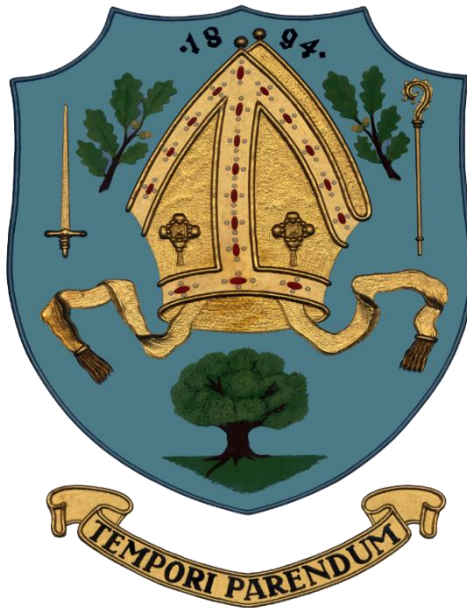


BISHOP AUCKLAND TOWN COUNCIL



Co-Option Policy

Effective from: 28th May 2026
Last reviewed: May 2026
Next review:
Version Control: V1
Previous revision dates:
Review Panel Full Council

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Costs are as per the publication scheme.

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2 Introduction

This policy sets out the procedure to ensure there is a transparent and consistent process which complies with legislation for the co-option of Council members to Bishop Auckland Town Council (BATC). The Co-option process is entirely managed by Bishop Auckland Town Council.

3 Identification of Vacancies

The Co-option of a Councillor occurs when a casual vacancy has arisen on the Council or in an election year where a ward vacancy has not been filled via the election process.

A casual vacancy occurs when:

- A Councillor fails to make their declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time.
- A Councillor resigns.
- A Councillor dies.
- A Councillor becomes disqualified; or
- A Councillor fails to attend a Town Council meeting or committee meeting for six (6) months.

BATC must notify the Principal Authority (Durham County Council) of a Casual Vacancy and then advertise the vacancy and give the electors the opportunity to request an election. This occurs when ten electors write to the Principal Authority stating that an election is requested. If an election is called, this will be organised by the Principal Authority. The costs of holding an election will be paid for by BATC.

If an election is not called this will be confirmed in writing by the Principal Authority to the Town Clerk and the casual vacancy can then be filled by means of co-option.

4 Eligible Criteria

Any candidate who wishes to apply for co-option to the Council will be asked to confirm that they are eligible for co-option. To be eligible they must be:

- Be at least 18 years of age (that is, the day of nomination or election).
- Be a British citizen, an eligible Commonwealth citizen, or a citizen of the Republic of Ireland.

In addition, they must meet at least one of the following:

- Be a registered elector of the Parish or have lived, worked, or owned property in the Parish for at least 12 months.
- On the relevant day and thereafter they continue to be on the electoral register for the Parish.
- During the whole of the twelve months before that day, they have owned or tenanted land or premises in the Parish.

- During the whole of the twelve months before that day their principal or only place of work has been in the Parish.
- During the whole of the twelve months before that day they have resided in the parish or within three miles of it.
- Not be disqualified from being a councillor under any legal grounds, including undischarged bankruptcy, conviction of certain criminal offenses, or being employed by the parish council.

5 Advertising Vacancies

The Council will publicise any vacancies through appropriate channels, such as the town council website, noticeboards, and local media, inviting expressions of interest from eligible individuals. The notice will include the eligibility criteria, the deadline for applications, and a description of the role and responsibilities of a Town Councillor.

6 Application Process

Interested candidates must apply to the Town Clerk by the stated deadline.

Applications should include:

- A brief personal statement outlining the candidate's qualifications, experience, and reasons for wishing to join the Town Council.
- Any relevant background or experience that demonstrates suitability for the role.

The Town Clerk will acknowledge receipt of all applications and will ensure that candidates meet the eligibility requirements.

7 Selection Process

A meeting of the Town Council will be convened to consider all applications. There must be two thirds of elected councillors must be present at the meeting for the co-option to be considered. The selection process will be fair, transparent, and based on the merit of the candidates. Prior to the Town Council all members of the Council will receive the information provided by the candidates. Where the Council is discussing the merits of candidates and inevitably their personal attributes, this could be prejudicial and the Council should resolve to exclude the members of the press and public.

Each candidate will be invited to attend the meeting. The chairman will invite each candidate to address the Members outlining their reasons for wishing to fill the vacancy and their relevant skills and experience and why they would like to be a town councillor. Each candidate will be allocated a maximum of 5 minutes each. Once all candidates have presented and answered any questions, they will be asked to withdraw from the meeting until the discussions and voting has been completed.

The Chairman will then request those Councillors present to nominate any of the candidates. Candidates require a proposer and seconder to progress to the voting stage.

The Chairman will then place the names of those who have been nominated and seconded into alphabetical order and proceed to a vote.

Voting will be by a show of hands until a candidate receives an absolute majority of those Councillors present. At this stage the successful Councillor will be declared co-opted.

Should no single candidate receive a majority on the first vote the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated. Voting will then take place on the remaining candidates and continue until the candidate receives an absolute majority.

The successful candidate is then declared co-opted to the council and will be summoned to attend the next council meeting when they will sign their Declaration of Acceptance.

Councillors will have one vote per vacancy. In the event of a tie between candidates for one vacancy the Chairman will exercise their casting vote.

If there is only one candidate for one vacancy, they are not automatically co-opted. The candidate will still need a proposer and seconder to progress to a vote. Should no candidate be deemed suitable then the Council can declare a no contest and arrange for vacancy to be re-advertised.

If a further vacancy is declared within a year of a previous co-option, the Council reserve the right to co-opt an unsuccessful candidate without the need to re-advertise if they feel this is appropriate

8 Conflicts of Interest

Any councillor who has a personal or financial interest in any of the applicants must declare this interest and may be asked to recuse themselves from the voting process.

9 Co-opted members

The successful candidate will become a councillor once they have signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and Register their Interests with the Monitoring Officer. Co-opted members will be appointed to serve the remainder of the term of the council (until the next election).

A co-opted member of the Council is no different to any other elected representative (member), other than they are not eligible to claim the monthly members allowance,

however if they were to be elected into the position of chairman, they would be eligible to claim the Chairman's allowance as this is a special allowance.

10 Appeals

There will be no formal appeal process, as the decision to co-opt a new member lies within the discretion of the Town Council. However, candidates not selected may request feedback on their application from the Town Clerk.

11 Record of Co-option

The Town Clerk will keep a record of the co-option process, including the candidates considered, the reasons for the selection, and the final outcome. This record will be made available for inspection by the public on request.