

Report of the Governance working group on arrangements for Councillor's extended absence

January 2019

A member raised concerns about a lack of information relating to potential need for extended leave of absence from councillor duties. It was agreed that the Governance committee would establish a working group to investigate and report back to the Governance Committee with recommendations.

The working group held two meetings. It noted that extended absence from duties is governed by s.85 of the Local Government Act 1972 and that Full Council is the only body authorised by the legislation to grant permission. The onus is on the individual member to initiate the process of seeking extended leave of absence (beyond 6 months) from the Council, for whatever reason, in good time.

As the issues which may lead to such a desire for extended leave of absence are many and varied, it was considered that the recommendation to Council should be in the form of guidelines to assist the Council meeting in its consideration of applications, rather than a prescriptive policy.

Situations which may be expected to be considered sympathetically include:

- pregnancy/maternity, paternity, adoption
- acute medical conditions requiring debilitating therapies, such as cancer
- temporarily incapacitating physical conditions, such as broken back/pelvis/thigh, requiring confinement to bed/immobilisation/traction
- mental illness

but there will be others. All should be considered on their merits by Full Council.

The Council would be expected to follow best practice and, in particular, to grant applications for matters relating to maternity.

In the interests of promoting accessibility and inclusiveness to all potential candidates for election as Councillors, where such applications for extended leave be granted by Full Council that the absent member shall continue to be entitled to receive the member's basic allowance plus any Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) of which they may be in receipt for the duration of the approved absence. Any member providing temporary cover for an absent member in a post of Special Responsibility shall also be entitled to receive the appropriate RSA.

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It was recommended that the Induction Pack given to all members at the commencement of their 4-year term should include clear guidance on the foregoing.

It was noted that where a member was to be absent from their duties for an extended period that they may need to be screened from the usual public contact, for which approach should be made to Democratic Services. Similarly, residents are still entitled to receive support by way of service from a Councillor, so absent Councillors should make arrangements through their group.

Alan Pett
Chairman, Governance Committee
January 2019

Constitution of working group:

Cllr Pett (Chair)
Cllr Scott*
Cllr Layland
Cllr Firth*
Cllr Canet

* First meeting only