

AMBLE TOWN COUNCIL CO-OPTION POLICY



CO-OPTION POLICY

INTRODUCTION

STAGE 1

There are two instances under which the Electoral Officer of Northumberland County Council will notify Amble Town Council that it may, if it so wishes, proceed to fill a casual vacancy by co-option:

1) The electoral area of the Amble Parish is divided into wards. At full election a candidate may only stand for election in one ward. This may result in some wards having more candidates standing for election than there are seats available, while other wards may have insufficient candidates standing for election to fill the available number of seats. Under the latter circumstances, the Town Clerk would be notified of vacancies by NCC and that efforts must be made to fill the vacancies by co-option.

The Council will be notified and they will decide if they wish to proceed to stage 2.

2) during the life of a council when a ward seat has fallen vacant (because of resignation, death or ineligibility). The Town Clerk will immediately notify the Electoral Officer and the vacancy will be advertised. If the required 10 electors of the ward have not called for a by-election within the legally specified time period (currently 14 working days) following the publication of the Notice of Vacancy, the Town Clerk would be notified by NCC that the vacancies can be filled by co-option. The Council will be notified and they will decide if they wish to proceed to stage 2 within 28 days or wait a period of 6 months before proceeding.

The Town 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.

However, it is not desirable that electors in a particular ward be left partially unrepresented for a significant period of time. Neither does it contribute to the effective and efficient working of the Council if there are insufficient Councillors to share the workload equally; 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.

Councillors elected by co-option are full members of the Council.

To ensure that a fair and transparent process is undertaken this policy sets out the process to be followed by Amble Town Council when co-option is under consideration.

ADOPTED May 2023

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STAGE 2

APPLICATION PROCESS TO BE FOLLOWED

Within 21 days of receipt of written notification, from the Electoral Officer at Northumberland County Council, that a casual vacancy may be filled by means of co-option, The Town Clerk, with the Town Council's agreement, will announce the vacancy or vacancies to be filled by co-option by means of displaying a Notice on the Council Noticeboards, website and social media platforms. A copy of the notice will also be sent to local press. The co-option notice will also be displayed in other locations as instructed by the Council.

The Town Clerk will advise the Council when the co-option policy has been instigated, sending a memorandum to all Councillors.

The co-option notice will include the closing date for acceptance of requests for consideration (no sooner than 14 days after the date of display) and the number of vacancies.

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

Candidates considering applying for co-option are strongly advised to attend a full council meeting to gain some insight into the breadth of work members undertake. No decision on co-option will be taken until after potential applicants have had the opportunity to attend a full council meeting.

Candidates found to be offering inducements of any kind will be disqualified.

Although there is no statutory requirement to do so, applications for co-option will be asked to:

Submit information about themselves, by completing a short application form (a copy of the application form is attached as Appendix 1) together with a written personal statement stating their reasons for wishing to be a Councillor

and

Confirm their eligibility for the position of Councillor within the statutory rules (a copy of the confirmation of eligibility is attached as Appendix 2)

Copies of the application and written summary will be circulated to all Councillors by the Town Clerk at least 7 days prior to the meeting of the full Council when the co-option will be considered. All documents will be treated by the Clerk and Councillors in accordance with Data protection requirements concerning personal information.

Candidates will be sent a full agenda of the meeting at which they are to be considered for appointment, together with a copy of the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations of the Council. Candidates will also be informed that they may, if they wish, speak for up to 3 minutes about their application during the public session of that Council meeting. Candidates may be asked questions from the attached list (Appendix 3).

Applicants can withdraw no later than 24 hours prior to the meeting where the co-options will be considered.

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VOTING PROCEDURE FOR EACH VACANCY

Existing Councillors should declare an interest should they be related to any candidate.

At the appropriate business item Councillors will proceed direct to voting unless a candidate has elected to speak or they wish to ask questions taken from Appendix 3 of a candidate(s). Voting will be according to statutory requirements, in that the successful candidate must receive a 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, the candidate with the least number of votes will be removed from consideration and the remainder will then be put to the vote again.
- The process will, if necessary, be repeated until a majority is obtained.
- This process will be followed separately for each individual vacancy for which co-option is under consideration.
- If no candidate secures an absolute majority of votes cast for an individual vacancy, then that vacancy remains unfilled (e.g. 9 councillors are present and 5 abstain from voting then there is no absolute majority).

In the case of an equality of votes, the Chairman of the meeting has a second or casting vote.

Candidates will be asked to vacate the room whilst Councillors vote by anonymous paper ballot.

After the vote has been concluded, the candidates will be invited to return and the Chairman will declare the successful candidate(s) duly elected.

ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE

After the vote the successful candidate(s) will be asked to sign that they have read and understood the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations of the Council and agree to the Code of Conduct. The successful candidate(s) must sign the declaration of acceptance of office before they can act as a Councillor. After signing their declaration of acceptance of Office, that person may take their seat immediately.

The Register of Interest must be completed within 28 days and the Town Clerk will forward a copy to the Monitoring Officer.

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every four years (or earlier if required by changes to legislation or additional documentation) and amended as necessary based on good practice or evidence taken forward.

Date:	May 2023	Approving:	Full Council
Policy effective:	Immediate	Date for next review:	May 2024

ADOPTED May 2023

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APPENDIX 1

Co-option Application Form

Contact Details (BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE)

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Email Address:

Home Tel. No.:

Mobile Tel. No.:

Are you 18 or over? YES/NO

NB: Please attach a written summary covering your reasons for wishing to be a Councillor.

Is there 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 your mobility, hearing, vision)

Signature

Date

Please return your completed form together with your written summary and the co-option eligibility form to:

Town Clerk
Amble Town Council
Fourways 2
6 Dilston Terrace
Amble
Northumberland
NE65 0DT

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APPENDIX 2

Co-option Eligibility Form

In order to be eligible for co-option as a Town Councillor for Amble you must be a British subject, or a citizen of the Commonwealth or the European Union; and be 18 years of age or over on the 'relevant date' (i.e. the day on which you are nominated or if there is a poll the day of election). You must additionally be able to meet one of the following qualifications:

- I am registered as a local government elector for the parish of Amble; or
- I have, during the whole twelve months preceding the date of my co-option, occupied as owner or tenant, land or other premises in the parish of Amble; or
- My principle place or only place of work during those twelve months has been in the parish of Amble; or
- I have during the whole twelve months resided in the parish of Amble or within 3 miles of it.

Please tick which of the above applied to you.

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 a paid office of employment of the local council or a joint committee on which the Council is represented
- b) Is a person who has been adjudged bankrupt or has made a composition or arrangement with his/her creditors
- c) Or has within five years before the day of election, or since his/her election, 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;
- 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:

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;

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

If the person was discharged without such a certificate.

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

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

Signed.....Dated.....

Ward.....

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APPENDIX 3

At the meeting when co-option is taking place Candidates may be asked the following:

What is your current or recent career history?

Do you have any prior experience of local Council work?

Do you have any experience of team working?

What are your interests?

Have you in the past or do you currently carry out any voluntary or community work?

What skills do you feel you could bring to the Council?

There are various committees and working parties that council members can volunteer to be a member of as well as training opportunities, would you have the flexibility in your life to represent Amble on one or more of them as well as the once a month full town council meeting?