

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Member Parental Leave Policy</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Council on 23 March 2023
<b>WARD</b>	(All Wards);
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

To adopt a parental leave policy for Members in accordance with the motion that was approved at the 20 October 2022 Council meeting.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

To agree the Member Parental Leave Policy at Appendix A.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

Wokingham Borough Council seeks to encourage and promote equality and diversity.

The Council therefore approved a Motion at its meeting in October 2022, which agreed to introduce a 'Parental Leave Policy' for members. At present, there is no legal right for those elected as local authority councillors, to take parental leave. It is intended by the introduction of this policy, that some of the barriers which may deter people from standing for public office will be removed.

The objective of this policy is to ensure that in so far as possible Elected Members are able to take appropriate leave at the time of birth or adoption thereby increasing the likelihood that there will be a greater diversity of experience, age and background of members. In addition the policy may also assist in retaining members and making it more accessible to individuals who might otherwise feel excluded from it.

The proposal is to effectively "stop the clock" at the point leave is taken so that a Member taking parental leave does not find themselves in breach of S85(1), Local Government Act 1972 which requires members to attend at least one meeting during a consecutive period of six months.

By introducing a policy for parental leave for members which allows a member to effectively "stop the clock" whilst they are on leave, the Council will improve provision for new parents and increase the diversity of councillors an making public office more accessible.

## Background

1. At the Council meeting on the 20 October 2022 Councillor Blumenthal proposed the following motion:

“At present, a Member taking leave to look after their new-born or newly adopted child could find themselves in breach of s85(1), Local Government Act 1972 (“if a member of a Local Authority fails, throughout a period of six consecutive months from the date of their last attendance, to attend any meeting of the Authority they will, unless the failure was due to some good reason approved by the Authority before the expiry of that period, cease to be a member of the Authority”).

It is therefore proposed that this Council agrees the following Motion with the intention of introducing a Leave Policy for Members who become parents. This Council therefore resolves that: The Assistant Director of Governance be commissioned to work with the Head of Legal and the Assistant Director of Human Resources, to draft a Leave Policy for Members who become parents, taking into account guidance issued by the LGA, for approval by Council at the earliest opportunity.”

2. The motion was seconded by Councillor Aktar and following a discussion was agreed by full Council.
3. A small cross-party working group was established to develop the policy. The working group comprised Councillor Bishop-Firth, Councillor Blumenthal, Councillor Burgess, and Councillor Frewin and met on two occasions; 12 December 2022, and 27 February 2023.
4. The proposed Policy sets out Councillors’ entitlement to maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave and relevant allowances. The Policy is shown at Appendix A.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	Yes	Revenue

### Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

If an elected member has a special responsibility allowance (SRA) and is on parental leave there will be a financial implication because the role will be covered by another elected member who will also receive the SRA. However, there is sufficient headroom in the existing budget for Members Allowances to cover this eventuality.

### Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)

No specific implications.

### Public Sector Equality Duty

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is provided at Appendix B.

### Climate Emergency – ***This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030***

There are no direct implications from this policy on achieving the Council's carbon neutral objective.

### Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

Not applicable

### List of Background Papers

Local Government Association (LGA) Guidance

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