

GREAT WYRLEY PARISH COUNCIL
CO-OPTION POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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Approved:

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1. Purpose and Governance Principles

This policy sets out the procedure to be followed by Great Wyrley Parish Council when filling vacancies by co-option.

The Council will comply with all relevant statutory requirements relating to vacancies and co-option. Where legislation or advice from the Returning Officer prescribes a particular procedure or timescale, that statutory requirement will take precedence over this policy.

The Council recognises that Parish Councils provide an important direct connection between residents and the wider Local Government system. The Council, therefore, seeks to ensure that its co-option process is transparent, consistent, fair and capable of identifying individuals who can make a constructive contribution to the Council and the community it serves.

The Council will seek to appoint councillors who demonstrate:

- commitment to the local community;
 - an understanding of the responsibilities of public office;
 - an ability to work constructively with others;
 - a willingness to participate actively in Council business; and
 - a willingness to develop their knowledge and skills as a councillor.
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2. Types of Vacancy

Vacancies may arise through:

- a casual vacancy; or
- a vacancy arising because fewer candidates were nominated at an ordinary election than there were seats available.

The statutory procedure applicable to the particular vacancy will be followed.

The Clerk will notify the Elections Team at South Staffordshire Council and will arrange any notices required by law.

The Council will follow the instructions of the Returning Officer concerning whether an election is required or whether the vacancy may proceed to co-option.

3. Casual Vacancies

A casual vacancy may arise in circumstances prescribed by law, including resignation, death, disqualification, failure to make a Declaration of Acceptance of Office or other circumstances specified by Legislation.

On becoming aware of a Casual Vacancy, the Clerk will notify the Elections Team at South Staffordshire Council and arrange for the appropriate statutory notice to be published.

Where an election is requested in accordance with the statutory procedure, the Council will await the outcome.

Where the Returning Officer confirms that the vacancy may be filled by co-option, the Council will proceed as soon as practicable and within the applicable statutory timescale.

4. Vacancies Arising from Insufficient Nominations

Where vacancies remain following an uncontested election because fewer candidates were nominated than there were seats available, the Council may fill those vacancies by co-option in accordance with the applicable legislation and advice from the Returning Officer.

The Clerk will advertise the opportunity for expressions of interest as soon as practicable, subject to the legal requirement that vacancies cannot be filled until the elected candidates have taken office.

The Council will have regard to any statutory deadline for filling such vacancies and will demonstrate best endeavours to fill them within the required period.

5. Purpose of Co-option

Co-option provides the Parish Council with an opportunity to appoint suitably qualified, motivated and constructive individuals to contribute to the work of the Council and the local community.

In considering applicants, the Council will have regard to:

- the skills, knowledge and experience already represented on the Council;
- skills and experience which would strengthen or complement the existing membership;
- an applicant's understanding of the role and responsibilities of a Parish Councillor;
- an applicant's commitment to the local community;
- an applicant's ability to work constructively with other Councillors;
- an applicant's ability and willingness to participate in Council business; and
- an applicant's willingness to comply with the Council's Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and other relevant policies.

The Council is not obliged to appoint every person who expresses an interest in a vacancy. **Co-option is a decision of the Parish Council and an applicant must obtain the required majority of votes to be appointed.**

6. Councillor Person Specification

Applicants should demonstrate the following qualities.

Essential

- Eligibility to serve as a Parish Councillor.
- An understanding of the role of a Parish Council and Parish Councillor.
- Commitment to the local community.
- Ability to work constructively with other Councillors.
- Ability to communicate appropriately and respectfully with residents, Councillors and Officers.
- Willingness and ability to attend Council meetings and participate in Council business.
- Willingness to undertake relevant Councillor training.
- Willingness to comply with the Council's Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and Policies.
- Understanding of the importance of confidentiality and appropriate handling of Council information.
- Ability to identify and appropriately manage conflicts of interest.

Desirable

- Previous community or voluntary involvement.
- Knowledge of local issues.
- Relevant professional, technical or community skills.
- Experience which complements existing skills and knowledge within the Council.

The person specification will be applied consistently to all applicants.

7. Advertising Vacancies

The Council will advertise co-option opportunities on its website and noticeboards.

Where appropriate, vacancies may also be publicised through:

- local community groups;
- newsletters;
- social media;
- community organisations; and
- other suitable local communication channels.

The Council may specify a closing date for expressions of interest so that applications can be considered together, provided that doing so does not conflict with any statutory requirement to fill the vacancy.

8. Application Process

Applicants will normally be asked to complete a standard application form and provide a supporting statement explaining:

- why they wish to become a Parish Councillor;
- what skills, knowledge or experience they would bring to the Council;
- their knowledge of and connection with the local community;
- the areas of Council work in which they would particularly like to contribute; and
- their availability and willingness to participate in Council meetings, committees and working groups.

All applicants will be asked to provide the same core information.

9. Eligibility

Before an applicant is considered for co-option, the Clerk will confirm that the applicant has provided sufficient information to establish that they appear to meet the statutory qualifications for election to the Parish Council and are not aware of any statutory disqualification.

The Clerk's role is to administer the process and provide procedural and statutory guidance where appropriate.

The Clerk will not make recommendations to Members regarding the personal suitability of individual applicants.

10. Interviews

Where there is more than one applicant, or where the Council considers an interview appropriate, applicants will be invited to an interview with Members.

Applicants will normally be asked the same core questions and will be assessed against the agreed person specification.

The interview is intended to enable Members to understand the applicant's:

- skills;
- experience;
- motivation;
- understanding of the role; and
- potential contribution to the Council.

The interview is **not intended to investigate an applicant's private life or matters unrelated to their eligibility or suitability for the role.**

Suggested interview questions

1. What are your main skills, knowledge and experience, and how do you believe they could contribute to the Parish Council?
 2. Why do you wish to become a Parish Councillor?
 3. What do you understand the role and responsibilities of a Parish Councillor to be?
 4. What do you know about Great Wyrley and what do you consider to be some of the key issues affecting the community?
 5. What initiatives or actions would you like to see the Parish Council consider?
 6. If the Council made a decision with which you personally disagreed, how would you respond?
 7. How would you approach working with a Councillor with whom you strongly disagreed?
 8. How would you deal with a resident who approached you with a complaint or concern about the Parish Council?
 9. What do you understand by the importance of the Code of Conduct, confidentiality and declaring interests?
 10. Would you be prepared to serve on committees and working parties and take responsibility for specific tasks?
 11. What time are you realistically able to commit to Parish Council work?
 12. Are there any current or planned interests, memberships or commitments which may affect your ability to participate in Council business or create a conflict of interest?
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11. Assessment and Scoring

Members may use a standard assessment sheet to assist their consideration of applicants.

Suggested assessment criteria are:

Criterion	Score 1–5
Understanding of the Parish Council role	
Commitment to the local community	
Relevant skills and experience	
Ability to work constructively with others	
Communication skills	
Availability and commitment	
Understanding of Code of Conduct, confidentiality and conflicts of interest	
Potential contribution to the Council	

Total: /40

Scoring is intended to assist Members' deliberations and does not automatically determine the outcome.

The formal decision remains a decision of the Parish Council and must be made in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders and applicable legislation.

12. Public Representations and Relevant Information

Members of the public may make representations to the Council in accordance with the Council's normal public participation arrangements.

Information concerning an applicant will only be considered where it is relevant to:

- the applicant's statutory eligibility;
- the requirements of the person specification; or
- the applicant's ability to undertake the role of Parish Councillor.

The Council will not take into account matters which are unrelated to the role, unsubstantiated allegations, or information relating solely to an applicant's private life.

13. Confidentiality and Personal Information

Applications and information supplied by applicants will be handled appropriately and in accordance with the Council's legal obligations concerning confidentiality, data protection and access to information.

Members will not circulate or discuss applicants' personal information outside the Council's proper decision-making process.

Applicants' personal information will not be used for purposes unrelated to the co-option process.

14. Council Meeting

A meeting will be arranged to consider applications and, where appropriate, interview applicants.

The meeting will be properly convened and an Agenda issued in accordance with the Council's normal meeting requirements.

The Council will determine whether the interview and decision-making process should take place in public or whether any particular agenda item requires consideration in accordance with the Council's legal obligations concerning exempt or confidential information.

15. Decision and Voting

Following consideration of the applications and interviews, the Council will determine which applicant(s), if any, should be co-opted.

Voting will be conducted in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders and applicable legislation.

A candidate must obtain the required majority to be co-opted.

The Council will determine the method of voting in accordance with its Standing Orders and any applicable statutory requirements.

16. Where No Candidate Obtains the Required Majority

Where an applicant does not obtain the required majority, that applicant is **not co-opted**.

Where a vacancy remains unfilled, the Council may continue to seek applications and undertake a further co-option process, subject to any statutory requirement to fill the vacancy within a specified period.

The Council is not required to appoint an applicant solely because that person has applied or has been interviewed.

17. Appointment

The successful candidate will be notified by the Clerk.

The successful candidate will be required to complete and sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office in accordance with the statutory requirements before taking up office.

The Clerk will provide the newly co-opted Councillor with relevant induction information and documentation, including information concerning:

- the Code of Conduct;
- Standing Orders;
- Financial procedures;
- Declarations of interest;
- Council policies; and
- Appropriate Councillor training.

The Clerk will notify South Staffordshire Council's Elections Team of the co-option in accordance with the required procedure.

18. Induction and Training

Newly co-opted councillors will be encouraged to undertake appropriate induction and Councillor training.

The Council will seek to ensure that new Members understand:

- the role and powers of the Parish Council;
- the distinction between the Parish Council and other local authorities;
- the Code of Conduct;
- declarations of interest;
- Standing Orders;
- financial procedures;
- planning responsibilities;
- data protection;
- confidentiality;

- freedom of information;
 - complaints procedures; and
 - any other matters considered relevant to their role.
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19. Recording the Decision

The minutes will record the names of candidates considered and the outcome of the Council's vote in accordance with the Council's normal requirements for recording decisions.

The minutes will not record personal information, allegations or comments about an applicant which are not necessary to explain the Council's decision.

20. Role of the Clerk

The Clerk is responsible for:

- administering the co-option process;
- providing procedural and statutory guidance where appropriate;
- ensuring that the Council's agreed procedure is followed;
- maintaining the relevant records;
- communicating with applicants; and
- completing any statutory notifications required following co-option.

The Clerk will not make or recommend a decision concerning the personal suitability of an individual applicant unless specifically required to provide procedural or statutory advice.

The decision to co-opt an applicant is a decision of the Parish Council.

21. Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed periodically and whenever there is a significant change to legislation, statutory guidance or the Local Government structure which may affect Parish Council co-option.

Sian McGlue (Mrs.)

Clerk to Great Wyrley Parish Council

18th August, 2026

Appendix A – Co-option Assessment Sheet

Candidate: _____

Date: _____

Assessment criterion	Score 1–5	Notes
Understanding of Parish Council role		
Commitment to local community		
Relevant skills and experience		
Ability to work constructively with others		
Communication		
Availability and commitment		
Understanding of Code of Conduct / confidentiality / conflicts		
Potential contribution to Council		
Total	/40	

Member comments, if required:

Scoring is an aid to deliberation and does not replace the Council's formal decision or statutory voting requirements.

Appendix B – Applicant Information

Full name: _____

Address: _____

Contact details: _____

Why do you wish to become a Parish Councillor?

What skills, knowledge or experience would you bring?

What connection do you have with the local community?

What areas of Parish Council work particularly interest you?

What availability do you have for Council meetings, committees and working parties?

Are there any interests, memberships or commitments which may create a conflict of interest or affect your ability to participate?

Appendix C – Suggested Clerk's Checklist

Before the co-option process

- Confirm the type of vacancy.
- Notify South Staffordshire Council Elections Team as required.
- Confirm the statutory timetable.
- Advertise the vacancy appropriately.
- Provide all applicants with the same information.
- Check apparent statutory eligibility.
- Issue the same application form/person specification to applicants.
- Arrange interviews where appropriate.
- Prepare assessment sheets.

At the meeting

- Confirm the meeting is properly convened and quorate.
- Explain the procedure to Members.
- Ensure applicants are treated consistently.
- Keep discussion relevant to eligibility and suitability for the role.
- Prevent irrelevant personal information or unsubstantiated allegations becoming part of the decision.
- Record the voting outcome accurately.
- Record the decision in the minutes.

After appointment

- Notify successful applicant.
 - Arrange Declaration of Acceptance of Office.
 - Provide councillor induction information.
 - Provide Code of Conduct information.
 - Provide declaration-of-interest information.
 - Notify South Staffordshire Council Elections Team.
 - Retain records in accordance with the Council's retention/data-protection arrangements.
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