

Hooe Parish Council

CO-OPTION POLICY

1. Introduction

1.1 There are two circumstances under which the council may proceed to fill a casual vacancy by co-option:

- When a ward seat has been left vacant because no eligible candidate stood for election at the full elections for a new council (currently every four years)
- During the life of the council, a ward seat falls vacant but the required 10 electors of the ward have not called for a poll (by-election) within the legally specified time period following publication of the notice of vacancy

1.2 The 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.

1.3 However, it is not desirable that electors in a particular ward be left partially or fully unrepresented for a significant length of time. Neither does it contribute to effective and efficient working of the council if there are insufficient Members to share the workload equitably; 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.

1.4 To ensure a fair and transparent process is undertaken, this policy outlines the procedure to be followed by the council when co-option is considered.

2. Application Process

2.1 On receipt of written notice from the Democratic Services Manager at Wealden District Council that a casual vacancy may be filled by means of co-option:

- The Clerk will advertise the vacancy or vacancies to be filled by co-option.
- The co-option advertisement will include the closing date for acceptance of requests for consideration (between 7 and 30 days after the date of the advertisement) and the number of vacancies, and will be displayed on the council website, social media platforms and noticeboards.

2.2 Members may point out the vacancies and the process to any qualifying candidate(s). Candidates found to be offering inducements of any kind will be disqualified.

2.3 Applicants for a vacancy will:

- Receive a New Councillor Application Pack and a copy of the Good Councillor Guide (produced by the National Association of Local Councils), the Code of Conduct,

Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation to be issued by the clerk.

- Submit information about themselves by completing a short application form, including a description of their interest in becoming a councillor and specifying any skills or qualifications which may benefit the council
- Confirm their eligibility for the position of councillor within the statutory rules, a copy of which will be attached to the application form

2.4 Copies of the applicant's application form will be circulated to all Members by the Clerk at least three clear working days prior to the Council meeting where the co-option will be considered. The application forms and any supporting documents will be treated by the Clerk and Members as strictly confidential.

2.5 Candidates will be sent a full agenda of the meeting at which they are to be considered for appointment, and will be informed they may, if they so wish speak for up to **2 minutes** about their application during the co-option item on the agenda at the meeting. The co option will be the first item on the agenda and will be conducted in accordance with this policy.

3. Voting Procedure

3.1 Voting will be according to the agreed procedure in standing orders, namely:

'Where more than 2 persons have been nominated for a position to be filled by the Council and none of those persons has received an absolute majority of votes in their favour, the name of the person having the least number of votes shall be struck off the list and a fresh vote taken. This process shall continue until a majority of votes is given in favour of one person. Any tie may be settled by the Chairman's casting vote.'

3.2 Voting will be conducted as per the agreed procedure in standing orders, namely:

'Unless standing orders provide otherwise, voting on any question shall be by a show of hands. At the request of a Councillor, the voting on any question shall be recorded so as to show whether each Councillor present and voting gave his vote for or against that question. Such a request shall be made before moving on to the next item of business on the agenda. At the request of two Councillors, voting on any question shall be by a signed ballot.'

3.3 If there is more than one vacancy and the number of candidates equals the number of vacancies, all the vacancies may be filled by a single composite resolution, but if the number of candidates exceeds the number of vacancies each vacancy must be filled by a separate vote or series of votes

3.4 After the vote has been concluded, the chairman will declare the successful candidate(s) duly elected. A Member elected by co-option is a full member of the council but is not eligible for the basic parish allowance.

4. Acceptance of Office

- 4.1 The successful candidate(s) **must sign their Declaration of Acceptance of Office** before they can act as a councillor. The Declaration of Acceptance shall include the words 'As a member of Hooe Parish Council, I will agree to operate in accordance with the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Scheme of Delegation and all Policies adopted by Hooe parish council'.
- 4.2 The Register of Members Interests form must be completed and returned to the clerk within 14 days, whereby the Clerk will forward a copy to the District Monitoring Officer within 28 days as required by statutory requirements.
- 4.3 At the earliest convenient date, the elected member will meet with the clerk for an induction to cover procedural matters related to the running of the parish council, and to receive a operational manual detailing the policies, procedures and other relevant key documents.
- 4.4 All new members will be required to undertake councillor training at the earliest opportunity, but no later than six months after becoming an elected member of Hooe Parish Council. The councillor training will be organised by the clerk.

Councillor Recruitment, Councillor Duties and Responsibilities

Below is a list outlining the key duties and responsibilities of a potential parish councillor for Hooe Parish Council. It is important to note that all candidates must adhere to the Hooe Parish Council's Standing Orders and all other applicable policies.

Key Duties and Responsibilities of a Parish Councillor for Hooe Parish Council

It is important to note that all candidates must adhere to Hooe Parish Council's Standing Orders and all other applicable policies.

1. **Adhere to the Code of Conduct and Act Within the Law:** As a member of Hooe Parish Council, you are responsible for behaving in a manner consistent with the **Nolan Principles of Public Life** to maintain public confidence. You must make decisions in accordance with the law and on merit, with an open mind and without bias, ensuring all arguments and viewpoints are properly considered before decisions are made. Upon election or co-option, you are required to sign an undertaking to comply with Hooe's Code of Conduct. You must not conduct yourself in a manner that could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or the Parish Council into disrepute. It is also crucial to act within the Parish Council's powers and duties.
2. **Represent the Community and Make Decisions for Their Benefit:** Your primary responsibility is to represent the community and work constructively with staff and partner organisations to secure better social, economic, and environmental outcomes for all. You should bring local issues to the Council's attention and help it make decisions for the benefit of the local community. This includes understanding the needs of diverse groups within the community.
3. **Attend and Actively Participate in Council Meetings:** Decisions of the Parish Council can only be made at properly summoned face-to-face meetings. You are expected to attend meetings when summoned and take part in voting, respecting the decisions made by the majority. Prior to meetings, you should prepare and research the issues to be discussed, as detailed in the agenda which is sent at least three clear days in advance. Please note that while all elected or co-opted councillors are full members of the council, membership in specific council committees is not automatic. The Parish Council has the authority for the creation of committees and the appointment of members therein. Therefore, even if

you are successfully elected as a Parish Councillor, your eligibility to join a particular committee will be considered individually based on any specific criteria or requirements established for that committee.

4. **Declare and Register Interests:** You must declare any private interests relating to your public duties and take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest. Within 28 days of your election or appointment, you are required to register details of your personal interests, including disclosable pecuniary interests, with the District Council's monitoring officer. You must notify the monitoring officer in writing. At meetings, you must also declare any interests relevant to agenda items.
5. **Maintain Accountability and Openness:** You should be accountable to the public for your actions and the manner in which you carry out your responsibilities and should co-operate fully and honestly with any scrutiny appropriate to your office. You should be as open as possible about your actions and those of the Parish Council and should be prepared to give reasons for those actions.
6. **Work Constructively with Other Councillors and the Clerk:** As a councillor, you will work with all other members of the council to stand for the interests of the whole community as a balanced local council. It is important to understand the distinct roles and responsibilities of councillors and the Clerk. You should respect the professional role of the Clerk, who is responsible for the management and administration of the council's business and ensuring the council acts within the law. Effective and timely communication is essential for the smooth functioning of the Parish Council. All councillors are expected to be comfortable using email for communication with the Parish Clerk and fellow councillors. Councillors are provided with designated council email addresses for this purpose and are expected to respond to emails within two working days where possible.
7. **Stay Informed About Local Issues and Diverse Views:** You have a responsibility to be well informed, especially about diverse local views. This may involve actively consulting with residents to understand their needs and preferences.
8. **Comply with Standing Orders and Other Policies:** You must operate in accordance with Hooe Parish Council's Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Scheme of Delegation, and all other policies adopted by the Council. This includes understanding and adhering to procedures for meetings, decision-making, handling correspondence, and other council business.
9. **Participate in Councillor Training:** All new members will be required to undertake councillor training at the earliest opportunity, but no later than six months after becoming an elected member of Hooe Parish Council. This training will be organised by the Clerk. Continuous learning and development are crucial for being an effective councillor.
10. **Sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office:** Before you can act as a councillor, you must sign a formal Declaration of Acceptance of Office at or before the first Council meeting following your election or co-option, in the presence of another councillor or the Clerk. This declaration includes agreeing to operate in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Scheme of Delegation, and all adopted policies.
11. **Approach All Decisions with an Open Mind:** Councillors must remain predisposed to listening to all arguments and evidence presented, without bias or predetermined views. It is unlawful to approach meetings with a closed mind, especially where decisions are to be made in the public interest.
12. **Uphold the National Civility and Respect Policy:** Hooe Parish Council has adopted the National Civility and Respect Policy. All councillors, the Clerk, and members of the public are expected to treat each other with courtesy and respect at all times. Inappropriate behaviour, bullying, or disrespectful conduct will not be tolerated in any council setting.

This list provides an overview of the expectations and responsibilities of a Hooe Parish Councillor. Potential applicants are also encouraged to review the Parish Council's Standing Orders and other relevant policy documents available from the Clerk or on the Parish Council's website to gain a more detailed understanding of the role.

Hooe Parish Councillor Recruitment

Recommended Interview Questions

I. General Qualifications and Understanding of the Role

- Why are you interested in becoming a councillor for Hooe Parish Council? What motivates you to serve the community?
- Based on your understanding, what do you believe are the primary responsibilities of a Hooe Parish Councillor? (Referencing our previous conversation, this should align with the 10 key duties)
- Are you familiar with the time commitment required to be an effective councillor, including attending meetings, training, and engaging with the community? Please elaborate on how you envision managing these commitments alongside your other responsibilities.
- What skills and experiences do you possess that you believe would be particularly beneficial to the Parish Council and the community? (Consider skills relevant to decision-making, communication, problem-solving, etc.)
- Have you reviewed the Hooe Parish Council website and any publicly available information about the council's activities, priorities, and challenges? What are your initial impressions?
- (For candidates with prior councillor experience): Could you briefly describe your previous experience as a councillor? What were some of your key achievements and challenges?

II. Ethical Considerations and Code of Conduct

- Are you familiar with the concept of a Code of Conduct for councillors? What do you understand to be its purpose, and are you willing to adhere to the Hooe Parish Council's Code of Conduct?
- The principles of public life include integrity, objectivity, and accountability. Can you provide an example of how you have demonstrated these principles in your professional or personal life?
- What is your understanding of "**declaration of interests**" for councillors, and why is it important? Are you prepared to declare any interests as required and avoid conflicts of interest?
- (For candidates with prior councillor experience): Reflecting on your previous experience, can you describe a situation where you had to navigate a potential conflict of interest? How did you ensure you acted ethically and in the best interest of the community?
- What would you do if you witnessed a fellow councillor acting in a way that you believed was unethical or in breach of the Code of Conduct?
- Do you understand the importance of maintaining **confidentiality** regarding council business and documents? What steps would you take to ensure confidentiality is maintained?

III. Community Engagement and Representation

- How do you plan to engage with the residents of Hooe Parish to understand their views, concerns, and priorities?
- Councillors represent the whole electorate, not just those who voted for them. How would you ensure that you consider the diverse needs and interests of all residents in your decision-making?
- What are your thoughts on the Parish Council's role in communicating with the community? What methods do you believe are most effective?
- How would you approach a situation where the views of different sections of the community on a particular issue are in conflict?
- Have you been involved in any community groups or initiatives in the past? Please tell us about your experience.
- (For candidates with prior councillor experience): Can you describe a time when you successfully represented the views of the community on a particular issue? What steps did you take?

IV. Teamwork, Communication, and Conflict Resolution within the Council

- How do you see yourself contributing to the effective **teamwork** of the Parish Council?
- Effective communication between councillors and the Clerk is crucial. What are your expectations for communication within the council, and how would you ensure your communication is respectful and effective?

- Councillors may have differing opinions on issues. How would you approach a situation where you strongly disagree with the views of other councillors?
- What is your understanding of the role of the Clerk in supporting the Parish Council? How would you ensure a positive and productive working relationship with the Clerk?
- (For candidates with prior councillor experience): Can you describe a time when there were disagreements or conflicts within the council? How did you contribute to finding a resolution?
- How would you ensure that discussions during council meetings remain focused and productive?

Appendix 1

REFERENCED VERSION: Roles and Responsibilities

1. **Adhere to the Code of Conduct and Act Within the Law:** As a member of Hooe Parish Council, you are responsible for behaving in a manner consistent with principles of public life to maintain public confidence. You must make decisions in accordance with the law and on merit [**LGA2 Code of Conduct October 2022.pdf, General Conduct**]. Upon election or co-option, you are expected to comply with the Code of Conduct [**Members Conduct and disclosure of their interests.pdf, #9**]. You **must not conduct yourself in a manner that could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or the Parish Council into disrepute** [**LGA2 Code of Conduct October 2022.pdf, General Conduct**]. It is also crucial to act within the Parish Council's powers and duties. The adoption, revision, or replacement of a code of conduct is a function discharged only by the authority itself [**Members Conduct and disclosure of their interests.pdf, #9**].
2. **Represent the Community and Make Decisions for Their Benefit:** Your primary responsibility is to represent the community and work constructively with staff and partner organisations to secure better social, economic, and environmental outcomes for all. You should bring local issues to the Council's attention and help it make decisions for the benefit of the local community. Local councils exist to make and implement decisions collectively as a corporate body, not by individual councillors [**The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, AFTER A MEETING**].
3. **Attend and Actively Participate in Council Meetings: Decisions of the Parish Council can only be made at formally called council meetings and by those councillors who attend in person** [**Parish Council Meetings.pdf, #62**]. You are expected to attend meetings when summoned and take part in voting, respecting the decisions made by the majority [**The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 67 Meetings**]. The minutes of a meeting shall include the names of councillors who are present and absent [**HPC Standing Orders 2020 amended & adopted 16.5.2022.pdf, 3(t)ii**]. Unless standing orders provide otherwise, voting shall be by a show of hands, with the option for recorded votes or a signed ballot under specific conditions [**Co-option Policy adopted 28.02.2022.pdf, 3.2**]. Resolutions made at a meeting have immediate effect [**Parish Council Meetings.pdf, #62**].
4. **Declare and Register Interests:** You **must declare any private interests relating to your public duties** [**LGA2 Code of Conduct October 2022.pdf, Integrity**] and take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest [**LGA2 Code of Conduct October 2022.pdf, Integrity**]. Within 28 days of your election or appointment, you **must register with the Monitoring Officer the interests which fall within the categories of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs)** and other registerable interests [**Members Conduct and disclosure of their interests.pdf, #10, #43**]. Notification of a DPI will be entered into the member's register of

interests [**Members Conduct and disclosure of their interests.pdf, #50**]. At meetings, you must also declare any interests relevant to agenda items [**HPC Standing Orders 2020 amended & adopted 16.5.2022.pdf, 3(t)iii**].

5. **Maintain Accountability and Openness:** You should be **accountable to the public for your actions** [**LGA2 Code of Conduct October 2022.pdf, General Conduct**] and the manner in which you carry out your responsibilities and should co-operate fully and honestly with any scrutiny appropriate to your office [**LGA2 Code of Conduct October 2022.pdf, General Conduct**]. You should be as open as possible about your actions and those of the Parish Council and should be prepared to give reasons for those actions [**LGA2 Code of Conduct October 2022.pdf, General Conduct**]. The council shall publish information in accordance with its publication scheme [**Model Publication Scheme adopted 7.12.2022.pdf, Class 3, Class 4, Class 5, Class 6, Class 7**] and respond to requests for information [**Model Publication Scheme adopted 7.12.2022.pdf, Class 5**].
6. **Work Constructively with Other Councillors and the Clerk:** As a councillor, you will work with all other members of the council to stand for the interests of the whole community as a balanced local council. It is important to understand the distinct roles and responsibilities of councillors and the Clerk [**Parish Council - Roles & Responsibilities.pdf, CLERK, COUNCIL AND COUNCILLORS DIFFERING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**]. You should respect the professional role of the Clerk, who is responsible for the management and administration of the council's business and ensuring the council acts within the law [**Parish Council - Roles & Responsibilities.pdf, The Clerk**].
7. **Stay Informed About Local Issues and Diverse Views:** You have a responsibility to be well informed, especially about diverse local views.
8. **Comply with Standing Orders and Other Policies:** You must operate in accordance with the Hooe Parish Council's Standing Orders [**HPC Standing Orders 2020 amended & adopted 16.5.2022.pdf, 3(a)**], Financial Regulations [**HPC Finance Regulations Adopted 20.6.2022.pdf, 18.2**], Scheme of Delegation [**HPC Scheme of Delegation Adopted 16.5.2022 2022.pdf**], and all other policies adopted by the Council. This includes understanding and adhering to procedures for meetings, decision-making, handling correspondence [**Communication Policy adopted 27.02.2023 .pdf, 1.9, 1.10**], and other council business. Standing orders incorporate and reference many statutory requirements [**Standing Orders adopted 16.12.2024.pdf, How to use model standing orders**].
9. **Participate in Councillor Training:** All new members will be expected to undertake councillor training at the earliest opportunity [**The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 8 Councillors**]. Continuous learning and development are crucial for being an effective councillor.
10. **Sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office:** Before you can act as a councillor, you must sign a formal Declaration of Acceptance of Office at or before the first Council meeting following your election or co-option [**HPC Standing Orders 2020 amended & adopted 16.5.2022.pdf, 3(b)**], agreeing to operate in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct [**HPC Standing Orders 2020 amended & adopted 16.5.2022.pdf, 3(a), CODE OF CONDUCT AND DISPENSATIONS**], Standing Orders [**HPC Standing Orders 2020 amended & adopted 16.5.2022.pdf**], Financial Regulations [**HPC Finance Regulations Adopted 20.6.2022.pdf**], Scheme of Delegation [**HPC Scheme of Delegation Adopted 16.5.2022 2022.pdf**], and all adopted policies.
11. **Approach All Decisions with an Open Mind:** Councillors must remain predisposed to listening to all arguments and evidence presented, without bias or predetermined views. It is unlawful to approach meetings with a closed mind, especially where decisions are to be made in the public interest.
12. **Uphold the National Civility and Respect Policy:** Hooe Parish Council has adopted the National Civility and Respect Policy. All councillors, the Clerk, and members of the public are expected to treat each other with courtesy and respect at all times. Inappropriate behaviour, bullying, or disrespectful conduct will not be tolerated in any council setting.

Appendix 2

REFERENCED VERSION – Recommended Interview Questions

I. General Qualifications and Understanding of the Role

- Why are you interested in becoming a councillor for Hooe Parish Council? What motivates you to serve the community?
- Based on your understanding, what do you believe are the primary responsibilities of a Hooe Parish Councillor? (Referencing our previous conversation, this should align with the 10 key duties)
- Are you familiar with the time commitment required to be an effective councillor, including attending meetings, training, and engaging with the community? Please elaborate on how you envision managing these commitments alongside your other responsibilities.
- What skills and experiences do you possess that you believe would be particularly beneficial to the Parish Council and the community? (Consider skills relevant to decision-making, communication, problem-solving, etc.) [**Co-option Policy adopted 28.02.2022.pdf, 2.3**]
- Have you reviewed the Hooe Parish Council website and any publicly available information about the council's activities, priorities, and challenges? What are your initial impressions? [**The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 67 Serving the community**]
- (For candidates with prior councillor experience): Could you briefly describe your previous experience as a councillor? What were some of your key achievements and challenges?

II. Ethical Considerations and Code of Conduct

- Are you familiar with the concept of a Code of Conduct for councillors? What do you understand to be its purpose, and are you willing to adhere to the Hooe Parish Council's Code of Conduct? [**Co-option Policy adopted 28.02.2022.pdf, 2.3, The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 86 THE NOLAN PRINCIPLES, 87 THE CODE OF CONDUCT**]
- The principles of public life include integrity, objectivity, and accountability. Can you provide an example of how you have demonstrated these principles in your professional or personal life? [**LGA2 Code of Conduct October 2022.pdf, General Conduct**]
- What is your understanding of "declaration of interests" for councillors, and why is it important? Are you prepared to declare any interests as required and avoid conflicts of interest? [**The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 54 Declaring interests, 88 THE CODE OF CONDUCT**]
- (For candidates with prior councillor experience): Reflecting on your previous experience, can you describe a situation where you had to navigate a potential conflict of interest? How did you ensure you acted ethically and in the best interest of the community?
- What would you do if you witnessed a fellow councillor acting in a way that you believed was unethical or in breach of the Code of Conduct? [**The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 87 Leadership**]
- Do you understand the importance of maintaining confidentiality regarding council business and documents? [**Co-option Policy adopted 28.02.2022.pdf, 2.4**] What steps would you take to ensure confidentiality is maintained?

III. Community Engagement and Representation

- How do you plan to engage with the residents of Hooe Parish to understand their views, concerns, and priorities? [**The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 18 SERVING THE COMMUNITY, 64 Communication and social media**]

- Councillors represent the whole electorate, not just those who voted for them. How would you ensure that you consider the diverse needs and interests of all residents in your decision-making? **[The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 85]**
- What are your thoughts on the Parish Council's role in communicating with the community? What methods do you believe are most effective? **[The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 23 Serving the community]**
- How would you approach a situation where the views of different sections of the community on a particular issue are in conflict? **[The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 66 COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA]**
- Have you been involved in any community groups or initiatives in the past? Please tell us about your experience.
- (For candidates with prior councillor experience): Can you describe a time when you successfully represented the views of the community on a particular issue? What steps did you take?

IV. Teamwork, Communication, and Conflict Resolution within the Council

- How do you see yourself contributing to the effective teamwork of the Parish Council? **[The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 90, 95]**
- Effective communication between councillors and the Clerk is crucial. What are your expectations for communication within the council, and how would you ensure your communication is respectful and effective? **[The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 71 EMPLOYMENT OF THE PROPER OFFICER (CLERK)]**
- Councillors may have differing opinions on issues. How would you approach a situation where you strongly disagree with the views of other councillors? **[The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 67 At a meeting, 98]**
- What is your understanding of the role of the Clerk in supporting the Parish Council? How would you ensure a positive and productive working relationship with the Clerk? **[The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 33 Employment of the proper officer (clerk), 73, 90]**
- (For candidates with prior councillor experience): Can you describe a time when there were disagreements or conflicts within the council? How did you contribute to finding a resolution?
- How would you ensure that discussions during council meetings remain focused and productive? **[The Good Councillors Guide 2024.pdf, 67 At a meeting, 98]**