Co-option Procedure

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Introduction:

This policy sets out the procedure to ensure there is compliance with legislation and continuity of procedures in the co-option of members to Meriden Parish Council. The co-option procedure is entirely managed by the Parish Council, and this policy aims to ensure that a fair and equitable process is carried out. The co-option of a Parish Councillor occurs in two instances:

1. When an ordinary vacancy has arisen on Meriden Parish Council after the ordinary elections held every four years; or

2. When a casual vacancy has arisen on the Council and no poll (by-election) has been called by electors within the Parish.

Ordinary Vacancy:

An ordinary vacancy occurs when there are insufficient candidates to fill all eight seats on Meriden Parish Council at the ordinary elections held every four years. Any candidates who were nominated are automatically elected to the Council and any remaining vacancies are known as 'ordinary vacancies'. Provided there are enough Parish Councillors to constitute a quorum (three Councillors), the Council is usually able to co-opt interested applicants to fill the vacancies.

Casual Vacancy:

A casual vacancy occurs when:
- A Councillor fails to make his/her declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time
- A Councillor resigns
- A Councillor dies
- A Councillor becomes disqualified
- A Councillor fails for six months to attend meetings of a Council, committee or sub-committee or to attend as a representative of the Council a meeting of an outside body (this requirement is waived, and the time limit extended if any failure to attend was due to a reason/apology approved by the Council, in advance of the six-month period expiring).

The Parish Council must notify the Monitoring Officer at Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council of a casual vacancy and then advertise the vacancy to give electors of the ward the opportunity to request an election. An election will occur if ten electors write to Solihull MBC stating that an election is requested. The electors of the ward have fourteen days (not including weekends, bank holidays and other notable days), to claim the by-election. If a by-election is called, a polling station will be set up by Solihull MBC and the electors of the ward will be asked to vote for candidates who will have put themselves forward by way of a nomination paper. Meriden Parish Council will pay the costs of the election. If

electors do not request a ballot within fourteen working days of the vacancy notice being posted, then the Parish Council can co-opt a replacement Councillor to fill the vacancy.

Policy Purpose:

This policy sets out the procedure that will be followed by Meriden Parish Council to fill a vacancy through co-option, ensuring a transparent and equitable process.

Main Body:

1. The vacancy will be advertised within the parish on the Council's noticeboards, website, Facebook page and, time permitting, via the monthly e-newsletter. The vacancy will detail the number of vacant seats, the process and date by which to request an election, the closing date of the vacancy if filled through co-option, and contact details for the Clerk in order to obtain further information and an application pack.
2. It is permissible for Parish Councillors (or any parishioner) to approach individuals to advise of the vacancy and provide the Clerk's details for further information.
3. Interested persons will be required to complete an application form and confirm their eligibility for the position of Parish Councillor to Meriden Parish Council within the statutory rules.
4. Completed application forms and confirmation of eligibility to stand as a Councillor will be circulated to all members of the Council.
5. Following receipt of application forms, notice of the intention to co-opt the vacancy will be given in the agenda of the Parish Council public meeting.
6. The Parish Council will invite **all** candidates to an informal meeting to discuss the Role of a Councillor and the Committees of the Council, with no more than three Councillors in attendance. **No decisions will be made on the suitability of candidates at an informal meeting – it is an opportunity for candidates to ask questions and ensure they are aware of what the role entails before formal co-option takes place at a public Parish Council meeting.**
7. All of those who have applied for the vacancy will be invited to attend a public ordinary or extraordinary Parish Council meeting for co-option to take place.
8. The Chair will invite each candidate to address the Members outlining their reasons for wishing to fill the vacancy and their relevant skills and experience. Members may ask suitable questions relating to the skills, experience and expertise detailed on the applicant's submission documents/statement which may be directly pertinent to the role of a Councillor.
9. Each candidate will be allocated a maximum of 5 minutes. Candidates that do not wish to address the Council, or attend the meeting, will be considered on the basis of their application form.
10. Public, press and other candidates present during the meeting would only be excluded by resolution under the Public Bodies [Admission to Meetings] Act 1960, if the Council

wished to discuss personal attributes which could be prejudicial. Following this, the public, press and other candidates would be invited to return to the meeting for voting.

11. The Chair will then request those Councillors present to nominate any of the candidates. Candidates require a proposer and seconder to progress to the voting stage.
12. The Chair will then place the names of those who have been nominated and seconded into alphabetical order and proceed to a vote.
13. Voting will be by a show of hands until a candidate receives an absolute majority of those Councillors present. At this stage the successful Councillor will be declared elected.
14. Should no single candidate receive a majority on the first vote the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated. Voting will then take place on the remaining candidates and continue until the candidate receives an absolute majority.
15. The successful candidate is then declared co-opted to the Council and will be summoned to attend the next council meeting when they will sign their Declaration of Acceptance. At the Chair's discretion, the co-option procedure can take place after apologies and declaration of interests agenda items, to allow the co-opted member to join the remainder of the meeting, if desired, subject to the Declaration of Acceptance of Office being signed.
16. Co-opted Councillors must complete, within 28 days, a Member's Register of Interest form which is a public document displayed on Solihull Council's website.