

Policy and procedure for Councillor Co-option

Vacancies

1. There are three types of vacancy that could arise on a Parish Council.
 - a) Ordinary Vacancy

This occurs as a result of insufficient nominations for seats available at the time of election. These vacancies should be advertised within 35 days of the election and are available for co-option.
 - b) Casual Vacancy

This occurs during the four-year term when a councillor resigns, dies or is disqualified. The Council must give public notice of such a vacancy and if 10 electors ask for an election this must take place within the rules and procedures of the District Council.
 - c) Vacancy eligible for co-option

Any other vacancy left after either an election or an in-term advert produces no or insufficient call for an election.
2. This document sets out the policy and procedure for the co-option of councillors to South Hinksey Parish Council. The policy and procedure is managed by the Council.

Policy

3. The Council's policy is to ensure that:
 - a fair and equitable process is carried out
 - council vacancies are filled at the earliest opportunity
 - the Council consider "gaps" in its knowledge, expertise and representation when considering applications.

Procedure

4. All vacancies that are eligible for co-option will be advertised at the earliest opportunity on:
 - the Council noticeboards, with a closing date of four weeks
 - the front page of the Council's website including a link to the application form, along with a closing date of four weeks
 - once on the community email groups available, giving the closing date.
5. Councillors will also encourage eligible applicants, especially within the relevant wards, to come forward for consideration pointing any interested individuals towards this procedure.

6. All eligible candidates should put their request for consideration in writing to the Clerk on the form provided on the Council's website or obtained directly from the Clerk by the advertised closing date.

(Form to include name, address, contact details, reasons for wanting to be a councillor, skills and any previous community or such work. Also include a data protection statement allowing the council to use and store data and sensitive personal data.)

7. After the closing date, one of the following procedures should be followed:

a) No candidates by the closing date

If no applicant comes forward, an agenda item will be placed on the next Council meeting which will decide how to proceed, but at a minimum the vacancy:

- Remains on Council noticeboards with an open invitation
- Remains on the Council's website with an open invitation
- Is advertised on community email groups six-monthly
- Councillors continue to encourage applications.

As soon as a candidate comes forward the Clerk will follow one of the procedures below.

b) The number of applications matches the number of vacancies

- a) An agenda item is listed for the next Council meeting
- b) All application forms are circulated to councillors on a confidential basis prior to the meeting. Only the names of applicants will be included in the agenda item at the time of consideration
- c) Applicants are invited to attend the Council meeting for interview
- d) The councillor chairing the meeting will adjourn the Council meeting prior to the agenda item and ask any members of the public present to leave the room temporarily in order to interview candidates privately. This allows councillors to ask additional questions and applicants to respond without sharing any personal data they may not want in the public domain
- e) The councillor chairing the meeting will re-open the meeting and re-admit the public
- f) A vote is then taken on each vacancy. Applicants are elected on the basis of an absolute majority.

c) The number of applicants is more than the number of vacancies

The bullet points above apply but voting shall be as follows:

- Each vacancy shall be taken separately
- Members can only vote once in each round
- The councillor chairing the meeting will call for a vote on each applicant. Should one applicant not get an absolute majority the applicant with the fewest votes will be removed and a vote taken again. This will continue until one applicant has an absolute majority
- Should there be more than one vacancy the successful applicant at round 1 will be removed and (after signing the Declaration of Acceptance of Office) be invited to sit as a parish councillor. The unsuccessful applicants will be added to the list for consideration. The same process is repeated until all vacancies are filled or there are no remaining applicants.

Next steps for new councillors

8. The Clerk will contact newly appointed councillors before the next meeting to:
 - Ask for the completion of the Register of Interests form, offering advice if needed
 - Provide a link to the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulation.
 - Provide a copy of and guidance to the Council's Code of Conduct
 - Provide a link (guide) to where other procedures can be found and in particular the dates of the forthcoming meetings
 - Provide information on the next available training courses for councillors on at least, Planning, procedure and Code of Conduct.
9. If at all possible, existing councillors will agree to "mentor" new councillors should this be required. In addition, the Clerk will "check in" on new councillors after two months and provide support and guidance, if needed.

This policy and procedure was adopted by South Hinksey Parish Council on [insert date].

This policy and procedure is due for review on [insert date].