

BRADWELL PARISH COUNCIL



Co-option Policy

1. Purpose

This policy sets out the process Bradwell Parish Council will follow when filling councillor vacancies by co-option. It ensures that co-option is conducted in a fair, transparent, and lawful manner, in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 and relevant electoral regulations.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all casual vacancies on Bradwell Parish Council that may be filled by co-option, whether arising from resignation, disqualification, death, or failure to elect.

3. Legislative Context

Co-option may only be used when:

- The Returning Officer has confirmed that the Council may fill the vacancy by co-option, either because an election was not requested or because insufficient candidates were nominated.
- The Council has formally resolved to fill the vacancy by co-option.

The Council must comply with:

- Local Government Act 1972
- Representation of the People Act 1983
- Electoral Commission guidance

4. Principles

Bradwell Parish Council is committed to ensuring that co-option is:

- **Open and transparent**
- **Fair and consistent**
- **Non-discriminatory**
- **Based on merit and suitability**
- **Conducted in the best interests of the community**

5. Eligibility

Applicants must:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Be a British citizen, qualifying Commonwealth citizen, or citizen of an EU member state
- Meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Registered as a local government elector for Bradwell
- Have lived in Bradwell or within 3 miles of the parish for the past 12 months
- Have worked in Bradwell for the past 12 months
- Occupy land or premises in Bradwell for the past 12 months

Applicants **cannot** be co-opted if they are disqualified under electoral law (e.g., bankruptcy restrictions, criminal convictions resulting in disqualification, employment by the Council).

6. Advertising the Vacancy

The Council will:

- Publish a notice of co-option on the parish website and noticeboards
- Invite expressions of interest from eligible residents
- Provide a short application form or request a written statement from candidates
- Set a clear closing date for applications

The notice will include:

- The role and responsibilities of a councillor
- Eligibility requirements
- How to apply
- The date of the co-option meeting

7. Application Process

Applicants will be asked to provide:

- Their name, address, and eligibility confirmation
- A brief statement explaining why they wish to be a councillor
- Any skills, experience, or community involvement relevant to the role

All applications will be circulated to councillors prior to the co-option meeting.

8. Co-option Meeting Procedure

At the co-option meeting:

1. The Chair will outline the process.
2. Each candidate may be invited to speak briefly (optional).
3. Councillors may ask questions relating to the role.
4. Candidates will withdraw from the room during discussion and voting.

9. Attendance at the Co-option Meeting

Bradwell Parish Council encourages applicants to attend the co-option meeting so that councillors may ask questions and gain a fuller understanding of each candidate's suitability for the role. However, the Council recognises that attendance may not always be possible due to personal, work, health, or accessibility reasons.

Where an applicant is unable to attend the meeting:

- Their written application will still be fully considered.
- They may submit an additional written statement or provide further information if they wish.
- They may request to speak to councillors via remote means (e.g., telephone or video call), subject to feasibility.
- The Council will not disadvantage any applicant solely because they cannot attend in person.

The Council will ensure that all candidates are assessed fairly and consistently, whether or not they are present at the meeting, and decisions will continue to be based on merit, eligibility, and the needs of the community.

10. Voting Procedure

- Co-option must be decided by **a majority vote** of councillors present.
- Voting will normally be by **show of hands**, unless the Council resolves to use a written ballot.
- If more than one vacancy exists, each vacancy will be filled separately.
- If no candidate receives a majority, voting continues until a majority is achieved.

The successful candidate is deemed co-opted immediately and must sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office before participating in Council business.

11. After Co-option

The Clerk will:

- Notify the Returning Officer
- Update Council records
- Provide induction materials
- Arrange training opportunities
- Ensure the new councillor signs the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and completes the Register of Interests within 28 days

12. Equality and Fairness

The Council will ensure that:

- All applicants are treated equally
- Decisions are based solely on merit and suitability
- No applicant is discriminated against on the grounds of protected characteristics
- The process is accessible and inclusive

13. Confidentiality

Personal information provided by applicants will be handled in accordance with data protection legislation and used only for the purpose of assessing suitability for co-option.

14. Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed every three years or sooner if legislation or best practice changes