



PRUDHOE TOWN COUNCIL CO-OPTION POLICY

ADOPTED at the Ordinary Meeting on 28th May 2025

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy sets out the procedure to ensure there is compliance with legislation and continuity of procedures in the co-option of members to the Town Council (referred to in this policy as 'the Council'). The co-option procedure is entirely managed by the Council and this policy will ensure that a fair and equitable process is carried out.

1.2 Prudhoe Town Council is composed of six wards: Castle and Eltringham; Castlefields and Low Prudhoe; Mickley; Prudhoe Hall; Prudhoe West and Halfway and West Wylam.

2. Reasons for co-option

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

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

2.2 Ordinary Vacancy - An ordinary vacancy occurs when there are insufficient candidates to fill all the seats on a Council at the ordinary elections held every four years. Any candidates who were nominated are automatically elected to the Council and any remaining vacancies are known as "ordinary vacancies". Provided there are enough Councillors to constitute a quorum, the Council is usually able to co-opt a volunteer to fill the vacancies.

2.3 Casual Vacancy – A casual vacancy occurs when:

- A councillor fails to make his declaration of acceptance of office at the proper time;
- A councillor resigns;
- A councillor dies;
- A councillor becomes disqualified; or
- A councillor fails for six (6) months to attend meetings of a council committee or subcommittee or to attend as a representative of the council a meeting of an outside body unless their absence has been previously agreed by the Council.

2.4 The Council must notify the Unitary Council (Northumberland County Council) of a casual vacancy and give electors for the ward the opportunity to request an election.

This occurs when ten (10) electors of that ward write to Northumberland County Council stating that an election is requested.

2.5 If a by-election is called, a polling station will be set up by Northumberland County Council and the people of the ward will be asked to go to the polls to vote for candidates who will have put themselves forward by way of a nomination paper. Prudhoe Town Council will pay the costs of the election. The people of the ward have fourteen days (not including weekends, bank holidays and other notable days), to claim the by-election, but the Electoral Services Office of Northumberland County Council will advise the Clerk of the closing date.

2.6 If more than one (1) candidate is then nominated, a by-election takes place but if only one (1) candidate is put forward they are duly elected without a ballot.

2.7 If ten (10) residents of that ward do not request a by-election within fourteen (14) days of the vacancy notice being posted, as advised by the Electoral Services Office, the Council is able to co-opt a volunteer.

2.8 Should casual vacancies occur within six (6) months of the next regular election of the Council then no by-election can take place. The Council may co-opt new members if it so wishes.

3 Confirmation of co-option

3.1 On receipt of written confirmation from the Electoral Services Office that no by-election has been claimed, the casual vacancy can be filled by means of co-option. The Clerk will:

- Advertise the vacancy for at least four (4) weeks or such other period as the Council may agree on the Council notice boards, website and social media.
- Advise Northumberland County Council that the co-option policy has been instigated.

3.2 This procedure will also apply in the case of an ordinary vacancy where the Electoral Services Office has confirmed that there were insufficient nominations to fill all the seats but there are sufficient town councillors elected to constitute a quorum.

3.3 Councillors elected by co-option are full members of Prudhoe Town Council, with the same rights and responsibilities as members elected at ordinary or by-elections.

4 Eligibility of Candidates

4.1 The Council is able to consider any person to fill a vacancy provided that:

- They are 18 or over
- They are a British citizen, a qualifying Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any other member state of the European Union.

and at least one of the following apply:

- They are and continue to be, registered as a local government elector for the Parish and continues to be an elector.

- Has resided in the Parish for the past twelve months or rented/tenanted land in the Parish.
- Has had their principal or only place of work in the Parish for the past twelve months.
- Has lived within three miles of the Parish for the past twelve months.

4.2 There are certain disqualifications for being a parish councillor, (see Section 80 of the Local Government Act 1972), of which the main are:

- Holding a paid office or employment under the Council
- Are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order.
- Have been sentenced to prison for three months or more (including suspended sentences) during the five years before election day.
- Have been convicted of a corrupt or illegal practice by an election court.
- Are subject to any relevant notification requirements, or a relevant order, in respect of a sexual offence.

4.3 Candidates found to be offering inducements of any kind will be disqualified.

5 Applications

5.1 Candidates will be requested to:

- Submit information about themselves, by way of completing a short application form (a copy of the application form is attached as Appendix A)
- Confirm their eligibility for the position of councillor within the statutory rules (a copy of the eligibility form is attached as Appendix B).

5.2 Following receipt of applications, the Clerk will place an agenda item on the next suitable Council meeting 'To receive written applications for the office of Town Councillor and to consider co-option of a candidate to fill the existing vacancy'.

5.3 Copies of the eligible candidates' applications will be circulated to all Councillors by the Clerk at least three (3) clear days prior to the meeting of the Council, where the co-option will be considered. All such documents will be treated by the Clerk and Councillors as strictly private and confidential.

5.4 Candidates will be advised of the date and sent a full agenda of the meeting at which they are to be considered for appointment. Candidates will also be informed that they will be invited to speak in support of their application at the meeting.

6 The Co-option Meeting

6.1 At the co-option meeting, candidates will be given five (5) minutes maximum to introduce themselves to current councillors, give information on their background and experience and explain why they wish to become a Councillor for Prudhoe Town Council.

6.2 The process will be carried out in the public session and there will be no private discussions between Councillors prior to a vote being taken.

6.3 The Chair of the meeting will then ask up to three questions to each candidate. These questions will have been submitted prior to the meeting by current Councillors.

6.4 Following the candidate presentations and questions, Councillors will proceed to a

Title and Full Name	
Home Address inc. postcode	
Telephone Number	
Email Address	

vote in the form of a show of hands. Each councillor will be given the same number of votes as there are vacancies.

6.5 Voting will be according to statutory requirements, in that the successful candidate must receive a majority vote of those present and voting.

6.6 If there are more than two (2) candidates for a vacancy and there is no candidate with an overall majority in the first round of voting, the candidate with the least number of votes will be removed from the process. Further rounds of voting will then take place, with the process repeated until a candidate receives the required majority.

6.7 In the case of an equality of votes, the Chair of the meeting has the second or casting vote. The Chair cannot abstain in this case.

6.8 After the vote has been concluded, the Chair will declare the successful candidate duly elected.

6.9 The successful candidate will be invited to sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office, included an undertaking to abide by the Council's Code of Conduct, and may take office thereafter.

6.10 The Clerk will notify the Electoral Office at Northumberland County Council of the new councillor appointment. The successful candidate must complete the 'Registration of Interests' form within the required twenty-eight days (28) of being elected. The form should be handed to the Clerk for forwarding to the Monitoring Officer.

6.11 If insufficient candidates come forward for co-option, the process should continue, whereby the vacancies are advertised again.

APPENDIX A

Application for Co-Option – Prudhoe Town Council

About You

Please provide the council with some background information about yourself

Reasons for applying

Please provide the council with your reasons for wanting to become a Town Councillor

Use of Personal Information

Prudhoe Town Council will use your information, including that which you provide on this application form, to assess your suitability to be a town councillor. The information provided will remain private and confidential in line with the Data Protection Act.

Declaration and Consent

I have read the section entitled 'Use of Personal Information' and by signing this form I consent to the use and disclosure of my information included this application form.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

Eligibility for Co-Option – Prudhoe Town Council

In order to be eligible for co-option as a Prudhoe Town Councillor you must:

- **Be 18 or over**
- **Be a British citizen, a qualifying Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any other member state of the European Union.**

Additionally, you must be able to meet one of the following qualifications set out below:

Please tick whichever applies to you:	
I am and continue to be, registered as a local government elector for the Parish and continue to be an elector; OR	
I have, during the whole of the twelve months preceding the date of my co-option occupied, as owner or tenant, land or other premises in the Parish; OR	
My principal or only place of work during those twelve months has been in the Parish; OR	
I have, during the whole of those twelve months resided in the Parish or within three (3) miles of it.	

Please note that under Section 80 of the Local Government Act 1972 a person is disqualified from being a Town Councillor if they:

- Hold a paid office or employment under the Council;
- Are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order;
- Have been sentenced to prison for three months or more (including suspended sentences) during the five years before election day;
- Have been convicted of a corrupt or illegal practice by an election court;
- Are subject to any relevant notification requirements, or a relevant order, in respect of a sexual offence.

Declaration	
I.....hereby confirm that I am eligible for the vacancy of Prudhoe Town Councillor and the information given on this form is a true and accurate record.	
Signature	
Date	