

Laverstock & Ford Parish Council

CANDIDATE CO-OPTION POLICY

Purpose	To set out a Code of Practice
Scope	All
Date adopted	20 th January 2025
Minute Ref:	25.011
Previous Versions	16 August 2021 21.123
Next Review	January 2027
Policy Owner	Full Council
Supersedes	None

Introduction

The Co-option of a Parish Councillor may occur when a vacancy remains after an election or where the resignation of a councillor causes a 'casual vacancy' to occur. Residents who apply to fill the vacancy may be 'co-opted' by vote of existing councillors, rather than calling an election.

Purpose

The policy identifies the procedures to be undertaken when considering co-option of candidates to become Parish Councillors. The purpose is to ensure that candidates are treated fairly and consistently, and that they fully understand the role of a Parish Councillor and all the implications of accepting the position. The Council must ensure, to the best of its ability, that the candidate is eligible and understands the resolve and commitment required to fulfil the responsibility.

Related Information

Local Government Association – Becoming a Councillor <https://www.local.gov.uk/becoming-councillor/becoming-councillor-0>

Laverstock & Ford Communities Neighbourhood Plan: <https://www.lfcnp.co.uk/>

Laverstock & Ford Parish Council: <http://www.laverstock-ford.co.uk/policies,-plans,-guides-and-operating-procedures.html>

National Association of Local Councils: <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications>

Pre Co-option process

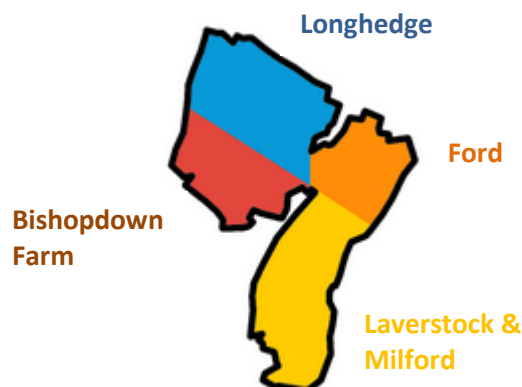
This process is intended to ensure that the prospective Councillor is fully aware of the regular activity and workload of the PC, the role of Councillors serving the Parish and the limitations of their authority.

- The candidate who has expressed an interest in becoming a councillor will be sent a letter regarding co-option by the Chair (Appendix 1)
- The candidate will be assigned two Councillors to act as sponsors and oversee the pre co-option process. Normally the Chair plus one other. (Appendix 2)
- The candidate is required to attend a minimum of two Parish Council meetings as an observer, before being considered for co-option.
- At an initial informal meeting with the Chair, after the candidate has attended one PC meeting, guidance will be offered regarding the interview process, and sufficient time given to the candidate for research before attending any further interviews. The Chair should ensure, as a minimum, that the candidate is aware of:-

Council Assets and responsibilities

A map showing the parish boundaries and location of Open Spaces can be found at <https://www.lfcnp.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Appendix-10-Designated-Local-Green-Spaces-V6a.pdf>

Ward Boundaries are:



Structure and workings of the council

Scheme of Delegation is available at <https://laverstockford-pc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Scheme-of-Delegations-Adopted-May-2024.pdf>

Previous Agendas and minutes are available at <https://laverstockford-pc.gov.uk/meetings>

- After the candidate has attended a second PC meeting, the Sponsors will arrange a formal interview (see Appendix 3). The meeting will also cover:
 - Structure of the Parish Council.
 - The Candidate's reasons for wishing to join the Parish Council.
 - Current and future activities of the Parish Council.
 - Minutes of the last meeting observed; to provide an opportunity for a two-way discussion on the events.
 - Roles and responsibilities of Councillors within the parish
 - Subgroups and the candidate choice
 - The Question/Scoring Sheet will be completed by the Sponsors.
- The outcome of the interview and recommendation of the Sponsors will be reported to Councillors who will have the opportunity to vote on the candidate's co-option.

Post Co-option process

A number of actions are essential to assist the integration of new Councillors, post co-option, into the Laverstock and Ford Parish Council. The following process will be adopted:

- A Councillor may be appointed to mentor the new Councillor, with the level and duration of mentoring dependent on their experience and knowledge of parish issues.

Exemption from the Co-option Process

The Parish Council reserves the right to exempt a candidate from having to undertake the Co-option Policy and Procedure.

Appendix 1. Letter to candidate



Laverstock & Ford Parish Council

Incorporating Milford, Bishopdown Farm, Old Sarum & Longhedge

3 Pilgrims Way, Laverstock, Salisbury, SP1 1RZ

Tel: 01722 411847

Email: parish-clerk@laverstockford.gov.uk

Date xxxxxx

To Candidate

XXXXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Dear

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Councillor for Laverstock and Ford Parish Council. We have a formal co-option process aimed at ensuring you understand and are well prepared for the role. Reading the documentation indicated will give you a clear understanding of what will be expected of you as a councillor and also help you to understand the limitations of the role. I hope you find it helpful.

Process

1. On our website at www.laverstock-ford.co.uk, under the Parish Council tab, you will find a page with all our policies and operating procedures, including our Constitution and Code of Conduct. At this stage, it is important that you read at least these two documents carefully. In addition, on the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) website at www.nalc.gov.uk, under the Publications tab, you will find the Good Councillors Guide. Again, it is important to read this guide carefully. These three documents should help you understand the role you would be taking on.
2. You will be asked to attend two consecutive Parish Council meetings as an observer, to help you understand how council meetings work and the amount of work involved in being a councillor. Before each meeting, the agenda and minutes of the last meeting are available on our website.
3. During this time I will arrange an informal meeting with you, at which I will explain the co-option process. You will have an opportunity to ask me any questions you may have. I will also cover some detail about the structure and operating practice including the roles and responsibilities of Councillors and the work of our committees.
4. You will be assigned two Councillors to act as your Sponsors. They will work with you throughout the co-option process.
5. After attendance at the second meeting your sponsors will arrange a formal meeting with you which will be more interactive, when there will be further discussion on:
 - a) Current and future activities within the Parish Council
 - b) Your reasons for wanting to join the Council and how you think you will fit in.
 - c) You will be asked about your understanding of aspects of the Code of Conduct and the Good Councillors Guide.
6. Following this meeting you will be invited to a full Council Meeting where you will be asked to briefly address all Councillors explaining why you want to become a Councillor. You will then be asked to briefly leave the meeting whilst the sponsors report their recommendation on your co-option and all Councillors will vote. If your co-option is successful, you will then be asked by the Parish Clerk to sign a declaration of acceptance.
7. Following your co-option, a sponsor will remain available to assist you with any follow-up guidance for as long as you need it.

In the event that you are not co-opted, you are entitled to request the reason for the Councillors decision.

I hope this information is helpful and if you have any questions please contact me or XXXXX XXXXX, our Parish Clerk.

Yours Sincerely

XXXXX XXXXX

Chair of Laverstock & Ford Parish Council

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

www.laverstock-ford.gov.uk – Laverstock and Ford Parish Council website where you will find all our Policies and Procedures, minutes from past meetings and information about the parish including maps and ward boundaries. In addition to the Code of Conduct, you will find the Scheme of Delegation on our Policies page, giving details of the structure of the council and it's committees. The Agendas and Minutes page has details of all recent meetings and the topics and projects that the council is currently working on.

www.lfcnp.co.uk – Laverstock and Ford Parish Councils Neighbourhood Plan website. The Neighbourhood Plan has been a huge project undertaken by the steering group on behalf of the parish council. The plan documents include a map showing the parish boundaries and location of Open Spaces, landscape sensitivity assessments of all corners of the parish, together with extensive information on planning considerations for the parish.

www.nalc.gov.uk – National Association of Local Councils website. NALC is the national body representing the interests of parish councils and hold many national policies and publications.

www.wiltshire-alc.org.uk – Wiltshire Association of Local Councils, our local branch of NALC

Appendix 2. Guidance for Sponsors

LAVERSTOCK AND FORD PARISH COUNCIL

Guidance for Sponsors mentoring Residents who wish to become Councillors

The co-option of a Parish Councillor can occur when a vacancy remains after an election or when the resignation of a councillor causes a 'casual' vacancy'.

This guidance is prepared to assist Councillors who accept to undertake the role of mentoring a candidate to become a Parish Councillor. Sponsors have four objectives:

1. INFORMATION GIVING

To give the candidate a clear understanding of the extent of the work of a Councillor in the Parish. To include:

- Role and responsibility of Councillor.
- Committees, their function and candidate's choice
- Refer to the website on information, policies and procedures available.

2. INFORMATION RECEIVING

To test the candidate's motivation and enthusiasm to become a Councillor.

To ensure that the candidate is conversant with the Code of Conduct and the Good Councillor Guide. The Code of Conduct describes how a councillor must behave and it is expected that the candidate will have read the document and be able to address issues/questions raised. This requires the candidate to be questioned about their understanding of the documents (the scored questions are an aid to this). Failure to have read and understood contents may point to a lack of understanding or time commitment.

Where the person sees themselves fitting in team of councillors.

3. RECOMMENDATION

Make recommendation to the full council whether the candidate is suitable to be co-opted as a Councillor.

4. MENTOR ROLE

One or more of the sponsors may continue after co-option to provide a mentor service for the new Councillor.

Appendix 3. SCORED QUESTIONS

COUNCILLOR RECRUITMENT PATHWAY

Scoring Sheet

Not read the Code of Conduct. Answers irrelevant. Hesitant about working collectively. No experience of working with a team. Not forthcoming about personal goals SCORE 0.	Has read the Code of Conduct and shows some effort to understand the fundamentals. No examples of collective initiatives. Enthusiastic to learn. Forthcoming when prompted. SCORE 1.	Has read the Code of Conduct and shows enthusiasm to learn and participate. Some examples given of previous collective initiatives. Recognises the importance of working as team. No hidden agendas SCORE 2.
Number	Question	Score
1	Please describe your motivation for becoming a Parish Councillor.	
2	A matter comes before the PC which is outside your experience/expertise. What would you do? For example, would you: - Listen to the debate and try to form your own opinion, asking questions if you need to. - Try to identify which Councillors seem to be knowledgeable on the subject and vote with them - Abstain from voting on the matter -	
3	A matter comes before the PC for discussion, but it is in a different Ward from the one you represent. What would you do? For example, would you: - Leave it to the Councillors representing that particular Ward - Try to participate in the debate - Abstain from the vote on grounds that it is not in your patch -	

4	This question is about Declaration of Interests. The code of conduct gives examples of two different types of interest councillors might have relevant to council business. Can you give examples of situations where councillors would have a Pecuniary and a non-Pecuniary interest?	
5	Party Political influences. You may have Party Political allegiances as is your right to do so. To what extent do you believe such political loyalties will have an influence on your decision making when engaged in debate with other Councillors?	
6	Previous experience with a Collective Responsibility. Please give an example of a recent activity/project where you worked with a group of other people. What did you achieve and what did you find was most rewarding about it?	
7	Taking into account what you know about the work of the PC, do you have any personal goals you would like to achieve in the first twelve months of becoming a Councillor?	
8	The council's work involves spending public money and representing the views of the local community on issues such as planning. How can we ensure the decisions we make reflect the views of the local community?	
9	Are there any questions you would like to ask us?	
Total		

Appendix 4. Summary Pathway.

- 1. Resident applies to become a Parish Councillor.**
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- 2. Letter from the Chair to the Candidate explaining the process of co-option and inviting participation**
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- 3. Sponsors by Chair**
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- 4. Candidate attends first PC meeting as an observer**
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- 5. Informal meeting with Chair**
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- 6. Candidate attends second PC meeting as an observer**
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- 7. Candidate attends interview with Sponsors. Includes use of formal questions.**
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- 8. Sponsors report back to Full Council meeting with recommendations, explaining reason. Candidate invited to briefly address the meeting.**
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- 9. From Parish Clerk to Candidate – Declaration of Acceptance or PC decline to co-option.**
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- 10. Discussion between Sponsors regarding mentoring arrangements.**
↓
- 11. Candidate attends first meeting as a Councillor.**