

# CO-OPTION POLICY AND NEW COUNCILLOR PROCEDURE

## Great Witchingham with Lenwade Parish Council

### 1. 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 Great Witchingham Parish Council. The co-option procedure is entirely managed by the Council and this policy will ensure that a fair and equitable process is carried out.

### 2. Co-option

The co-option of a Parish Councillor occurs when a casual vacancy has arisen on the Council and no poll (by-election) has been called for by parishioners. A casual vacancy occurs when:

- A councillor fails to make their 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 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.

The Parish Council is required to notify the District Council of the casual vacancy and then advertise the vacancy to give electors the opportunity to request an election. If ten electors write to the District Council within fourteen working days requesting an election, then one is called. A polling station will be set up by the District Council and parishioners will be asked to vote for candidates who will have put themselves forward by way of a nomination paper. The Parish Clerk will advertise the process on notice boards, website and any other means in use by the council at the time. The Parish Council will be required to pay the costs of the election. If only one candidate applies, they are elected without a ballot.

If residents do not request a ballot within fourteen days of the vacancy notice being posted, the Parish Council is able to co-opt.

### 3. Confirmation of Co-option

On receipt of written confirmation from the District Council that the casual vacancy can be filled by means of co-option, the Parish Clerk will advertise the vacancy on the website, Facebook page and notice boards. Councillors are also encouraged to approach anyone who meets the criteria below.

### 4. Eligibility of Candidates

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

- He/she is an elector for the parish or,
- has resided in the parish for the past twelve months or rented/tenanted land or other premises in the parish or,

- had his/her principal place of work in the parish, or
- has lived within three miles (direct) of the parish.

There are certain disqualifications for election, of which the main ones are:

- holding a paid office under the local authority;
- 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 five years preceding the election;
- being disqualified under any enactment relating to corrupt or illegal practices.

## **5. Co-Option Process**

Candidates will be requested to submit information about themselves using the adopted application form at least five working days before the next meeting of Full Council. This information will be circulated by the clerk to councillors, and an item to co-opt a councillor will be placed on the agenda of the meeting. All such documents will be treated by the Clerk and Councillors as strictly private and confidential.

Candidates will be invited to attend the meeting. If there is more than one candidate, the Councillors vote on who to co-opt. This decision-making process will take place in the open part of the meeting.

No co-option may take place outside of a Full Council meeting. An additional meeting may be called if necessary.

Councillors elected by co-option are full members of Council.

## **6. After Co-option**

The co-opted member must sign an acceptance of office form. He/she can then take their place and join the meeting. A register of interests form will also be given. This must be returned to the Parish Clerk, or sent directly to the District Council, within three weeks. This document will be published on the District Council's website.

The Parish Clerk will, within five working days of the meeting, send the new Councillor by email a copy of the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, as well as a link to the website which contains additional policies. The dates of future meetings and available training will also be given.

By accepting office all new councillors will be expected to:

- Undertake training for new councillors, as a minimum. However, it is encouraged the councillors attend as many courses as possible, to ensure that councillors have a thorough understanding of the functions and legislature of parish councils;
- Use a parish council email address exclusively for all formal Council business and they should not be used in any other way; This email will be subject to any Freedom of Information requests made.
- Ensure they do not make reference to the Council or its services or represent themselves on behalf of the Council on social media without formal permission from the Council to do so.