



Grange-over-Sands Town Council Co-option Policy

**Adopted July 2023
Reviewed March 2024**

The co-option of a Town Councillor occurs in two instances:

1. When an ordinary vacancy has arisen on the Town Council after the ordinary elections held every four years.
2. When a casual vacancy has arisen on the Town Council and no poll (by-election) has been called.

This procedure is to ensure that a fair and transparent process is undertaken:

On receipt of written confirmation from Westmorland and Furness Electoral Services that the casual vacancy can be filled by means of co-option, the Clerk will:

1. Advertise the vacancy on the Council noticeboard(s) and website.
2. Advise the Council that the Co-option Policy has been instigated.

Grange Town Council will seek and encourage applications from anyone who is eligible to stand as a Town Councillor. Councillors and residents can legally approach individuals to suggest they might wish to consider putting their names forward for co-option and encourage them to register a short (500 words maximum) expression of interest.

The Town 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.

However, it is not desirable that the electorate be left partially unrepresented for a significant length of time; neither does it contribute to the effective and efficient working of the Town Council if there are insufficient Councillors to share the workload, provide a broad cross-section of skills and interests, or to achieve meeting quorums.

However, this must not be used as an excuse to co-opt, and any vacancies will remain an agenda item until filled.

Applicants for co-option are asked to:

1. Submit a written expression of interest, giving information about themselves and why they wish to serve on the Council.
2. Confirm their eligibility for the position of Councillor within the statutory rules (see below pages 3-4 for criteria).
3. Attend an informal meeting, an opportunity to meet serving councillors, discuss the role and ask questions.

Copies of the applicant's expression of interest will be circulated to all Councillors by the Clerk prior to the informal meeting. All such documents will be treated by the Clerk and all Councillors as confidential.

At the next available Council meeting, the applications will be considered.

The Council may select the most suitable candidate but is not obliged to select anyone from the candidates that apply. Candidates are welcome (but are not required) to attend as members of the public. The Council may choose to discuss each candidate's suitability for the role when they and members of the public are not present.

Nomination and Voting

The Chairman will request the Councillors present to nominate any of the candidates. Candidates will require a proposer and seconder to progress to the voting stage. If there is only one vacancy, a councillor may only nominate or second one candidate.

If no candidates are nominated (i.e., if no councillor proposed them) the vacancy shall remain open.

Councillors vote by show of hands.

If there are exactly as many as, or fewer candidates than vacancies, the Council may vote on a composite motion, duly proposed and seconded, that all candidates be co-opted. If there are more candidates than vacancies, it will be necessary for existing councillors present at the meeting to vote.

If there is more than one vacancy, a councillor may nominate one person per seat. Each councillor will have only one vote per seat i.e., two vacancies will enable votes for two different people.

Voting will be according to the statutory requirements; that a successful candidate must have received an absolute majority vote of those present and voting. If there are more than two candidates for one vacancy and no one at the first count receives a majority, the candidate with the fewest votes should be eliminated and the remainder put to the vote again. The process should be repeated as necessary until one candidate has an overall majority.

The Chairman has the casting vote.

After the vote has been concluded the Chairman declares that the successful candidate is duly elected. The successful candidate is then declared co-opted to the Council and summoned to attend the next meeting.

Following Co-option

The Clerk will advise the Monitoring Officer of anyone co-opted onto the Council.

All new councillors are required to have read and understood the Code of Conduct and other policies, rules and protocols adopted by the Council.

Before the successful candidate can participate in Council business, they must sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office. This can be at the meeting or prior to the next meeting. Failure to sign will indicate the candidate does not want to join the Council.

All new councillors must, within 28 days of appointment to office, register their Interests with the Unitary Council Monitoring Officer. Failure to complete will assume that the candidate does not wish to be a member.

The successful candidates' term of office runs until the next quadrennial elections for the Town Council.

Eligibility of Candidate

To be eligible to apply for a role as a Town Councillor you must:

- Be at least 18 years old on the date of your nomination.
- Be a British citizen, a qualifying Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of a member state of the European Union.

And meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Be an elector for the Parish and continue to be an elector from the day of your nomination onwards.
- Have resided in or rented/tenanted land in the Parish for the past 12 months.
- Have your principal, or only place of work in the Parish for the last 12 months.
- For the previous 12 months lived in the parish or within 3 miles of the Parish boundary.

Disqualifications

There are certain disqualifications for being a Town or Parish Councillor (s80 of the Local Government Act 1972), of which the main are:

- Holding a paid office or employment under the Town or Parish Council.
- Subject to bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order.
- Having been sentenced to a term of imprisonment (whether suspended or not) of three months or more, without the option of a fine during the preceding five years.

- Being disqualified under any enactment relating to corrupt or illegal electoral practices.
- Being subject to the notification requirement of or under Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Next review: 2028