

THORNAGE PARISH COUNCIL

CO-OPTION POLICY

1. Background

The process for co-option is only partially prescribed in law. Items marked in bold are prescribed in law.

2. Scope and purpose

This policy aims to explain the procedure regarding co-option. The information contained in it is to be used by Members of the Council and members of the public. The aim of the policy is also to show that the Council endeavours to treat all applicants fairly and alike, and to ensure that the process is fair, open and transparent.

3. When a vacancy arises

A co-option vacancy arises when a Member of the Council leaves the Council. This will be reported to North Norfolk District Council who will issue a Notice of Vacancy whereby the position is formally advertised for 14 days allowing residents the opportunity to call for the position to be filled by election. At the end of this 14-day period if insufficient names have submitted a request to North Norfolk District Council to call for an election (this is 10 names) then the Parish Council can fill the vacancy by co-option. (Local Government Act 1972 s86 and 87(2)(b))

3.1 Applications

We aim to encourage applications from anyone in the Parish who is eligible to stand. Councillors or parishioners can approach individuals to suggest that they might wish to consider putting their names forward for co-option. Co-option vacancies will be advertised on the website and on the noticeboard. The advertisement for the co-option will include:

- a) Method by which applications can be made, this will be in writing to the Clerk
- b) The closing date for applications
- c) Contact point for potential candidates to obtain more information – contact the Clerk
- d) Advice that further information is available electronically via the website or from the Clerk – a form to complete which includes a maximum of 100 words asking the candidate why they would like to be a Councillor; name; address and other contact details.

When applications are received, the Clerk will confirm eligibility. Any candidate found to be offering inducements will be disqualified.

3.2 Attendance following an application

All eligible candidates shall be invited by letter or email, to attend the next Parish Council meeting following the application deadline. They will be asked to confirm their attendance at the meeting. In the event of candidates being unable to attend, this meeting will not be rearranged.

All Parish Council Members receive copies of applications ahead of the meeting. Applications are to be treated as confidential.

A candidate, on confirming that they will attend the meeting will be sent a copy of the agenda and agenda papers (but not details of other candidates)

4. Commitment

The Parish Council is keen that potential candidates understand the commitment which is required from Councillors. Anyone interested in standing will be encouraged to look at the website for more information on the role of being a councillor and will receive an information sheet on the work of the council.

5. The process of Co-option at the Council meeting

There is an early agenda item at which each candidate will be given the opportunity to make a brief verbal presentation on why they would like to be a Councillor and the skills they can offer the Council (3 minutes maximum per candidate). All of this, including the voting for the candidate will be in public. Candidates may be asked questions by Members.

In the event of a candidate being unable to attend, his / her application will still be considered by Members.

In the event of a candidate being related to a Councillor, then the Councillor would be expected to declare an interest and request a dispensation to speak and vote.

6. Voting

Only Councillors present at the meeting may vote. There will be one vote per vacancy to be filled (Chairman may have a casting vote). **The successful candidate must receive an absolute majority of those present and voting** (Local Government Act 1972 Sch 12).

If there are more than two candidates for one vacancy and no one of them at the first count receives a majority over the aggregate votes given to the rest, steps must be taken to strike off the candidate with the least number of votes and the remainder must then be put to the vote again. The process is to be repeated until an absolute majority is obtained.

7. Starting as a councillor

The successful candidate(s) are asked to start as a Councillor immediately after completing their Declarations of Acceptance of Office (provided by the Clerk). **The fact that the new member has not received a summons does not make his / her attendance as a councillor illegal** (Local Government Act 1972 Sch 12, para 10(3)).

If an absent candidate is successful, Members must agree to him / her signing the Declaration of Acceptance of Office before or at the very start of the next meeting. New Councillors will also be made aware of the fact that Interests Forms will need to be completed and returned to North Norfolk District Council within 28 days of co-option.

8. Filling a Co-option vacancy

The Council must fill co-option vacancies as soon as practicably possible.

Date of adoption of this policy – March 2024

Date to be reviewed - 2027