

HOW DO I CO-OPT A COUNCILLOR?

Local (parish and town) councils can only be as connected and helpful as the people elected to run them, so we need councillors capable, enthusiastic and engaged to reflect their communities. Making co-options is an opportunity for councils or their committees to address shortfalls and imbalances in their membership. Steps should be taken to identify the nature of these gaps and to conduct a recruitment process that specifically targets them.

There are two ways that co-options can occur:

- There have been insufficient candidates to fill all of the available seats at an election.
- A casual vacancy has arisen between elections, and there is no demand to hold a by-election.

What is the process for co-opting a councillor?

The council should specify how to apply for the role (in writing, any deadlines, with or without CVs) and stipulate how co-options will be made (via interview, public or private). The council should check that all applicants are eligible for the post. The electoral returning officer and the county association can advise on the detail of eligibility and disqualification.

The council should interview all eligible candidates before deciding who to co-opt. Where there are more candidates than vacancies, a vote should take place. Voting can take place using show-of-hands or on paper by secret ballot. If there are more than two candidates for one available place, the result must be by a clear majority, meaning that the chosen candidate must receive more votes than the total of votes; for the other candidates.

How do I co-opt a councillor?

Here are four simple steps to co-opting a councillor:

1. The council should identify any shortfalls and imbalances in their membership. The council should take steps to identify these gaps and recruit specifically for them.
2. Councils should co-opt to benefit the diversity of the council to welcome all backgrounds, experiences and abilities. Use a job description and person specification to target specific skills or groups.

3. The council should highlight the necessary skills to be a good councillor, for example, good communication skills, problem solving, analytical thinking and being a team player. However, the most important attribute is to care about the community and be willing to take an active role.
4. Advertise for the role across all media platforms: social media, community newsletters, websites and notice boards. While also creating an advert for community hotspots like the local post office or coffee shop. Additionally, look to work with community groups to advertise the vacant role. The council should also send a copy of the notice to the monitoring officer.

Once you have found a new councillor

- The new councillor must sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office and, they can then join the council as a fully-fledged member.
- Within 28 days, the new councillor must complete a Declaration of Interests form which must be sent to the council's monitoring officer.
- The council should also make its Register of Interests available via its website either by publishing the register directly or by providing a link to the monitoring officer's website register.

What training and support is there?

Councillors should receive training and support via their county association. County associations are representative bodies for local councils in their area. As part of their induction, council's should ensure that their new councillors receive:

- Schedule of council meeting dates
- Standing orders
- Financial regulations
- Code of conduct
- Contact details (for the clerk and other councillors)
- Budget and assets register for the council
- Minutes from recent council meetings
- Documents relevant to your council (e.g. Parish Plan)

For more information, please get in touch with policycomms@nalc.gov.uk