



Co-option Policy

Scope

This Policy sets out the way in which Abbey Hill Parish Council ('the Council') identifies and manages its Parish Councillor ('Councillor') vacancies and the process which it follows to co-opt Councillors as and when required.

Vacancies

Councillor vacancies may arise due to either:

1. Insufficiency of candidates at an ordinary election; or
2. A casual vacancy due to:
 - a. A Councillor fails to deliver their declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time;
 - b. A Councillor resigns;
 - c. A Councillor dies;
 - d. Disqualification;
 - e. Election is considered void; or
 - f. A Councillor fails to attend meetings for six consecutive months.

Notice of vacancy and application

While the Council is not obliged to give public notice if a vacancy arises due to the insufficiency of candidates at an ordinary election, the Council may decide to do so. In the event of a casual vacancy public notice will be given as soon as practicable.

Public notice will have been deemed to be given in the posting of a notice on the noticeboard in the Parish. The Council may choose to add to its website too. The notice will have a closure date and provide the Clerk's email for contact.

If no by-election is called given the period of the notice prescribed by MKCC, the Council will look to co-opt and advertise the vacancy, typically on both the noticeboard and its website.

Application requirements

Upon being contacted by the applicant, the Clerk will request that applications provide a curriculum vitae and covering letter, in which the Council may request, at a minimum, the applicant's rationale for applying to become a Councillor. The Council may specify that other details relevant to the vacancy are included in the application i.e. detail of particular skills, expertise or interest.

Eligibility for co-option

To be eligible to be elected a Councillor a person must be:

- 18 years of age or over
- a British subject or citizen of the Republic of Ireland; and
- meet at least one of the following four qualifications:

(a) be a local government elector of the Parish; or

(b) have during the whole of the twelve months preceding the day of being nominated as a candidate occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the Parish; or

(b) have their principal or only place of work in the twelve months preceding the day of being nominated as a candidate have been in the Parish; or

(d) have resided in the Parish during the whole of the 12 months proceeding the day of being nominated as a candidate.

There are also certain disqualifications for election, including:

(a) holding a paid office under the local authority;

(b) bankruptcy;

(c) 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

(d) being disqualified under any enactment relating to corrupt or illegal practices.

Co-option process

Once an application has been received after the closure date has passed, the Clerk will check the applicant is eligible for co-option as above. The Clerk will request the applicant to fulfil the application requirements (i.e. covering letter and CV) within a given timeframe, and if the applicant has not already done so, will be invited to observe a Parish Council meeting.

At the next Council meeting, which may be either a general or extraordinary meeting, the Clerk reports any eligible applications received. Dependent on timings and whether the application requirements have been fulfilled, the Council may consider co-option of an eligible candidate at the same meeting.

Alternatively, the Council may consider it beneficial for both the applicant and Council for the Chair of the Council to convene an informal meeting with the applicant to discuss the role of a Councillor prior to such a discussion about co-option.

In any event, the decision to co-opt an applicant shall be voted on by the Council and this may take place at a general or extraordinary meeting and, only if strictly necessary, the Council may exclude the press or public from such a vote. Prior to making the decision the Council may ask questions of the applicant in respect of their covering letter and CV.

If an application is not compliant with the application requirements specified at the outset, the Council in its absolute discretion may decide not to proceed with the application.

There may be instances where there are more eligible candidates than Councillor vacancies and in this case the Council will consider its Person Specification to mark the applicants. The Council must take care to ask the same questions of all applicants to ensure parity.

Person specification

Personal attributes:

- Sound knowledge and understanding of local affairs and the local community
- Forward thinking
- Can bring a new skill, expertise or key local knowledge to the Council.

Experience, skills, knowledge and abilities:

- Ability to listen constructively
- A good team player
- Ability to pick up and run with a variety of projects
- Solid interest in local matters
- Ability and willingness to represent the Council and their community
- Good interpersonal skills and able to contribute opinions at meetings whilst willing to see others' views and accept majority decisions
- Ability to communicate succinctly and clearly
- Ability and willingness to work closely with other members and to maintain good working relationships with all members and the Clerk
- Ability and willingness to work with the Council's partners (e.g. voluntary groups, MKCC, other Local Councils, charities)
- Ability and willingness to undertake induction training and other relevant training
- Basic knowledge of legal issues relating to town and Community Councils or local authorities
Circumstances
- Ability and willingness to attend meetings of the Council (or meetings of other local authorities and local bodies) at any time and events in the evening and at weekends.

The Council will always adhere to the principles of its Equal Opportunities Policy during the co-option process. The Council wishes to promote a true representation of its community on the Council, for instance, relating to geographical representation across the Parish, and such factors may become relevant in the event there are more applicants than vacancies.

Declaration of Office and Interests

Elected persons must make a Declaration of Acceptance of Office before, or at, the first meeting of the Council following their co-option in the presence of a Councillor or the Proper Officer of the Council. A completed Declaration of Interests Form must be provided to the Clerk within 28 days of co-option.