

## HEXHAM TOWN COUNCIL

### POLICY REGARDING THE CO-OPTION OF A TOWN COUNCILLOR

Whenever the need for co-option arises Hexham Town Council will seek and encourage applications from anyone who is eligible to stand as a Town Councillor.

1. The co-option of a Town Councillor occurs when a casual vacancy occurs at Hexham Town Council and no poll (by-election) has been called. A casual vacancy occurs when:
  - A Councillor fails to make his declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time
  - A Councillor resigns
  - A Councillor dies
  - A Councillor becomes disqualified (criteria for disqualification are outlined in section 4), or
  - A Councillor fails for six (6) months to attend meetings of a council committee or subcommittee without acceptable mitigation.

Once a vacancy has been confirmed the Clerk of Hexham Town Council will advise the Electoral Officer of Northumberland County Council.

2. Once the date for nominations to the Town Council has passed the Electoral Officer, if no formal election is to take place, will advise the Clerk of the Council that the co-option process may start. Co-option is the process by which the Town Council selects a new Councillor and it is done as an agenda item within a monthly Town Council meeting.
3. The Town Council manages the process of co-option by itself and will demonstrate transparency and openness by ensuring that a fair and equitable procedure is followed. This procedure is set out below:
  - The Clerk of Hexham Town Council invites interested candidates to write to the Clerk by a specified date.
  - This date will be no longer than two weeks after the Electoral Officer has notified that no election will take place.
  - This invitation will be made by:
    - a) A notice placed on the Town Council noticeboard and website.
    - b) Other methods of invitation may also be considered, but in each case a closing date for receipt of applications will be specified.

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4. **Qualifications.** A person will only be considered as a Councillor if he/she is a British citizen, an eligible Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any member state of the European Union, is over 18, and an elector in the parish of Hexham.

**Disqualifications.** There are several ways in which a person may be disqualified:

- a) If a person holds a paid office or other place of profit in the gift or disposal of the council or any committee or subcommittee thereof of a company controlled by the Council.
  - b) Bankruptcy and execution of compositions or arrangements with creditors. This ends 5 years after discharge.
  - c) Conviction in the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man within 5 years before the election and has been sentenced to not less than three months imprisonment (whether suspended or not) without the option of a fine. If a free pardon has been given the disqualification ceases.
  - d) Corrupt or illegal practices.
5. Applications received are circulated to Councillors ahead of the meeting at which a Town Councillor is to be co-opted. At the Council meeting only Councillors who are present at the meeting where co-option is to take place will be eligible to vote.
  6. At the Town Council meeting candidates are invited to say something about themselves and Councillors have the opportunity to ask questions of the candidates. Each candidate will be allocated a maximum of ten minutes, with additional time as needed to answer questions.
  7. In a closed session of the Town Council, without the public present, members will consider the candidates and, following the discussion, the public are invited back into the meeting before the voting to takes place.
  8. The Chairman will request the Councillors present to nominate any of the candidates. Candidates will require a proposer and seconder to progress to the voting stage. If there is only one vacancy, a Councillor may only nominate or second one candidate. One candidate needs to receive an absolute majority of votes.
  9. The Chairman will then place the names of those nominated into alphabetical order and proceed to vote. Councillors will have one vote per vacancy to be filled.

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10. Voting will be in accordance with Standing Orders by a show of hands and will continue until one candidate has received an absolute majority of those Councillors present. At this stage, the successful candidate will be declared co-opted.
11. Should no single candidate receive a majority on the first vote, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated. Voting will then take place for the remaining candidates until one person receives an absolute majority. In the event of a draw between the final two candidates, the candidate selected for co-option for the Council will be decided by the toss of a coin.
12. The successful candidate is then declared co-opted to the Town Council and will be asked to join the meeting.
13. The successful candidate is a Councillor in their own right and is no different to any other member as co-option is a legitimate form of election as part of the election process. The co-opted Councillor is then invited to sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office and will agree to be bound by the Code of Local Government Conduct.
14. Should there be no suitable applicant for the vacancy by the date of the Council meeting then Council will decide at the meeting whether or not a vacancy will be agreed or if the Town Clerk will be asked to advertise the vacancy again.

Adopted by Hexham Town Council on 8 January 2018, revised and readopted on 13 December 2021.

Date for Review: December 2024