

Congham Co-option Policy

Congham

Introduction

This procedure is based on National Association of Local Councils, hereafter referred to as NALC, Legal Briefing L15-08-good practice for selection of candidates for co-option to local councils.

Parish Councils are permitted to exercise the power to co-opt a person onto the Council to fill a casual vacancy when the requirements to hold an election have not been met (the vacancy has been the subject of a public notice and less than 10 registered electors have requested an election by a deadline date specified by the District Returning Officer).

NALC recommends that Councils always give public notice of vacancies because this makes the process of co-option open and transparent and should attract more potential candidates. Congham Parish Council encourages anyone who is interested in standing as a Councillor to attend a Parish Council meeting prior to submitting an expression of interest in response to a vacancy.

Although seeking 'expressions of interest' is not a legal requirement, NALC recommends that Councils always give public notice of vacancies because this makes the process of co-option open and transparent and this should attract more potential candidates.

Process

Whenever the need for co-option arises, Congham Parish Council will undertake the following steps:

1. Advertise the vacancy for a minimum of two weeks, to seek expressions of interest from anyone in the Parish who is eligible to stand as a Parish Councillor.
2. Candidates may be asked to submit a written application, to include the reasons why they would like to be a Councillor, how their skills match those set out in the personal specification (see below) and any relevant experience which would be beneficial to the Parish Council.
3. Written applications will be circulated to all Parish Councillors for their consideration.

4. At the next full Parish Council meeting, the Clerk will confirm that each candidate is qualified to become a Councillor and is not disqualified from being a Councillor as set out in the Local Government Act 1972 s79 and s80.
5. A vote will be taken on the acceptability of each qualified candidate for co-option, on the basis of the candidates' applications in line with the personal specification criteria listed below. For a candidate to be considered acceptable, an absolute majority is required from all members present and entitled to vote (LGA 1972 Sch.12 Para.39).
6. Where there are more candidates than vacancies, the Chair will offer the opportunity for debate on the order of priority to offer co-option, following which, a vote will be taken to select the order in which acceptable candidates will be approached to offer co-option.
7. After the meeting, the Clerk will approach and offer co-option to acceptable candidates (where there are more candidates than vacancies, in the order determined in point 6) until the vacancies are filled.
8. The co-opted Councillors will be invited to the next full Parish Council meeting where the appointments will be formally confirmed.
9. The Clerk will notify the Electoral Services of the new Councillor appointment and complete the required paperwork.
10. If the vacant post(s) are not filled, the process is repeated when new applications are received, or at the next election.

Personal specification for a co-opted parish councillor:

- Councillors must meet the eligibility criteria specified in the Local Government Act 1972 section 79, and must not be disqualified by any provision of section 80 of the same Act.
- Councillors should ideally be residents of the parish.
- Councillors must be available to attend meetings.
- Councillors must be able to work productively with fellow Councillors, the Parish Clerk, and local representatives from the Police, County Council and community groups etc.
- Councillors must be accessible to residents, and encourage them to raise issues and participate in finding resolutions.
- Councillors must abide by the Code of Conduct, and declare personal interests both routinely and in respect of specific projects or proposals. They must prioritise the interests of the parish as a whole over those of individuals.
- Development support is available for new Councillors, including dedicated training events, peer groups and published resources.

Adopted by Congham Parish Council on the 27th September 2023