

HOCKHAM PARISH COUNCIL

CO-OPTION POLICY

1.1 There are two circumstances under which the Monitoring Officer of Breckland Council will notify Hockham Parish Council that it may, proceed to fill a casual vacancy by co-option:

a) When a parish seat has been left vacant because no eligible candidate stood for election at the full elections for a new council (currently at four-yearly intervals). In this instance the Parish Clerk would be notified of vacancies by the Monitoring Officer and that efforts must be made to fill the vacancies by co- option.

b) During the life of a council when a parish seat has fallen vacant (because of a resignation, death or ineligibility). The Parish Clerk will immediately notify the Monitoring Officer and the vacancy will be advertised. If the required 7 electors of the parish have not called for a poll (by-election) within the legally specified time period (currently 14 days) following publication of the Notice of Vacancy, the Parish Clerk would be notified by Breckland Council and that the vacancies can be filled by co-option. The Council will be notified and they must give public notice of the vacancy and intention to co-opt.

1.2 The Parish Council is not obliged to co-opt to fill any vacancy. Even if the Council invites applications for co-option, it is not obliged to select anyone from the candidates who apply.

1.3 However, it is not desirable that electors be left partially unrepresented for a significant length of time. Neither does it contribute to effective and efficient working of the Council if there are insufficient councillors to share the workload equitably; to provide a broad cross-section of skills and interests; or to achieve meeting quorums without difficulty, given that some absence is unavoidable at times.

1.4 Councillors elected by co-option are full members of the Council. Hockham Parish Councillors receive no remuneration or allowances.

1.5 To ensure that a fair and transparent process is undertaken this policy sets out the process followed by Hockham Parish Council when co-option is under consideration.

2. APPLICATION PROCESS

2.1 On receipt, of written notification, from the Monitoring Officer at Breckland Council, that a casual vacancy may be filled by means of co-option:

a) The Parish Clerk will announce the vacancy or vacancies to be filled by co-option within 21 days of receipt of the written notification by means of displaying a Notice on the Council Notice board and website. A copy of the Notice will also be sent to the village magazine.

b) The Co-option Notice will include the closing date for acceptance of requests for consideration (between 14 and 30 days after the date of the display) and the number of vacancies.

c) The Parish Clerk will advise the council when the Co-option Policy has been instigated, by notifying all councillors.

2.2 Members may point out the vacancies and the process to any qualifying applicant(s).

2.3 Applicants are recommended to read the publication, "The Good Councillor Guide" which explains more about the role and the responsibilities of councillors – copies are available on request. If you have any question's you are welcome to raise them with the Parish Clerk.

2.4 All candidates will be invited to meet the Chair and Clerk prior to their attendance at the Parish Council meeting, to talk through the role and expectations and answer any questions the candidates may have.

2.5 Applications will be considered at the next available full Council meeting. To ensure that applications are included on the agenda they should be sent to the Parish Clerk at least one week before the meeting (earlier if there are bank holidays).

2.6 Application letters should explain how you are eligible and confirm that you are not disqualified (by completing the co-option application form (appendix 1)). Application letters should also explain why applicants are interested in applying and what they think they can bring to the role of Parish Councillor. A short questionnaire is to be completed by the applicant (appendix 2) to support this and this will be circulated to all Councillors in advance of voting. This will support in the consideration of the applicant for the position. Some topics that applicants might like to consider are shown in the table below, but please note that applicants are not expected to be able to demonstrate all of these competencies.

Experience, Skills, Knowledge and Ability

We welcome people with a wide range of life skills and experience that reflects the local community. The Council is an apolitical organisation and therefore no Councillor represents any political affiliation or beliefs. We are looking for councillors who can bring enthusiasm and commitment as well as some of the following:

- Interest in local matters.
- Knowledge and understanding of local affairs and the local community.
- Ability and willingness to represent the Council and their community.
- Good interpersonal skills.
- Ability to communicate succinctly and clearly.
- Ability and willingness to work closely with other members and to maintain good working relationships with all members and staff.
- Ability and willingness to work with the council's partners (e.g. voluntary groups, other parish councils, principal authority, charities).
- Ability and willingness to undertake relevant training (noting training takes place during normal office hours)

Circumstances

- Ability and willingness to attend meetings of the council (or the meetings of other local authorities and local bodies) in the evening and events in the evening and at weekends.
- Flexible and committed to the Council
- Enthusiastic.

2.7 Applicants will be invited to attend the next full Parish Council meeting at which their application will be considered. The Parish Clerk will provide applicants with an agenda for the meeting, which will normally be held at the Community Centre. Details of Parish Council meeting dates are available on the website or from the office.

At the meeting, applicants will be given the opportunity to speak for a maximum of 5 minutes to introduce themselves and explain why they want to join the council. This is optional and the applicant can decline this opportunity if they so wish. Noting if they wish to speak, they will inform the Clerk in advance.

All co-option vacancies will be filled after a vote by the Council. Voting will be according to the statutory requirements, in that, a successful candidate must have received an absolute majority vote of those present and voting. 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; this process must, if necessary, be repeated until an absolute majority is obtained.

The vote by the Parish Council will be by a show of hands. In the case of an equality of votes, the Chairman of the meeting has a second or casting vote. (in accordance with Standing Orders)

2.8 On successful co-option applicants will be invited to sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office which completes the process for joining the council. Within 28 days of co-option, applicants are also required to complete a Register of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests which will be provided by the Parish Clerk. Unsuccessful applicants can request that their details be kept on file for up to 6 months should any new vacancies arise.

2.9 Applicants found to be offering inducements of any kind, at any stage in the co-option process, will be disqualified.

Appendix 1

Hockham Parish Council Co-option & Eligibility Application Form

Contact Details (Block Capitals please) Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Email address:

Home Tel. No:

Mobile Tel. No:

Please attach the questionnaire provided to this form which should explain why you are interested in applying and any relevant experience you think you can bring to the role of Parish Councillor.

Please inform us of any other information you would like to disclose regarding your application (E.g. if you are related to an employee of the Council / would require assistance during Council meetings with a disability)

Councillor Eligibility

Please tick which of the following applies to your application.

In order to be eligible for co-option as a Hockham Parish Councillor you must be:

- a British subject, or a citizen of the Commonwealth or the European Union
- 18 years of age or over on the 'relevant date' (i.e. the day on which you are co-opted).

You must additionally be able to meet one of the following qualifications, please tick all that apply: I am registered as a local government elector for the parish of Hockham; or

I have, during the whole of the twelve months preceding the date of my co-option, occupied as owner or tenant, land or other premises in the parish of Hockham; or

My principal or only place of work during those twelve months has been in the parish of Hockham ; or

I have during the whole of the twelve months preceding the date of my co-option resided in the parish of Hockham or within 3 miles of it.

Please note that under Section 80 of the Local Government Act 1972 a person is disqualified from being elected as a Local Councillor or being a member of a Local Council if he/she:

a) holds any paid office or employment of the local council (other than the office of Chairman) or of a joint committee on which the Council is represented;

or

b) is a person who has been adjudged bankrupt or has made a composition or arrangement with his/her creditors* (but see below);

or

c) has within five years before the day of co-option, or since his/her co-option, been convicted in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man of any offence and has been sentenced to imprisonment (whether suspended or not) for not less than three months without the option of a fine;

or

d) is otherwise disqualified under Part III of the representation of the People Act 1983 for corrupt or illegal practices.

*This disqualification for bankruptcy ceases in the following circumstances: -

I. If the bankruptcy is annulled on the grounds that either the person ought not to have been adjudged bankrupt or that his/her debts have been fully discharged;

II. If the person is discharged with a certificate that the bankruptcy was caused by misfortune without misconduct on his/her part;

III. If the person is discharged without such a certificate.

In (i) and (ii) above, the disqualification ceases on the date of the annulment and discharge respectively. In (iii), it ceases on the expiry of five years from the date of discharge.

I (insert name) hereby confirm, that I am eligible to apply for the vacancy of Hockham Parish Councillor, and the information given on this form is a true and accurate record.

Signed Dated

Please return your completed application form, together with your application letter to:
The Parish Clerk, Hockham Parish Council, Oaklands, Vicarage Rd, Gt Hockham, Norfolk. IP24 1PE For further information, please contact:
Email: hockhampc@outlook.com
Phone: 07770710307
Website: www.greathockham.org

Appendix 2- Questionnaire for Prospective Councillors

Name

How long have you lived in Hockham.....

Do you have access to email communication and is this via a personal and private email address?
Please explain why you wish to become a Councillor (please note this is a non- political position)
What strengths and skills do you have that would help the Council in its work for the village?
Tell us something about any interests or hobbies you may have.

Are you able to attend monthly meetings? Are you able and willing to attend any relevant training courses?

Please note:

The 5-minute public address is voluntary, please inform the Clerk if you wish to use this. The decision whether to co -opt onto the Council will be held by a show of hands.

APPROVED AND ADOPTED. 

DATE. 22/11/21