillors – Person Specification

COMPETENCY	DESIRABLE
Relevant knowledge, Education, Professional Qualifications & Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sound knowledge and understanding of local affairs and the local community• Good knowledge of the Town boundaries and Town Council property• Specific work experience / voluntary work experience / undertaken vocational or academic training / professional qualifications
Experience, Skills and Ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Solid interest in local matters• Ability and willingness to represent the Town Council and its community• Ability to communicate clearly both verbally and in writing• Ability and willingness to work closely with other members and to maintain good working relationships with all members and staff• Good reading, analytic and problem solving skills• Ability and willingness to work with the Town Council's partners (e.g. Town Council sub groups, voluntary groups, other parish councils, principal authority, charities)• Ability and willingness to undertake relevant training as and when required• Ability to work under pressure and make sound judgement• Ability to research and report back on issues faced by the Town Council• Good standard of computer literacy with access to an email account• Previous council/parish council experience• Basic knowledge of legal issues relating to town and parish councils or local authorities• Experience of financial control / budgeting
Other requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability and willingness to attend all meetings of the Town Council (including sub group meetings or the meetings of other local authorities and local bodies) in the evening and at weekends• Flexible working approach• Enthusiastic• To have attended 2 town/district/parish council meetings.

Co-option Application Form

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Is there any other information you would like to disclose regarding your application? (If necessary please continue on a separate sheet).

Use of Personal Information

Rugeley Town Council will use your information, including that which you provide on this application form, to assess your suitability to be a town councillor.

Declaration & Consent

I have read the section entitled 'Use of Personal Information' and by signing this form I consent to the use and disclosure of my information included in this application form.

I declare the information given on this form to be true and correct.

SIGNED.....

Name:.....

DATE.....

Please return this completed form, together with the completed Co-option Eligibility Form to:

Town Clerk, Rugeley Town Council, Taylors Lane, Rugeley, Staffs, WS15 2AA

Tel: 01889 574074

Email: clerk@rugeleytowncouncil.gov.uk

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Appendix C

Co-option Eligibility Form

1. In order to be eligible for co-option as a Rugeley Town Councillor, you must satisfy certain criteria. You must satisfy (a) and (b) below and at least one of the options (c) – (f). Please tick which apply to you:

- a) I am 18 years of age or over ; and ☐
- b) I am a British Citizen or a citizen of the Commonwealth or a citizen of any other member state of the European Union; and ☐
- c) I am registered as a local government elector for the town; or ☐
- d) I have, during the whole of the twelve months preceding the date of my co-option occupied, as owner or tenant, land or other premises in the town; or ☐
- e) My principal or only place of work during those twelve months has been in the town; or ☐
- f) I have, during the whole of those twelve months resided in the town or within 3 miles of it. ☐

2. Please note that under Section 80 of the local Government Act 1972 a person is disqualified from being a town councillor if he/she:

- a) Is employed by the town council or holds paid office (other than chairman, vice chairman or deputy chairman) under the town council (including joint boards or committees);
- b) Is employed by an entity controlled by the parish council;
- c) Is the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or an interim bankruptcy restrictions order or a debt relief restrictions order or an interim debt relief restrictions order; or
- d) Has within five years before the day of co-option, or since his/her co-option, been convicted in the UK, Channel islands or Isle of Man of any offence and has been sentenced to imprisonment (whether suspended or not) for not less than three months without the option of a fine; or
- e) Is otherwise disqualified under Part III of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (relating to corrupt or illegal electoral practices and offences relating to donations) or the Audit Commission Act 1998.

Use of this Personal Information

The Town Council will use the information provided on this form to assess your eligibility to be a town councillor.

Declaration & Consent

I,hereby confirm that I am eligible for the vacancy of Rugeley Town Councillor and I am not disqualified under s80 of the local Government Act 1972 from being a town councillor and that the information given on this form is true and correct.

I have read the section entitled 'Use of Personal Information' and by signing this form, I consent to the use and disclosure of my information in this form.

Signature..... Name

Date