

New Councillors Co-opted to Biggleswade Town Council

At the Council Meeting held on 28th March 2017, the Town Council co-opted two new councillors, Mr Grant Fage who will represent the Holme Ward and Mr Sarju Patel who will represent Ivel Ward. Both will serve until the next all out elections in May 2019.

You will find a lot of information about the Town Council on our website. In the Constitution, we explain about the role of councillors, their rights and responsibilities and how decisions are taken. Once co-opted, councillors have the same rights and responsibilities as those who have stood for election. Below we explain when councillors have to stand for election and when they may be co-opted.

The usual term of office of a Town Councillor is four years, and council seats are elected *en bloc* through multiple non-transferable vote, by secret ballot. Biggleswade Town is divided into 3 parish wards, with separate elections for each ward. The next all-out election will be May 2019, when all existing councillors will need to re-stand along with other candidates.

A candidate must be at least one of the following:

A UK or Commonwealth citizen, Citizen of the Republic of Ireland or Citizen of another member state of the European Union.

And at least one of the following:

- An elector of the town parish (at least 18 years of age)
- during the whole of the last 12 months they have occupied, either as owner or tenant, land or other premises in the parish.
- their principal or only place of work is in the town
- they live within 4.8 kilometres (3 miles) of the town boundary

Uncontested elections. Where there are an equal number or fewer candidates than there are vacancies, all candidates are elected unopposed, and no poll is taken. Where there are fewer candidates than vacant seats, the Town council has the power to coopt any person or persons to fill the vacancies within 35 days of the election. If there is not a quorum elected the district council *must* dissolve it and order fresh elections.

Contested elections. Where there are more candidates than vacancies, a poll must be held.

Casual vacancies. Where a vacancy occurs during the 4 year term, it may be filled by either election or co-option. Elections only occur if, following the advertisement of the vacancy for 14 days, 10 electors send a written request to the returning officer. If no request is received, the town council will be required to fill the vacancies by co-option. The nomination qualifications required of a candidate for co-option are the same as for those for election. The Town Council will always advertise any vacancy to be filled by cooption along with the criteria by which selection will be made.

A Town Councillor can make a real difference to the community he/she represents. They are very much part of the democratic framework of the country, representing the interests of their community within a broad landscape of national governance. Local councils need active, interested and committed people to serve and get involved in their work. We would encourage you to consider joining the Town Council whenever an election is held or a vacancy is to be filled by cooption. We wish all sectors of our community to be represented on the Council and you will see from our Equality Policy that we are positive about democracy.

We would also encourage you to use your vote in all elections whether Parliamentary, Central Bedfordshire Council or the Town Council. Voting is a right and a privilege.

Interestingly, International Women's Day on 8th March, brought to mind the struggle of the Suffragettes. Indeed, although propertied women over the age of 30 got the right to vote in parliamentary elections in 1918, it took until 1928 for women over 21 to be allowed to vote in parliamentary elections. The 1918 Representation of the People Act gave the vote to all men over the age of 21, so the war did not bring equality.

Surprisingly the Local Government Act 1894, which incidentally gave rise to the creation of the parish council, gave all women, irrespective of marital status the right to elect and also to stand for election for parish councils, district and county councils, some 3 decades before the parliamentary vote.