**BISHOPSTONE PARISH COUNCIL - CO-OPTION POLICY**

**AGREED 6TH JUNE 2022**

**Introduction**

Co-option is the process by which the Parish Council selects a new Councillor, and it is done as an agenda item within a monthly Parish Council Meeting.

There are two situations in which co-option can occur:

1. When there have been insufficient candidates to fill all of the available seats at an election; and
2. When a casual vacancy has arisen between elections and there is no demand to hold a by-election.

S.87(2) of the Local Government Act 1972 (“the 1972 Act”) requires a local council to give public notice of casual vacancies. There is no statutory requirement to give public notice of local council vacancies which remain unfilled after an ordinary election (s.21(2) Representation of the People Act 1985).

The Parish Council can only be as connected and helpful as the people elected to run it, so it needs councillors capable, enthusiastic and engaged to reflect its communities. Co-option is an opportunity for the Parish Council to address shortfalls and imbalances in its membership. The Parish Council manages the co-option process by itself, and strives to demonstrate that it is fair and equitable by following the procedure set out below. The procedure conforms to NALC guidelines including LT15-08 and its 2021 update.

**Co-option Process and Procedure**

1. The Returning Officer, Electoral Services, Swindon Borough Council will advise the Parish Council that it may co-opt to the vacancy.
2. Bishopstone Parish Council will publish public notices using all its available media platforms inviting applications from candidates who satisfy:
   * the eligibility criteria for being a councillor, and
   * the competencies listed in a person specification agreed by the council
3. The Clerk will provide interested candidates with the person specification, the timetable and process for co-option, and information about eligibility criteria.
4. The Clerk will ask candidates for co-option to self-certify in writing that they meet the eligibility criteria set out in s72 of the 1972 Act and are not disqualified pursuant to s.80 of the 1972 Act to be a member of the council.
5. Candidates will be asked to apply in writing by a given deadline and their application letters will be circulated to councillors with their usual meeting documents pack. The contents of application letters will be treated as strictly private and confidential.
6. All candidates will be invited to the parish council meeting where co-option is to take place and will be invited to say something about themselves. Councillors will have the opportunity to ask questions of the candidates. Each candidate will be allocated a maximum of five minutes.
7. In a closed session of the parish council, without the public or press present, members will consider the candidates and, following the discussion, the public will be invited back into the meeting before the voting takes place.
8. The Chair will request councillors present to nominate any of the candidates. Candidates will require a proposer and seconder to progress to the voting stage. If there is only one vacancy, a councillor may only nominate or second one candidate. One candidate needs to receive an absolute majority of votes (50% +1).
9. The Chair will then place the names of those nominated into alphabetical order and proceed to vote. Councillors will have one vote per vacancy to be filled. In the case of an equality of votes, the Chair of the meeting has a second or casting vote.
10. Councillors will decide at the meeting whether to vote by show of hands or secret ballot. Voting will continue until one candidate has received an absolute majority of those councillors present. At this stage, the successful candidate will be declared co-opted.
11. Should no single candidate receive a majority on the first vote, the candidate with the lowest number is eliminated. Voting will then take place for the remaining candidates until one person receives an absolute majority.
12. The successful candidate is then declared co-opted to the Parish Council. If present, they will be asked to sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office and to join the meeting. If the successful candidate is not present they will be notified by the clerk as soon as practical after the meeting and invited to attend the next meeting.
13. Within 28 days a co-opted councillor must complete a Declaration of Interests form which must be sent to Swindon Borough Council’s Monitoring Officer and will be published on the SBC website.
14. The Clerk will ensure that the successful candidate is given access to essential documents including:
    * Schedule of Meeting Dates
    * Standing Orders
    * Code of Conduct
    * Contact details for clerk and other councillors
    * Minutes from recent council meetings
    * Policies and other necessary documents
15. The successful candidate is a councillor in their own right and is no different to any other member; co-option is a legitimate form of election as part of the election process.

Policy agreed by Bishopstone Parish Council on 6th June 2022

For review in four years