**HALE PARISH COUNCIL**

**CO-OPTION PROCEDURE**

**A policy setting out the procedure for co-opting to fill a casual vacancy when no election is necessary**

**Introduction**

A casual vacancy arises when a Councillor resigns, dies or becomes disqualified during the four year term of office.

When a casual vacancy arises at Hale Parish Council the Clerk will, as soon as practicable, give public notice of it in a conspicuous public place to the include the notice boards at Hatchet Green and Woodfalls Cross and the Parish Council website. If at least ten electors give written notice to the Electoral Services Officer at New Forest District Council then a bye-election must be held to fill the casual vacancy.

This policy deals with the situation where no such election is required and Hale Parish Council may co-opt to fill the vacancy. Co-option is the process by which the Parish Council selects a new Councillor. If the period of vacancy has six months or more to run the Council must fill the vacancy by co-option. If it is less, the Council may fill the vacancy but is not bound to do so. Co-option is done as an agenda item within a monthly Parish Council meeting.

The Parish Council will manage the process of co-option by itself and will strive to demonstrate that it is fair and equitable by following the procedure agreed and set out below.

**Procedure**

1. Hale Parish Council will post a notice on the notice boards and website inviting any interested persons to write to the Clerk by a specified date. The Clerk will provide all such persons with a copy of this policy and the Guidance Note so that the candidate may make a written application within the time period. That written application will include:
	1. Name, address and contact details;
	2. confirmation that the candidate is eligible to be a Councillor;
	3. no more than half a page of explanation as to why they would like to be a Councillor; and
	4. A list of the relevant skills and experience they bring to the role.
2. Upon receipt the Parish Clerk will check, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the candidate is eligible in accordance with S79 – 80 Local Government Act 1972.
3. Following receipt of eligible applications, the next Parish meeting will have an agenda item “To receive written applications for the office of Parish Councillor and to co-opt a candidate to full the existing vacancy”.
4. The Clerk will forward a copy of each application to all Councillors ahead of the Parish Council meeting at which the co-option is to take place.
5. All candidates will be invited to the meeting to speak for no more than three minutes on why they would like to be considered to fill the vacancy and to answer questions from Members. Each candidate will be allocated a total of no more than ten minutes to speak and address any questions raised by Members.
6. In closed session, the Members of the Parish Council (without the public present), will consider the candidates and, following that discussion, the public will be invited to return to the meeting before the voting takes place.
7. The Chairman will request those Councillors present to nominate any of the candidates they wish to proceed to the vote stage. No candidate will progress to the voting stage unless proposed and seconded. If there is only one vacancy to be filled each Councillor may only nominate or second one candidate.
8. The names of those candidates nominated are placed in alphabetical order and the vote takes place. Councillors have one vote per vacancy to be filled.
9. Voting will be in accordance with the Standing Orders.
10. Where more than two candidates have been nominated for a position to be filled by the council the successful candidate must have received an absolute majority of the votes in their favour. This means that the person elected must receive more votes than those for all the other candidates combined. If that does not occur at the first vote the name of the candidate having the least number of votes shall be taken off the list and a fresh vote taken. This process shall continue until a majority of votes is given in favour of one candidate. A tie in votes may be settled by the casting vote of the Chairman.
11. The successful candidate is declared co-opted to the Parish Council, will sign the Declaration of Office and be invited to join the meeting.
12. The new Councillor will complete a Register of Interests Form within 28 days of being co-opted.
13. 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 and part of the election process.

Policy approved on: 4 October 2016

Policy to be reviewed: October 2019

Hale Parish Council

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