



**Ringwood
Town Council**

Co-option Procedure

Adopted: 20th March 2024

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	2
2	Co-Option (Casual vacancy arising)	2
3	Co-Option (After an ordinary election)	3
4	Eligibility of Candidates	3
5	Applications	3
6	At the Co-Option Meeting	4
7	Elected Councillors (Co-option)	5
8	Applying for a Casual Vacancy	5
	Appendix A – Co-Option Criteria	6
	Appendix B – Co-Option Eligibility Form	7
	Appendix C – Co-Option Application Form	9

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy sets out the procedure agreed to ensure there is legal compliance as well as consistency and fairness when members are co-opted to the Council.
- 1.2 Whenever the need for co-option arises Ringwood Town Council will seek and encourage applications from anyone who is eligible to stand as a Town Councillor. Anyone is welcome to approach individuals to suggest that they might wish to consider putting their names forward for co-option.
- 1.3 The Council will advertise vacancies via the Council's noticeboards, website and social media and via a press release if time allows.
- 1.4 The advertisement to co-opt will include:
- The method by which applications can be made;
 - The closing date for all applications;
 - A contact point to obtain more information;
 - A statement that further information is available electronically via the website.
- 1.5 The co-option policy will be reviewed every 4 years.

2 CO-OPTION (Casual vacancy arising)

- 2.1 The co-option of a Town Councillor can occur when a casual vacancy has arisen on the Council and no poll (by-election) has been claimed. A casual vacancy occurs when:
- A councillor fails to make their declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time;
 - A councillor resigns;
 - A councillor dies;
 - A councillor becomes disqualified; or
 - 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 (unless such absence has been authorized).
- 2.2 The Council must notify New Forest District Council of a Casual Vacancy and then advertise the vacancy and give electors the opportunity to claim a poll. If ten (10) electors write to New Forest District Council claiming a poll within fourteen (14) days (not including weekends, bank holidays and other notable days), New Forest District Council will make the necessary arrangements for this. However, a poll cannot be claimed within six months of the day when the term of office of the councillor whose office is declared vacant would ordinarily have expired. If a poll is claimed in time, co-option cannot be used to fill the relevant vacancy or vacancies.
- 2.3 If a by-election is claimed, the people of the relevant ward(s) within Ringwood will be asked to go to the polls to vote for those candidates who have put themselves forward by way of a nomination paper. The Town Council will pay the costs of the by-election.
- 2.4 If more than one (1) candidate is then nominated, a by-election takes place but if only one (1) candidate is put forward they are duly elected without a ballot.
- 2.5 If a poll is not claimed in time, the Town Council is able to co-opt to fill the relevant vacancy or vacancies.
- 2.6 On receipt of written confirmation, from New Forest District Council Electoral Services, that the casual vacancy can be filled by means of co-option, the Town Clerk will:

- Advertise the vacancy for (4) four weeks on the Council's noticeboards, website and social media
- Advise the Council that the co-option policy has been instigated.

3 CO-OPTION (After an ordinary election)

3.1 An insufficiency of candidates at an ordinary election also enables the Council to co-opt any person or persons to fill any vacancies within 35 days following the date of that ordinary election.

4 ELIGIBILITY OF CANDIDATES

4.1 The Town Council can consider any person to fill a vacancy who is an eligible citizen over 18 years of age, is not disqualified AND:

- is an elector for the parish; OR
- has (during the whole of the twelve (12) months before the day of their nomination or the election) resided, or occupied as owner or tenant any land or premises, or had their principal or only place of work, in the parish or within three miles of it.

4.2 A person may be disqualified from being elected or being a member. The main reasons for this are (Local Government Act 1972):

- holding a paid office under the Council;
- 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.

4.3 Eligibility of the candidate(s) will be confirmed by the Clerk.

4.4 All eligible candidates shall be invited to attend the Town Council meeting at which the applications shall be considered (usually the first meeting following the application deadline).

5 APPLICATIONS

5.1 To assist candidates **Appendix A** provides a guide to the criteria that the Council will look for when co-opting to membership. This is not an exhaustive list but provides candidates with guidance on areas they may wish to include in their application forms.

5.2 Candidates will be asked to:

- Confirm their eligibility for the position of Councillor within the statutory rules, (a copy of the Eligibility Form is attached at **Appendix B**).
- Submit information about themselves, by way of completing a short application form (a copy of the application form is attached at **Appendix C**).

5.2 Following receipt of applications, the next suitable council meeting will have an agenda item 'To receive written applications for the office of Town councillor and to Co-opt a candidate to fill the existing vacancy'.

5.3 Copies of the candidates' applications will be circulated to all Councillors by the Clerk at least three (3) clear days prior to the meeting of the full Council, when the co-option will be considered. All such documents will be treated by the Clerk and all Councillors as ***Strictly Private and Confidential***.

6 AT THE CO-OPTION MEETING

6.1 At the co-option meeting, candidates will have five minutes each to introduce themselves to members, give information on their background and experience and explain why they wish to become a member of the Town Council;

6.2 After presentations, members may ask candidates a few questions before proceeding to vote. (If a candidate is unable to attend the meeting, this process will still take place and voting will subsequently be based on this meeting **and** the application form)

6.3 The process will be carried out in the public session and there will be no private discussions between members prior to a vote being taken.

6.4 If a candidate is a close relative (e.g. spouse, partner, child, parent or sibling) of a Councillor, that Councillor should not participate in the co-option decision and withdraw from the meeting.

6.5 At the conclusion of the debate, the Council will proceed to a vote by ballot (as specified in the Standing Orders). The ballot paper shall include the choice of not co-opting any of the candidates. The ballot paper shall record the name of the Councillor casting that ballot. A recorded vote may be requested to show the vote of each Councillor present and voting.

6.6 In order for a candidate to be elected to the Council, it will be necessary for them to obtain an absolute majority of votes cast (50% + 1 of the votes cast).

6.7 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 an absolute majority.

6.8 If there is more than one vacancy to be filled, each vacancy will be the subject of its own separate round of voting (unless and until councillors vote not to appoint any candidate to a vacancy, at which point the process will terminate). Every candidate who has not been elected to an earlier vacancy will be included on the ballot paper.

6.9 Only Town Councillors present at the meeting may vote upon a person to fill the vacancy. Councillors will have one vote each per round of voting for each vacancy to be filled, save that the Chair has a casting vote which must be exercised in the event of a tie. Note: a tie may arise and be resolved by casting vote either to elect one of two candidates or to determine which of two or more candidates is to be eliminated).

6.10 The Clerk will notify Electoral Services of each new Councillor appointment, initiate 'acceptance of office' paperwork and 'registration of interests' within 28 days of the co-option meeting.

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

6.12 The Council is not obliged to fill all vacancies, but must take steps to advertise for further co-options or hold an election (where applicable) to fill vacancies.

6.13 Any candidate(s) found to be offering inducements of any kind will be disqualified.

7 ELECTED COUNCILLORS (CO-OPTION)

7.1 Successfully co-opted candidates become Councillors in their own right, with immediate effect, and are no different from any other member (save that they are not eligible to receive the parish basic allowance).

7.2 Co-opted members will be asked to sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office to agree to be bound by the Council's Code of Conduct. They may then take their seat at Council and are then able to be appointed to a committee and/or as a representative to local organisations.

7.3 Any application can be considered in a candidate(s) absence, but if successful, members would need to agree for them to sign the Declaration of Office either before or at the next Council meeting.

8 APPLYING FOR A CASUAL VACANCY

8.1 Candidates who are interested in applying for a casual vacancy need not wait until the notice appears or its time limit expires. Candidates can write to the Town Council directly expressing their interest in the casual vacancy and request it considers their application when it has authority to co-opt for the vacancy.

CO-OPTION CRITERIA

Name of Local Council: RINGWOOD TOWN COUNCIL

Description of Office: Town Councillor

COMPETENCY	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE
<i>Relevant knowledge, Education, Professional Qualifications & Training</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound knowledge and understanding of local affairs and the local community. • Familiarity with the Seven Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles) 	
<i>Experience, Skills, Knowledge and Ability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close interest in local matters. • Ability and willingness to represent the Council and their community. • Good interpersonal skills. • Ability to communicate clearly both orally and in writing. • Ability and willingness to work closely with other members and to maintain good working relationships with all members and staff. • Good reading and analytic skills. • Ability and willingness to work with the council's partners (e.g. voluntary groups, other parish councils, principal authority, charities). • Ability and willingness to undertake relevant training. • Ability to cope with pressure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of HR, procurement, contract management, financial control or risk management and compliance, public relations. • Experience of working in another public body or not for profit organisation. • Experience of working with voluntary and or local community/ interest groups. • Basic knowledge of legal issues relating to town and parish councils or local authorities. • Experience of delivering presentations. • Experience of working with the media. • Experience in financial control/budgeting • Experience of staff
<i>Other requirements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability and willingness to attend meetings of the council (or the meetings of other local authorities and local bodies) during the day and in the evening and events in the evening and at weekends. • Flexible • Enthusiastic 	

CO-OPTION ELIGIBILITY FORM

- Are you a British subject, citizen of the Commonwealth or citizen of the Republic of Ireland? **YES/NO**

- On the 'relevant date' (i.e. the day on which you are nominated or if there is a poll the day of the election) are you 18 years of age or over? **YES/NO**

<p>PLEASE TICK THOSE BELOW WHICH APPLY TO YOU</p> <p>a) I am registered as a local government elector for the town of Ringwood; or <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>b) 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 town of Ringwood; or <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>c) My principal or only place of work has, during the whole twelve months preceding my co-option, been in the town of Ringwood; or <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>d) I have during the whole of twelve months preceding my co-option lived in the town of Ringwood or within 3 miles of it. <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--

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 specific criteria are not met:

- a) Are you an employee of Ringwood Town Council? **YES/NO**

- b) Are you the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order? **YES/NO**

- c) Have you within the last five years been convicted of an offence in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man which resulted in a sentence of imprisonment (whether suspended or not) for a period of three months or more without the option of a fine? **YES/NO**

- d) Are you disqualified by order of a court from being a member of a local authority? **YES/NO**

DECLARATION

I confirm that I am eligible for the vacancy of Ringwood Town Councillor, and the information given on this form is a true and accurate record.

Signed:

Print:

Date:

**RINGWOOD TOWN COUNCIL
CO-OPTION APPLICATION FORM**

NAME	
ADDRESS	
TELEPHONE NUMBER	
EMAIL ADDRESS	
Please tell us something about what experience you can bring to Ringwood Town Council, for example; previous local government experience, work in the voluntary or charitable sector, business or trade union experience (<i>please continue on an additional page if required</i>).	

Please tell us something about skills you can bring to the Council, for example; professional qualifications, financial or project management expertise (*please continue on an additional page if required*).

Please explain why you are interested in becoming a Town Councillor

Please include any other information you would like to add in support of your application? *(please continue on an additional page if required)*

Are there any questions you would like to ask the Town Council?

.....