MEMBER CO-OPTION POLICY

1. Introduction

1.1 There are two circumstances under which the council may, if it so wishes, proceed to fill a casual vacancy by co-option:

- When a ward seat has been left vacant because no eligible candidate stood for election at the full elections for a new council (currently every four years)
- During the life of the council, a ward seat falls vacant but the required 10 electors of the ward have not called for a poll (by-election) within the legally specified time period following publication of the notice of vacancy

1.2 The 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.

1.3 However, it is not desirable that electors in a particular ward be left partially or fully unrepresented for a significant length of time. Neither does it contribute to effective and efficient working of the council if there are insufficient Members to share the workload equitably; to provide a broad cross-section of skills and interests; or to achieve meeting quorums without difficulty, given that some absence is unavoidable at times.

1.4 To ensure a fair and transparent process is undertaken, this policy outlines the procedure to be followed by the council when co-option is considered.

2. Application process

2.1 On receipt of written notice from the Democratic Services Manager at Mid Sussex District Council that a casual vacancy may be filled by means of co-option:

- The Clerk will advertise the vacancy or vacancies to be filled by co-option within 21 days of receipt of the written notification.
- The co-option advertisement will include the closing date for acceptance of requests for consideration (between 14 and 30 days after the date of the advertisement) and the number of vacancies, and will be displayed on the council website, social media platforms and noticeboards.

2.2 Members may point out the vacancies and the process to any qualifying candidate(s). Candidates found to be offering inducements of any kind will be disqualified.

2.3 Applicants for a vacancy will be asked to:

- Submit information about themselves by completing a short application form (attached in appendix 1), including a description of their interest in becoming a councillor and specifying any skills or qualifications which may benefit the parish council.
- Confirm their eligibility for the position of councillor within the statutory rules, a copy of which will be attached to the application form.

2.4 Copies of the applicant's application form will be circulated to all Members by the Clerk at least three clear working days prior to the Council meeting where the co-option will be considered. The application forms and any supporting documents will be treated by the Clerk and Members as strictly confidential.

2.5 Candidates will be sent a full agenda of the meeting at which they are to be considered for appointment, and will be informed they may, if they so wish speak for up to **three** minutes about their application during the co-option item on the agenda at the meeting.

3. Voting procedure

3.1 Voting will be according to the agreed procedure in standing orders, namely:
'Where more than 2 persons have been nominated for a position to be filled by the Council and none of those persons has received an absolute majority of votes in their favour, the name of the person having the least number of votes shall be struck off the list and a fresh vote taken. This process shall continue until a majority of votes is given in favour of one person. Any tie may be settled by the Chairman's casting vote.'

3.2 Voting will be conducted as per the agreed procedure in standing orders, namely:
'Unless standing orders provide otherwise, voting on any question shall be by a show of hands. At the request of a Councillor, the voting on any question shall be recorded so as to show whether each Councillor present and voting gave his vote for or against that question. Such a request shall be made before moving on to the next item of business on the agenda. At the request of two Councillors, voting on any question shall be by a signed ballot.'

3.3 After the vote has been concluded, the chairman will declare the successful candidate(s) duly elected. A Member elected by co-option is a full member of the council, but is not eligible for the basic parish allowance.

4. Acceptance of office

4.1 The successful candidate(s) must sign their Declaration of Acceptance of Office before they can act as a councillor. The Register of Members Interests form must be completed within 28 days and the Clerk will forward a copy to the District Monitoring Officer.