

SANDY TOWN COUNCIL

Co-option Policy

Introduction

Although the process for co-option is not prescribed in Law, County & District Councils and Local Council Associations provide best practice advice and guidelines. It is especially important that all applicants be treated alike so that the arrangements are seen as open, fair and transparent.

Whenever the need for co-option arises, Sandy Town Council will seek and encourage applications from anyone in the Town who is eligible to stand as a Town Councillor. Councillors or parishioners can legally approach individuals to suggest that they might wish to consider putting their names forward for co-option.

The Town Council will advertise the vacancies in the local area via the Town Council noticeboards, the Town Council website, social media and a media release.

The co-option procedure will be reviewed every four years.

The co-option process to be employed by Sandy Town Council is as follows:

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1. On receipt, of written confirmation, from the Electoral Services Office at Central Bedfordshire Council, the casual vacancy can be filled by means of Co-option, the Town Clerk will;
 - a. Advertise the vacancy for 4 weeks on the Council noticeboards, Council Website, Council Facebook page and via a press release.
 - b. Inform the Council that the Co-option Policy has been instigated.
2. The advertisement to co-opt will include:
 - a. the method by which applications can be made
 - b. the closing date for all applications
 - c. a contact point to obtain more information

- d. show that further information is available electronically via the website, to include application forms, and information about the roles and responsibilities of the council.
3. Existing Members may point out the vacancies and the process to any qualifying candidate(s)
4. Any candidate(s) found to be offering inducements of any kind will be disqualified.
5. Eligibility of the candidate(s) will be confirmed by the Clerk.
6. All eligible candidates will be invited, by letter, to attend the next full Town Council meeting following the application deadline. If candidates are unable to attend, this meeting will not be rearranged. The co-option will still take place and voting on this vacancy will be subsequently based on this meeting and the candidate application form.
7. All Members will receive copies of candidate applications, along with the summons to attend the next full Town Council meeting following the application deadline. Candidate names will be displayed on the agenda of the meeting at which the co-option voting will occur. No other details apart from the candidates' names will be displayed. Candidate applications are strictly confidential.
8. An agenda item will be set aside for candidates to make a brief verbal presentation to members, outlining their relevant skills and experience. Each candidate will be allocated a maximum of three minutes. After presentations, members may ask candidates questions if considered necessary. These presentations and questions will be open to the public, but other candidates will be asked to step outside the meeting until they are due to present. During the temporary holding of virtual meetings, which have occurred as a result of Covid19, applicants will be placed in the meeting's 'waiting room' until it is their turn to present.
9. The Chair will then request those councillors present to nominate any or all of the candidates for co-option. As co-opting any person to the Town Council has to occur by resolution, candidates will require a proposer and seconder to progress to the voting stage.
10. The Chair will then place the names of nominated candidates in alphabetical order and proceed to vote.
11. When conducting a co-option process in a physical meeting the Town Council will appoint the co-opted member/s by voting according to Standing Orders. During the temporary holding of virtual meetings,

which have occurred as a result of Covid19, voting on candidates will be conducted by a show of hands. Applicants will be placed in the meeting 'waiting room' while voting is conducted.

12. Only Town Councillors present at the meeting may vote upon a person to fill the vacancy. Councillors will have one vote per vacancy to be filled.
13. If a Candidate is a relative of a Councillor, that Councillor should declare a prejudicial interest and withdraw from the meeting.
14. A successful candidate must have received an absolute majority vote by those Councillors present.
15. It follows that if there are more than two candidates for one vacancy and not 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.
16. This process must, if necessary, be repeated until an absolute majority is obtained.
17. The Chair has the casting vote.
18. If there is more than one vacancy and the number of candidates equals the number of vacancies, all the vacancies may be filled by a single composite resolution, but if the number of candidates exceeds the number of vacancies each vacancy must be filled by a separate vote or series of votes.
19. The Council is not obliged to fill all vacancies, but must take steps to advertise for further co-options or hold an election to fill vacancies.
20. Successfully co-opted candidates become Councillors in their own right, with immediate effect, and are no different to any other member once their Declaration of Acceptance of Office Form has been signed.
21. At a physical meeting the co-opted members will be asked to sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office to agree to be bound by the Local Government Code of Conduct. This will then be signed and dated by the Clerk and they may then take their seat at Council and will be appointed to a committee and as a representative to local organisations. If Co-option is conducted at a virtual meeting of the Council, the co-opted Member will be invited to stay in the meeting, but may not take their seat with the Council until the Declaration of Acceptance is signed and dated by both the co-opted Member and the Clerk.

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

23. As soon as practicable following their co-option, members will be invited to attend an Induction and Training session with the Town Clerk.

This Policy will be reviewed in six months from the date of its adoption, or at a time when Government COVID19 guidelines change to allow the holding of physical Council meetings.