

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Corporate Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING DATE:	29th March 2021	
TITLE:	Parental leave policy – handling casework	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: None		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 Council on 10th September 2020 agreed to adopt a Parental Leave policy and asked the Corporate Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel to investigate options for handling casework during a period of parental leave.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to;

- 2.1 Propose to Council that the principles set out in section 3.9 are adopted to support the policy.

3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 When Council adopted the [Parental Leave policy](#) in September 2020, they further agreed to request that the Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel consider the matter of how the role of casework could be undertaken while a councillor is on parental leave or absent for other reasons (e.g. long-term sickness), and to report back to Council by the next Annual Meeting with proposals, or reasons for not bringing proposals.

- 3.2 Although the status of Councillors (who are not employees of the Council) means that employee benefits do not apply to them, the Council clearly recognises a duty of care to Councillors. The Council must seek to support Councillors in those areas which it can manage and control.

- 3.3 This may involve making appropriate adjustments for Councillors attending meetings, staying in touch with key messages and information from the Council and alerting and signposting to sources of information.
- 3.4 A number of Councils (just under 40) were contacted to see how they handled this. None of those that responded reported formal arrangements being put in place to manage casework during a period of parental or other such absence. The majority stated that it was a matter for the member taking the leave of absence to decide which responsibilities (if any) they wished to continue e.g. meeting attendance, a degree of casework, special responsibilities etc. and to discuss and agree this with their Group Leader.
- 3.5 For those wards represented by two councillors, a councillor taking a leave of absence may naturally signpost to their ward colleague. For single member wards, if they chose not to call upon their ward colleague, another named councillor from their group should be identified for constituency casework. One Council stated an example of a councillor employing a caseworker to assist, as a private arrangement not organised or funded by the Council.
- 3.6 A key theme from consulting other Councils was that the arrangements political groups make to cover member's roles must go across party politics to ensure that there is no democratic deficit to constituents.
- 3.7 Council officers do not manage casework for councillors so this must remain a matter between the councillor and their political group, although the Council can help to facilitate such arrangements.
- 3.8 As B&NES has a Political Assistant or Group Support Officer for each political group, they are best placed to handle the necessary liaison between the Group Leader and absent councillor.
- 3.9 When a councillor indicates they intend to take a period of parental leave, the following steps are recommended;
- (1) Group Leader has a discussion with the councillor to establish;
 - a) Relevant dates for start and end of period of leave;
 - b) Whether the councillor would like to maintain any councillor responsibilities during this period and, if so, which ones;
 - c) How and how often the councillor would like to be contacted;
 - d) How they would like their webpage to be amended;
 - e) Record keeping arrangements during the period of leave;
 - f) A review and handover of open issues at the start of the period of parental leave;
 - g) Settling back in on return from parental leave (work handover, if further support needed)
 - h) Any other relevant considerations including undertaking a risk assessment for expectant/new mothers if appropriate.

3.10 The Group Leader or Political Assistant then communicates the above information to Democratic Services and they jointly agree what is needed. Understandably, each case will be individual, and so a flexible approach will be needed, and the arrangements may need to adapt with circumstances.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 This policy supports Councillors with caring responsibilities.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

5.1 There are no direct financial implications of the proposals.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision-making risk management guidance.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 The role of a councillor should be open to all, regardless of their background, and adopting a Parental Leave policy is a step towards encouraging a wider range of people to become councillors, and is also a step to encourage existing councillors who may want to start a family to remain as councillors.

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

8.1 There are no direct climate change implications of proposals.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 None.

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 Political Group Leaders, Political Group Assistants, Director of Human Resources & Organisational Development, Head of Legal & Democratic Services, Chief Executive.

Contact person	<i>Jo Morrison, Democratic Services Manager</i>
Background papers	<i>Parental Leave policy;</i> https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/s62497/Appendix%20-%20Parental%20Leave%20Policy.pdf
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	