

**Policy Development and Review Committee
Discussion Paper re Parental and Sickness Leave for Councillors**

This paper proposes the inclusion of some additional paragraphs in the Members' Allowances Scheme (Part 6 of the Constitution) to clarify the provision of parental, adoption and sickness leave for councillors. As a constitutional amendment, a formal proposal would need to go to Council via General Purposes Committee, but this paper is being taken to PDRC first as a means of enabling members to give their views on it prior to a specific proposal being formulated.

The objective of the additional paragraphs is to ensure that insofar as possible Members are able to take appropriate leave at the time of birth or adoption, that both parents are able to take leave, and that reasonable and adequate arrangements are in place to provide cover for portfolio-holders and others in receipt of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) during any period of leave taken.

Under current legislation, members are able to not attend for a period of up to six months. Having the recommendations imbedded within the constitution will not only send a strong message that the council values diversity and equality but may also safeguard against potential unfair criticism of members that may want to take leave where it is needed.

Even if there is no substantive difference in the period of leave permitted, the additional paragraphs would create a clear categorical difference between parental, adoption or sickness leave on the one hand and simply not attending meetings for six months on the other.

The recommendations form part of the progression of the paper that was presented to Council in September 2019 in an effort to increase the accessibility and inclusivity of our local authority. They are also supported as part of the independent remuneration panel review.

Improved provision for new parents will contribute towards increasing the diversity of experience, age and background of local authority councillors. It will also assist with retaining experienced councillors – particularly women – and making public office more accessible to individuals who might otherwise feel excluded from it. Currently as few as 8% of councils have constitutional commitments to maternity, paternity and adoption and if we are to encourage a more inclusive environment for all elected officials, this is a good first step

The proposal would be to add paragraphs along the following lines to Part 6 of the constitution, the members' allowances scheme:

1. All councillors shall continue to receive their basic allowance in full for a period up to six months in the case of absence from their councillor duties due to leave related to maternity, paternity, adoption, shared parental leave or sickness absence.

2. Councillors entitled to a special responsibility allowance shall continue to receive their allowance in full for a period of six months, in the case of absence from their councillor duties due to leave related to maternity, paternity, adoption, shared parental leave or sickness absence.
3. Where for reasons connected with sickness, maternity leave, adoption leave, paternity leave or shared parental leave a councillor is unable to attend a meeting of the council for a period of six months, a dispensation by council can be sought in accordance with section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.
4. If a replacement to cover the period of absence under these provisions is appointed by council or the leader (or in the case of a party group position the party group) the replacement shall be entitled to claim a special responsibility allowance pro rata for the period over which the cover is provided.

Cllr Hannah Perkin

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