

Mudford Parish Council Co-option Policy

1. Introduction

There are two circumstances in which the Electoral Services of Somerset Council may notify Mudford Parish Council that it can proceed to fill a casual vacancy by co-option:

- a) When a seat remains vacant due to no eligible candidates standing at full elections. In this case, the Parish Clerk will be notified and may begin the co-option process.

- b) When a seat becomes vacant during the term of office due to resignation, death, or ineligibility. If a by-election is not called by 10 electors within 14 working days of the public notice of vacancy, the Council will be notified that the vacancy can be filled by co-option.

The Council is not obliged to co-opt to fill a vacancy. Even when applications are invited, the Council may choose not to appoint anyone.

However, extended vacancies may leave residents under-represented and place a burden on existing councillors. It is therefore in the community's interest to fill vacancies in a timely manner.

Co-opted members are full members of the Council, with the same responsibilities and rights as elected members. All councillors serve on a voluntary basis and receive no payment or allowances.

This policy outlines the fair and transparent process to be followed by Mudford Parish Council when co-option is under consideration.

2. Co-option Application Process

Upon receiving notification that a vacancy may be filled by co-option, the Parish Clerk shall:

- a) Publicly advertise the vacancy on the Parish Council website and noticeboards within 21 days of notification.

- b) Include in the notice the number of vacancies and the deadline for applications (between 14 and 30 days after the notice date).

- c) If instructed, arrange additional publicity in local venues or media.

- d) Notify all councillors that the co-option process has begun.

Councillors may inform potential candidates of the vacancy and encourage suitable applicants to apply.

Applicants are encouraged to read *The Good Councillor's Guide*, which explains the responsibilities of a parish councillor. Questions can be directed to the Parish Clerk.

If there are multiple vacancies in different wards, a separate application is required for each ward.

Applications must be received by the Parish Clerk before the stated deadline to be considered at the next full Council meeting.

Application letters must include:

- Confirmation of eligibility (by completing the co-option eligibility form)
- A statement of interest and what the applicant can contribute to the Council

Examples of desirable qualities:

- Knowledge or interest in local issues
- Community involvement or awareness
- Good communication and interpersonal skills
- Teamwork and commitment to public service
- Willingness to attend meetings and undertake training

Applicants will be invited to a Council meeting to speak for up to 3 minutes in support of their application. The meeting schedule is available via the Parish Clerk or on the Council's website.

If there are more applicants than vacancies, a vote will be held. A successful candidate must receive an absolute majority of votes from those present and voting. If necessary, the candidate with the fewest votes will be eliminated in successive rounds until a majority is reached.

Voting will be by show of hands unless two councillors request a signed ballot. In case of a tie, the Chair will have a casting vote.

Successful candidates will sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office and, within 28 days, must complete a Register of Interests form provided by the Parish Clerk.

Any applicant found to be offering inducements or engaging in misconduct during the process will be disqualified.

This policy was adopted by the Council at its meeting held on 29th May 2025.

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Chair