



Dormansland Parish Council

Councillor Co-option Policy

Reviewed 18th July 2023

1. Introduction

This policy sets out the procedure to ensure that there is compliance with legislation and continuity of procedures in the co-option of members to Dormansland Parish Council (DPC). The Co-option 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. 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;
- 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.

DPC has to notify the District Council of a Casual Vacancy and then advertise the vacancy and give electors the opportunity to request an election. This occurs when ten electors notify the District Council stating that an election is requested.

If a by-election is called, a polling station will be set up by the District Council and the electors will be asked to vote for candidates who will have put themselves forward by way of nomination paper. DPC will pay the costs of the election. The electors have fourteen days (not including weekends, bank holidays and other notable days) to claim the by-election but the Electoral Officer will advise the clerk of the closing date.

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

If ten residents do not request a ballot within fourteen days of the vacancy notice being posted, as advertised by the District Council, DPC is able to co-opt a volunteer.

3. Confirmation of Co-option

On receipt of written confirmation from the Electoral Services Office of the District Council the casual vacancy can be filled by means of Co-option. The parish clerk will:

- Advertise the vacancy for 4 weeks on the council notice boards, website and DPC's Facebook page;
- Advise DPC that the Co-option Policy has been instigated.

DPC is not obliged to fill any vacancy. Even if the council invites applications for co-option it is not obliged to select anyone from the candidates that apply.

However, despite this it is not desirable that electors be left underrepresented for a significant length of time, neither does it contribute to effective and efficient working of the council if there are insufficient councillors to share the workload; equitably; to provide a broad cross-section of skills and interests; or to achieve meeting quorums without difficulty.

Councillors elected by Co-Option are full members of DPC.

4. Eligibility of Candidates

DPC is able to consider any person to fill a vacancy provided that:

- He/she is an elector of 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 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; and
- Being disqualified under any enactment relating to corrupt or illegal practices.

Candidates found to be offering inducements of any kind will be disqualified.

5. Applications

Members may point out the vacancies and the process to any qualifying candidate(s).

Although there is no Statutory Requirement to do so candidates will be requested to:

- Submit information about themselves by way of completing a short application form (Appendix A)
- Confirm their eligibility for the position of Councillor within the statutory rules (Appendix B)

Following receipt of applications & if you are eligible, the next suitable council meeting will have an agenda item 'To receive written applications for the office of Parish Councillor and to Co-opt a candidate to fill the existing vacancy'. Copies of the application will be circulated to all Councillors by the Clerk at least three clear days before the meeting of the full Council when the Co-option will be considered. All such documents will be treated as strictly confidential by the Clerk and Councillors.

Policy reviewed 19.07.23 & amended.

Candidates will also be informed that they will be invited to speak about their application at the meeting and if you do not meet the eligibility criteria, you will be notified by email that you have not been successful.

6. At the Co-option Meeting

At the Co-option meeting candidates will be given five minutes maximum to introduce themselves to members, give information on their background and experience and explain why they wish to become a member of DPC. The process will be carried out by adjourning the meeting to allow the candidate to speak. Members of DPC will have the opportunity to ask question keeping these to a minimum. Where the Council wishes to discuss the merits of candidates and their personal attributes the Council will resolve to exclude the members of the press and public.

As soon as all candidates have finished giving their submissions the Council will proceed to vote on the acceptability of each candidate utilising the Person Specification criteria as set out in Appendix C and any personal statements provided by the candidate(s), with each candidate being proposed and seconded by the Councillors in attendance and a vote by show of hands. The vote will be recorded.

In order for a candidate to be elected to DPC 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. Further rounds of voting will then take place with the process repeated until a candidate has absolute majority. In the case of an equality of votes the Chairman of the meeting has a casting vote.

After the vote has been concluded the Chairman will declare the successful candidate duly elected and, after signing their Declaration of Acceptance of Office, he/she make take their seat immediately.

The Clerk will notify Electoral Services of the new appointment. The successful candidate(s) must complete their 'Registration of Interests' within 28 days of being elected. The form should be handed to the Clerk for forwarding to the Monitoring officer.

If insufficient candidates come forward for co-option the process should continue, whereby the vacancies are again advertised.

APPENDIX A

Councillor Co-option Application Form

Name:	
Address:	
Telephone:	
Mobile:	
Email:	
Are you over 18?	YES/NO
<p>Please detail below why you consider you would be the best candidate for this vacancy. Points to cover should include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Length of residence in the Parish if appropriate• Membership and involvement with any community associations within the Parish or elsewhere• Particular interests and concerns relating to the Parish including any conflicts of interest.• Do you have any professional or work-related experience which could be utilised for the benefit of the Parish? <p>If you wish to provide additional written information in support of your application this will be copied to all Councillors and treated in strict confidence. (If, necessary please continue on a separate sheet of paper) If your application is eligible, you will be required to do a short presentation.</p>	
Signed:	
Dated:	
Dormansland Parish Council is duty bound to treat this information as strictly confidential.	

APPENDIX B

Councillor Co-option Eligibility Form

1. In order to be eligible for co-option as a Dormansland Parish Councillor you must be a Commonwealth (this includes British) citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland or a citizen of another European Union member state, and on the 'relevant date' (i.e. the day on which you are nominated or if there is a poll the day of the election) 18 years of age or over; and additionally able to meet one of the following qualifications set out below. Please tick which applies to you:

I am registered as a local government elector for the parish; or

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 parish; or

My principal or only place of work during those twelve months has been in the parish; or

I have during the whole of twelve months resided in the parish or within 4.8 kilometres (3 miles) of it.

2. Please note that under Section 80 of the Local Government Act 1972 a person is disqualified from being elected as a Local Councillor or being a member of a Local Council if he/she:

Holds any paid office or employment of the local council (other than the office of Chairman) or of a joint committee on which the Council is represented; or

Is a person who has been adjudged bankrupt or has made a composition or arrangement with his/her creditors (but see below); or

Has within five years before the day of election, or since his/her election, 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

Is otherwise disqualified under Part III of the representation of the People Act 1983 for corrupt or illegal practices.

3. This disqualification for bankruptcy ceases in the following circumstances:

i If the bankruptcy is annulled on the grounds that either the person ought not to have been adjudged bankrupt or that his/her debts have been fully discharged;

ii If the person is discharged with a certificate that the bankruptcy was caused by misfortune without misconduct on his/her part;

iii If the person is discharged without such a certificate.

In i and ii above, the disqualification ceases on the date of the annulment and discharge respectively.

In iii, it ceases on the expiry of five years from the date of discharge.

DECLARATION

I..... hereby confirm that I am eligible for the vacancy of Dormansland Parish Councillor, and the information given on this form is true and accurate record.

Signature.....

Date.....

Dormansland Parish Council is duty bound to treat this information as strictly confidential.

APPENDIX C

CO-OPTED COUNCILLOR PERSON SPECIFICATION

The Council will endeavour to have representatives that match or closely align the demographic makeup of the Parish.

COMPETENCY	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE
Personal Attributes	<p>Sound knowledge and understanding of local affairs and the local community</p> <p>Forward thinking</p>	<p>Can bring a new skill, expertise or key local knowledge to the Council</p>
Experience, Skills, Knowledge and Ability	<p>Ability to listen constructively.</p> <p>A good team player.</p> <p>Ability to pick up and run with a variety of projects.</p> <p>Solid interest in local matters & a desire to maintain, & where possible improve the local Parish environment.</p> <p>Ability and willingness to represent the Council and their community.</p> <p>Good interpersonal skills and able to contribute opinions at meetings whilst willing to see others views and accept majority decisions.</p> <p>To be computer literate.</p> <p>Ability to communicate succinctly and clearly.</p> <p>Ability and willingness to work closely with other members and to maintain good working relationships with all members and staff.</p> <p>Ability and willingness to work with Council's partners (e.g. voluntary groups, other parish Councils, principal authority, charities)</p> <p>Ability and willingness to undertake induction training and other relevant training</p>	<p>Experience of working with voluntary and or local community/interest groups</p>

Requirements.	Ability and willingness to attend meetings of the Council (or meetings of other local authorities and local bodies) at any time and also events in the evening and at weekends. Access to an electronic device to respond to email communications.	
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