

Procedure

Co-option

1. This procedure must be read in conjunction with the council's co-option policy.
2. Following notification from Dorset Council that there are fewer than 14 candidates for an ordinary election or fewer than 10 electors have called for a by-election following a casual vacancy, the full council will be notified, and the co-option process will start.
3. If a casual vacancy occurs within six months of an election, there is no requirement to co-opt a councillor.
4. Following Full Council notification, a public notice will be issued seeking candidates for co-option. The notice will be published in a local newspaper and posted on the council's website and notice board, and on social media. The public notice will give candidates at least two weeks to submit an application for co-option.
- 5.. Those considering applying for co-option will be given the opportunity to meet with the town clerk.
6. Each candidate's application must be accompanied by a qualifying address, a nominator and seconder, and a 250-word supporting statement.
7. Each candidate must also provide a written declaration to certify they meet the eligibility criteria set out in s79 of the Local Government Act 1972 and are not disqualified under s80 of the 1972 Act.
8. Receipt of applications will be confirmed, and candidates will be given a copy of the co-option policy and procedure to appraise them of the decision-making process.

The decision-making process

9. If there is only one candidate for co-option, the applicant is appointed, automatically.
10. if there is more than one candidate, the co-option appointment must be made by the full council. If appropriate, an extraordinary meeting of the full council can be arranged to consider and approve the co-option of a councillor.
11. Candidates will be invited to meet councillors 45 minutes before the start of the Full Council meeting.
12. At the Full Council meeting, applicants will be given the opportunity to give a five-minute presentation on why they are seeking co-option, and to detail their skills and experience.
13. When the candidates have made their presentations, they will be invited to adjourn to the mayor's parlour.

14. The council will vote on and move into exempt business to allow members to consider the candidates and start the process of voting for their preferred applicant.
15. If there are two candidates, members will consider each application and return to open session to vote on their preferred candidate.

The voting processes

16. If there are three or more candidates, a two-stage voting process will be entered into. At the end of stage one, two candidates will remain.
17. At any time in the process and in line with standing orders, members can request either a signed ballot or a recorded vote.

Stage one

18. Stage one of the process takes place in exempt business. The aim of this stage of the process is to reduce the number of candidates to two.
19. Members cast a single vote for their preferred candidate in one or more rounds of voting. The purpose of each voting round is to eliminate the candidate with the lowest number of votes until two remain.
20. At any stage in the process, if more than one candidate has zero votes, they will all be eliminated.
21. For illustration, if five candidates are being considered and more than one candidate has the lowest number of votes, e.g., in the first round of voting candidate A has 3 votes, candidate B has 3 votes, candidate C has 2 votes, candidate D has 2 votes and candidate E has 2 votes, then candidates A and B will go through to the next round and a further vote will take place between candidates C, D and E to establish who has the lowest number of votes. In this instance up to 12 votes will be divided among three candidates.
22. It is possible that a second vote at this, or any, stage of the elimination process may not produce a candidate for elimination, i.e., two candidates could tie with the lowest number of votes (6:3:3) or the three remaining candidates could receive the same number of votes (4:4:4).
23. In the first instance, the candidate with the highest number of votes would go through to the next stage of the process and a further round of voting would take place between the two remaining candidates. If there was a further tie, (6:6) the mayor would exercise their casting vote in favour of their preferred candidate and the remaining candidate would be eliminated.
24. In the second instance, the mayor would exercise their casting vote in favour of a candidate and a further vote would be held between the remaining two candidates.
25. The process will repeat itself until two candidates are left.

Stage two

26. The council will move back into open session; the candidates will be invited back into the council chamber and they will be informed of the council's decision, i.e., who has been eliminated and the two remaining candidates.
27. A vote is taken on the two remaining candidates and the successful co-option candidate approved by resolution of the council.
28. On request, the town clerk will provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates.

Declaration of acceptance of office

29. The successful candidate will be asked to sign their declaration of acceptance of office.

Implementation date: 16 December 2021

Review date: December 2024

Author: John Wright, town clerk