

Co-option of Councillors

Wickhambrook is allocated 8 Parish Councillors who are elected for a period of four years or co-opted to fill vacancies as necessary. The most recent Parish and District Elections took place on 4th May last year. Cllr Sarah Pugh was re-elected as our District Councillor to West Suffolk Council, and four of our Councillors stood and were returned uncontested:

Cllr Paul Couzens
Cllr Mike Lavelle
Cllr Sandy Thwaite and
Cllr Tracey Turner

Cllr Mel Karunaratne was co-opted onto the parish council at its September meeting (23.09.04), and the parish council sadly noted the resignation of Sandy Thwaite at its January meeting this year.

This leaves four vacancies on the parish council, all of which may be filled by co-option.

At the Annual Meeting on 18th May, the parish council adopted a new policy on co-option of councillors, providing clear guidance on the process, an application form and job description (attached as **Appendix A**).

The clerk has advertised the vacancies on the parish notice board, the website, items published to Facebook, the parish newsletter, Parish Pump and Wickhambrook Scene.

The clerk has been notified of two expressions of interest, both candidates, Andrea Grimes and Linda Smith having submitted being eligible, and not disqualified from serving as a councillor.

Recommendation:

That Andrea Grimes and Linda Smith be co-opted on to Wickhambrook Parish Council to serve as councillors forthwith.

WICKHAMBROOK PARISH COUNCIL

Co-option of Councillors

Vacancies may exist following an election in which there were insufficient candidates, or during the term of a council due to resignation etc. The latter are known as 'casual vacancies' which must be notified to the local community. If a by-election is not required, the Council must endeavor to fill the vacancies by co-option.

Qualifying criteria

Unless disqualified, under s.79, Local Government Act 1972 a person is qualified to be elected (or co-opted) to a council if they are a qualifying Commonwealth citizen, or an EU citizen, are 18 years of age or over and:

- on that day they are and continue to be an elector for the parish; **or**
- during the whole of the previous 12 months have occupied as owner/tenant any land or other premises in that area; **or**
- their principal or only place of work during that 12 months has been in that area; **or**
- has resided in, or within three miles of, the Parish for the past twelve months

Disqualification

Under s.80 of the 1972 Act, a person is disqualified from being a Parish Councillor if they:

- hold any paid office or employment with the Parish Council; **or**
- is the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order, an interim restrictions order, a debt relief restrictions order, or interim order; **or**
- have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment (whether suspended or not) of not less than three months, without the option of a fine during the preceding five years; **or**
- have been disqualified under any enactment relating to corrupt or illegal electoral practices.

Applications

Candidates are asked to submit the attached form which enables them to confirm that they meet the qualifying criteria and are not disqualified, as well as to provide some basic information to help the Council choose in the event of there being more applicants than vacant seats.

At the meeting

When applications have been received, the co-option will be placed on the agenda of a suitable meeting of the Parish Council.

If there are the same number of, or less, eligible candidates than vacancies then the Council simply resolves to co-opt them on to the Council. Where there are more candidates than vacant seats, the Council will select the required number.

The selection will be an open, fair process with the public present, including candidates unless they choose to leave. Each candidate will be given an opportunity to briefly address the Council should they wish. All valid applications will be considered, including those of candidates not present.

In cases of more than one vacancy, each will be dealt with separately. Members will be asked to vote for their preferred candidate. An absolute majority is required and if there are more than two candidates, the process in (model) standing order 8 will be followed.

Once the process has been completed, the Council then co-opts them to the Council with a formal resolution. The successful candidates take office immediately and can take part in the remainder of the meeting should they wish to do so. New councillors must make a declaration of acceptance of office and, where possible, this will be dealt with at that meeting, but the law only requires it to be made at/before the next meeting (or a later meeting agreed by Council).

All councillors are required under the Localism Act 2011 to complete a Notification of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests form within 28 days of taking office. The Clerk to the Council will forward this to the Monitoring Officer of the district council.