



**Standards Committee**

**Wednesday 12<sup>st</sup> April, 2023 at 6.00 p.m.**

**at the Council House, Walsall**

Public access to meeting via: [www.walsallcouncilwebcasts.com](http://www.walsallcouncilwebcasts.com)

**MEMBERSHIP:**

Councillor P. Kaur (Chair)  
Councillor Burley (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Allen  
Councillor Andrew  
Councillor Follows  
Councillor James  
Councillor Lee  
Councillor Nazir  
Councillor Towe  
Councillor Young

**Independent Persons:**

Mr A. Green  
Deborah Mardner  
Carl Magness

**Quorum:**

Four Members

## A G E N D A

1. Apologies
2. Substitutions
3. Declarations of Interest
4. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended):**  
  
To agree that the public be excluded from the private session during consideration of the agenda items indicated for the reasons shown on the agenda.
5. Minutes of the previous meeting *Enclosed*
6. Review of Terms of Reference/Remit of Standards Committee *Enclosed*
7. Councillors Training *Enclosed*
8. Parental Leave for Councillors *Enclosed*

## **Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended)**

### **Access to information: Exempt information**

#### **Part 1**

#### **Descriptions of exempt information: England**

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
4. Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.
5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.
6. Information which reveals that the authority proposes:
  - (a) to give any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
  - (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment.
7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.
8. Information being disclosed during a meeting of a Scrutiny and Performance Panel when considering flood risk management functions which:
  - (a) Constitutes a trades secret;
  - (b) Its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the risk management authority);
  - (c) It was obtained by a risk management authority from any other person and its disclosure to the public by the risk management authority would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that other person.

## The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012

### Specified pecuniary interests

The pecuniary interests which are specified for the purposes of Chapter 7 of Part 1 of the Localism Act 2011 are the interests specified in the second column of the following:

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Prescribed description</b>
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	<p>Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by a member in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of a member.</p> <p>This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Regulations (Consolidation) Act 1992.</p>
Contracts	<p>Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority:</p> <p>(a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and</p> <p>(b) which has not been fully discharged.</p>
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	<p>Any tenancy where (to a member's knowledge):</p> <p>(a) the landlord is the relevant authority;</p> <p>(b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.</p>
Securities	<p>Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where:</p> <p>(a) that body (to a member's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and</p> <p>(b) either:</p> <p>(i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or</p> <p>(ii) if the share capital of that body is more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.</p>

## **Standards Committee**

**Tuesday 31 January, 2023 at 6.00pm.**

**In a Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall**

### **Members Present**

Councillor Kaur (Chair)  
Councillor Burley (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Allen  
Councillor Andrew  
Councillor James  
Councillor Lee  
Councillor Nazir  
Councillor Towe  
Councillor Sears  
Councillor Nawaz

### **Independent Persons Present**

Ms. D. Mardner

### **Officers Present**

Mr A. Cox	-	Director of Governance
Ms S. Lloyd	-	Democratic Services Officer

## **37/22 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Follows, Councillor Young, Mr A. Green and Mr. C. Magness.

## **38/22 Substitutions**

Councillor Sears substituted for Councillor Follows and Councillor Nawaz substituted for Councillor Young.

## **39/22 Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

## **40/22 Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items for consideration in private session.

#### **41/22 Minutes of the two previous meetings**

The Committee noted that Councillor Allen was in attendance at the meeting which took place on 11<sup>th</sup> July and requested that this was reflected in the minutes.

#### **Resolved**

**That, subject to the abovementioned changes, the minutes of the meetings held 11<sup>th</sup> July and 24<sup>th</sup> October be approved as correct records.**

#### **42/22 Review of Planning Protocol Guidance**

The Director of Governance presented a report which outlined the details of the ongoing review of the Planning Protocol Guidance which is included as part of the council's constitution. It was noted that this was required due to recent high profile cases in High Court and the government's declared intention to further amend planning law. The Director of Governance informed the Committee that the last such update of the Planning Protocol Guidance had been approved by Council in June 2014 and since this time there had been various changes which would also need to be reflected in the new version.

#### **Resolved**

**That:**

- 1. The report be noted; and**
- 2. A further report to be submitted to Standards Committee on the conclusion of the review to include training proposals for Members.**

#### **43/22 Standards of Conduct for Senior Officers**

The Committee received a report requested at the previous meeting in relation to Standards of Conduct which senior officers at the council must adhere to. The Director of Governance advised that the Employee Code of Conduct, which is approved by Personnel Committee, applies to all officers at the council and was last reviewed in 2022. He added that Mr Green had provided his feedback in the form of an email which had been shared with the Director of Human Resources, Organisational Development and Administration for consideration during the next review of the code. In this email Mr Green outlined that he felt that the code was too lengthy and that there needed to be a stronger link between contracts of employment and the Employee Code of Conduct.

Members of the Committee discussed the dress code as set out in the Code of Conduct and were informed that no such dress code applied to Elected Members.

The Director of Governance undertook to inform the Committee whether it was indeed line managers who set the minimum standard of dress expected of staff members and how frequently the Employee Code of Conduct was reviewed by Personnel Committee.

**Resolved**

**That:**

- 1. The report be noted; and**
- 2. The Director of Governance provides details on who is responsible for setting the minimum standard dress code and the review frequency of the Employee Code of Conduct.**

**44/22 Members Criminal Record Checks**

The Director of Governance presented a report on the current status of Members' criminal record checks. It was emphasised that this was not a legal requirement but was introduced by Council on 25th May 2016 as part of a desire to maintain transparency, high standards of behaviour, accountability and protection of Members following several national abuse enquiries. He provided the up-to-date position that 40 Members had now completed the DBS process and 4 simply needed to provide their ID in order to complete the process. This left 16 Members who had yet to complete the process.

The Director of Governance outlined that some of these Members may indeed have had DBS checks either for their employment or voluntary roles and, if this were the case, they could simply be shown to the Monitoring Officer rather than having to complete the process again.

Members of the Committee were supportive of the process and encouraging those Members who had not yet completed the process to do so. They asked whether the process was covered by the Code of Conduct for Elected Members and if sanctions could be applied to those who do not complete the process.

**Resolved**

**That**

- 1. The report be noted;**
- 2. An email be sent to all Members to remind them of the reasoning for the criminal record checks and explain the necessity of the process;**
- 3. A further report to return to Standards Committee on progress including details about other Local Authorities and their processes.**

**45/22 Date of next meeting.**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be the 12<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 6.50pm.

Chair .....

Date .....



**Review of Terms of Reference/Remit of Standards Committee**

**1. Aim**

- 1.1 To review the terms of reference/remit of the Standards Committee.

**2. Summary**

- 2.1. All council committees have a remit that defines the area of work the committee is responsible for. These are set out at Part 3.2 of the Council Constitution. The remit of all committees are considered on an annual basis as part of the governance review which culminates in a report to annual council. This is not however an in depth review of each remit but part of a process of updating the constitution.

**3. Recommendations**

That the Committee:

- 3.1 note the report.
- 3.2 make recommendations in relation to the remit of Standards Committee to be discussed with the group leaders prior to being submitted to full Council.
- 3.3 thanks the working party for the work it has done in reviewing the terms of reference/remit of the Standards Committee.

**4. Report Detail - Know**

- 4.1 The current remit of the Standards Committee is set out in part 3.2 of the Councils Constitution and states that the Committee will discharge the following functions:
- (1) Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors, and voting co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives.
  - (2) Advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct.
  - (3) Assisting Councillors and voting co-opted members (and church and parent governor representatives) to observe the Members' Code of Conduct.
  - (4) Monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct.
  - (5) Advising and training Councillors, voting co-opted members (and Church and parent governor representatives) on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct.
  - (6) Dealing with all other functions under the relevant provisions of, or Regulations made under, the Localism Act 2011.

(7) To appoint hearing sub-committees of 4 elected members to hear and determine complaints against Members and Co-opted Members under the provisions of the Members Code of Conduct, and in accordance with locally agreed procedures.

(8) To make recommendations to Council on the appointment of an Independent Person as required under the Localism Act and any relevant Regulations.

(9) Other functions relating to standards of conduct of Members assigned to Standards Committees under any Act.

(10) Dealing with Members misconduct falling outside breaches of the Code of Conduct, for example, breaches of protocols.

(11) Whistleblowing Policy.

(12) Strategic overview of the Employees' Code of Conduct.

(13) Overview of the conduct element of reports from external auditors.

The last time that the remit of the Standards Committee was amended was on the 22nd May 2019. It is for Council to approve any changes to the remit of committees. This will normally be done in consultation with the Group Leaders and Elected Members.

- 4.2 As set out in section 37 of the Local Government Act 2000 each council is required by law to have a constitution. The purpose of the constitution is to ensure lawful, open, and transparent decision-making. Whilst all council constitutions are based upon the model constitution produced by the Deputy Office of the Prime Minister, all councils keep their Constitutions under review to ensure that they remain lawful and have the most efficient and effective procedures in place to administer council functions.
- 4.3 When this matter came before Standards Committee on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2022 it was decided to establish a working party to review the remit of the standards committee and report back on the same at a future meeting.
- 4.4 The working party met on 27 February and 27 March 2023 and looked at the remit of the Standards Committee in detail. The working party felt it was important that the Standards Committee should be a stand-alone committee and not amalgamated with another committee, and that the frequency of meetings should remain quarterly. In addition the working party discussed in detail the importance of training and development for elected members, and that if possible a dashboard should be created to chart member development which may be indicative of their ability to fulfil more senior positions in the council. It was recognised however that the decisions on certain positions for councillors lay within the gift of group leaders, and the groups themselves. It was also recognised that the Standards Committee should, where possible, take a proactive role in maintaining and promoting high standards of conduct by councillors across the council.

- 4.5 In light of the discussions around training the current draft version of the remit for Standards Committee includes provision at paragraph 5 for the Committee to monitor the training of Councillors. The Committee may wish to discuss this further before making recommendations which would need to be discussed with the group leaders before being put to council for approval. The proposed remit is at Appendix 1 herewith.
- 4.6 The main proposed changes to the remit are as follows:
- Paragraph 5 - added in to paragraph 5 that the remit of the Committee is to also monitor training undertaken by Councillors.
  - Paragraph 6 - included specific reference to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and other significant interests.
  - Paragraph 8 – insert recommendations in relation to IP remuneration
  - Former paragraph 10 removed “(10) Dealing with Members misconduct falling outside breaches of the Code of Conduct, for example, breaches of protocols.” The reason for this was following discussion on 27 February it was hard to envisage misconduct being of a nature that fell outside of the scope of the Councillor Code of Conduct.
  - New paragraph 10 - consolidated the strategic review of the whistleblowing policy with the employee code of conduct. The reason for this was that under the previous remit of the Committee it purely stated whistleblowing policy but gave no further indication as to the purpose of this being within the remit of the Committee. Reports in relation to actual whistleblowing will be presented to Audit Committee, as it is part of the internal controls of the council.
  - Paragraph 11 - included in the words behaviour and cultures in respect of reports to the Standards Committee following any report that we received from external auditors, inspections etc.

## **5. Financial information**

- 5.1 None contained within this report

## **6. Legal implications**

- 6.1 As part of transparency, openness, and accountability in decision making the remit of committees should clearly set out the nature of the business that the committee will transact.

## **7. Decide**

- 7.1 The committee is asked to approve the recommendations as set out in Paragraph 3.

## **8. Respond**

- 8.1 If the committee support the proposed changes then these will be discussed with the relevant Group Leaders, and then be put to council as recommendations for changes to the constitution.

## **9. Review**

- 9.1 The council reviews the operation of the constitution in general on an ongoing basis, and reports to annual council every year in relation to the same. In addition to the general review more detailed reviews are carried out as and when required on different aspects of the constitution to ensure that there is lawful decision making.

Background papers - none

Appendix 1 – Proposed new remit for Standards Committee

Tony Cox Director of Governance

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### **Remit – Draft Version 3**

The Committee will discharge the following functions:-

- (1) Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors, and voting co-opted Members and Church and Parent Governor representatives.
- (2) Advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Councillor Code of Conduct.
- (3) Assisting Councillors and voting co-opted members (and Church and Parent Governor representatives) to observe the Councillor Code of Conduct.
- (4) Monitoring the operation of the Councillor Code of Conduct.
- (5) Advising on the training and development of Councillors, voting co-opted members (and Church and Parent Governor representatives) generally and on matters relating to the Councillors Code of Conduct. Monitoring training undertaken by Councillors.
- (6) Dealing with all other functions under the relevant provisions of, or Regulations made under, the Localism Act 2011. Including the legislation and functions assigned by the Localism Act 2011, and subsequent regulations, in relation to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and other significant interests.
- (7) To appoint hearing sub-committees of 4 elected members to hear and determine complaints against Members and Co-opted Members under the provisions of the Councillor Code of Conduct, and in accordance with locally agreed procedures.
- (8) To make recommendations to Council on the appointment of an Independent Person as required under the Localism Act 2011 and any relevant Regulations, and make recommendations to Council in relation to remuneration of Independent Members.
- (9) Other functions relating to standards of conduct of Members assigned to Standards Committees under any Act.
- (10) Strategic overview of the Employees' Code of Conduct and the Whistleblowing policy.
- (11) Overview of the conduct, culture and behaviour element of reports from external auditors, the Local Government Ombudsman, other regulatory reports and inspections.
- (12) Approving and revising the Arrangements for Dealing with Complaints about Councillors which sets out the detailed procedures for determining complaints made against Councillors and Co-opted Members under the Councillor Code of Conduct.

## **Elected Member Training**

### **Summary of report:**

This report provides an update to Elected Members in respect of progress towards reviewing the elected member learning and development for 23/24.

### **Recommendation:**

1. To note the content of the report and Appendix 1;
2. To advise the Head of Legal and Democratic Services of topics which would be particularly useful for inclusion in the 23/24 Programme'
3. To note the current Mandatory, Highly Recommended and Optional learning items and advise of any changes.

### **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 The purpose of training is to equip individuals with the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours to meet the organisation's needs in relation to its strategic priorities. By investing in people, through their training, we ensure we harness their full potential and focus their energies on the needs of the organisation while fulfilling their need for personal development and job/role satisfaction.
- 1.2 The Council recognise that such development is a continuing process for both employees and elected members in order to equip them with the necessary skills to fulfil their roles as community leaders, and to help them manage the changes facing the council going forward in delivering its aims and objectives as outlined in the Council Plan 2022-25.
- 1.3 Training and development for Councillors should be based on individual needs as well as organisational requirements. Councillors have a key role in meeting these challenges both as the strategic leaders of the council as an organisation and also in providing leadership to their local communities and places. Meeting these challenges at the local level will require councillors to transform both their organisations and change the way they relate to their communities and places both individually and collectively. Yet if councillors are to play their part they need to be effective in their roles. The council's processes supporting them also need to be appropriate and relevant to their needs.
- 1.4 The council formed a project team comprising officers from HRD and Legal and Democratic Services with the objective of reviewing approaches to and

content of elected member training, to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and supports the council's transformation ambitions. It is important that the training offered is relevant to councillors in enabling them to be effective in their role. In keeping the training programme for elected members under review we have sought to hear the Member voice via feedback received during focus groups and through other routes. The focus groups have been well attended since 2017 with elected members making an invaluable contribution to their programme. We are hoping to run a focus after the Elections to shape the 23/24 Programme. The current programme is appended to this report to support thinking.

- 1.5 It is planned to work with the Learning Champions to obtain their views in relation to the induction offered and training and development in general. Subject to their views further work may arise such as a member focus group or survey.
- 1.6 In addition to Member views on the content of the development programme, Directors are also being consulted to ensure some triangulation thereby ensuring our elected members are fully equipped to deal with the changes and challenges that the council is facing.
- 1.7 It is also proposed that the Standards Committee continue to review the content and effectiveness of the training programme for elected members on an annual basis to ensure that it is relevant to the role and of value to elected members. Training should also help the council maintain and improve governance and standards.

## **2.0 Resource and legal considerations:**

- 2.1 None directly related to this report. On occasions the council will commission external training but this cost will be met from within existing budgets. The Learning and Development Programme is part of maintaining standards and good governance.

## **3.0 Performance and Risk Management issues:**

- 3.1 Performance and risk management is a feature of all council functions. An effective training programme should aim to improve elected member performance and improve governance.
- 3.2 Training should also increase elected members understanding of the complexity of their role and improve their ability to fulfil the role. This in turn may further reduce the level of complaints that are submitted under the code of conduct.

## **4.0 Equality Implications:**

- 4.1 In maintaining up to date policies and procedures the council will ensure that services are delivered fairly in an open and transparent manner. There are specific requirements in both codes that elected members and officers

observe requirements for equalities, diversity and inclusion. EDI training will be made available to all elected members as part of this programme.

## **5.0 Consultation:**

5.1 Consultation has already commenced with elected members.

### **Author:**

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## **Parental Leave Policy for Councillors**

### **1. Aim of the Policy**

- 1.1 The objectives of this policy are:
  - a. to ensure a supportive and non-discriminatory environment for councillors who have or are planning to have parental responsibilities;
  - b. to improve and retain a diversity of experience, age and background of councillors; and
  - c. to make public office more accessible to individuals who might otherwise feel excluded from it.
- 1.2 This policy sets out councillors' entitlements to Parental Leave (covering maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave) and relevant allowances.
- 1.3 This policy has cross party support from all councillors.

### **2. Leave entitlement**

- 2.1 Councillors, who are the designated carer, are entitled to up to 6 months parental leave from the due date, , with the option to extend up to 52 weeks by agreement if required (see para 2.8).
- 2.2 A Councillor who adopts a child through an approved adoption agency shall be entitled to take up to 6months adoption leave from the date of placement, with the option to extend up to 52 weeks by agreement if required. For the purposes of this policy, surrogacy will fall under the definition of adoption and the Policy shall be applicable if a Councillor has applied for or be intending to apply for a Parental Order in relation to the child, in which case they shall be entitled to take up to 6-months leave with the option to extend up to 52 weeks by agreement if required.
- 2.3 In addition, where the birth is premature, the councillor is entitled to take leave during the period between the date of the birth and the due date. This is in addition to the 6 months' period as referred to in paragraph 2.1. In such cases any leave taken to cover prematurity of 28 days or less shall be deducted from any extension beyond the initial 6 months.
- 2.4 In exceptional circumstances, and only in cases of prematurity of 29 days or more, additional leave may be taken by agreement (see para 2.6), and such exceptional leave shall not be deducted from the total 52 week entitlement.

- 2.5 A councillor who has made Shared Parental Leave arrangements through their employment is requested to advise the Council of these at the earliest possible opportunity. Every effort will be made to replicate such arrangements in terms of leave from Council. In circumstances where no Shared Parental Leave arrangements are available the Council will consider an alternative pattern of leave.
- 2.6 Where both parents are councillors leave may be shared up to a maximum of 24 weeks for the first six months and 26 weeks for any leave agreed thereafter, up to a maximum of 52 weeks. Special and/or? exceptional arrangements may be made in cases of prematurity.
- 2.7 Any councillor who takes parental leave is still subject to the legal duty under the Local s85 Government Act 1972 to attend a meeting of the Council within a six month period unless there is agreement by Council to an extended leave of absence prior to the expiration of that six month period. In addition any councillor on leave is still subject to the provisions of the Councillor Code of Conduct.
- 2.8 Any councillor intending to take parental leave will be responsible for ensuring that they comply with the relevant notice requirements of the Council, both in terms of the point at which the leave starts and the point at which they return.
- 2.9 Any councillor taking leave should ensure that they respond to reasonable requests for information as promptly as possible, and that they keep officers and colleagues informed and updated in relation to intended dates of return and requests for extension of leave.
- 2.10 Absences from Council meetings during any period of Parental Leave will be noted as such, rather than being attributed to general absence.
- 2.11 If a Councillor wishes to have a keeping in touch day or attend a meeting (KIT day) then they should notify their Group Leader, although this will not affect any calculation of the leave periods or be taken into account for an extended leave period.

### **3. Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) During Parental Leave**

- 3.1 All councillors shall continue to receive their Basic Allowance in full whilst on parental leave.
- 3.2 Councillors entitled to a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) shall continue to receive their allowance in full whilst on parental leave
- 3.3 If a councillor holds a position that attracts a SRA it may be necessary to appoint a replacement. Where a replacement is appointed to cover the period of absence that replacement person shall receive a SRA on a pro rata basis for the period of the temporary appointment.

- 3.4 The payment of SRA, whether to the primary holder or the replacement, during a period of parental leave shall continue for a period of;
- a: six months; or
  - b: until the date of the next Annual Meeting of the Council; or
  - c: the Leader's decision on Cabinet appointments; or
  - d: until the date when the councillor taking leave is up for election whichever is soonest.

At such a point, the position will be reviewed, and will be subject to a possible extension for a further six month period.

- 3.5 Should a councillor appointed to cover for a councillor on parental leave already hold a remunerated position, the ordinary rules relating to payment of more than one SRA shall apply.
- 3.6 Unless the councillor taking leave is removed from their post at an Annual General Meeting of the Council whilst on leave, or by the Leader's removing them from their Cabinet appointment, or if the Party to which they belong loses control of the Council during their leave period, they shall return at the end of their leave period to the same post, or to an alternative post with equivalent status and remuneration which they held before the leave began.

#### **4. Resigning from office and elections**

- 4.1 If a councillor decides not to return at the end of their parental leave they must notify the council at the earliest opportunity. If they resign they must notify the proper officer of the council in writing of their resignation. All allowances will cease from the effective date of resignation.
- 4.2. If an election is held during the Councillor's maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave and they are not re-elected, or decide not to stand for re-election, their allowances will cease from the 4th day after the ordinary day of election when they would legally vacate office.

#### **5. Ward Duties**

- 5.1 Councillors who take parental leave will be able to nominate another councillor to deal with local issues in their Ward, in consultation where applicable with the relevant Group Leader. It will be the responsibility of the councillor and Group Leader to hold discussions with their preferred nomination to arrange this.
- 5.2 Where a councillor has limited alternatives to nominate due to low political representation, the Leader will decide with the member the most appropriate way in which their ward duties can be covered.

- 5.3 Councillors are responsible for putting an out of office message redirecting queries to a designated councillor. However, if they still wish to respond to emails/correspondence whilst taking parental leave, they are at liberty to undertake this activity.
- 5.4 Democratic Services will provide help and advice where appropriate and arrange for officers in service areas to respond to enquiries.

## **6. Parental Bereavement Leave (miscarriage or still birth)**

- 6.1 The council's policy for employees is extended to councillors.
- 6.2 Parental bereavement leave will be granted to parents or primary carers following the death of a child under the age of 18 or a stillbirth after 24 weeks of pregnancy. Primary carers include adopters, foster parents and guardians as well as close relatives or family friends who have taken responsibility for the child's care in the absence of parents.
- 6.3 Parents or primary carers will be entitled to two weeks' leave.
- 6.4 Leave can either be taken in one block of two weeks or in two separate blocks of one week (but not as individual days), and can be taken within a 56 week period from the date of the child's death.
- 6.5 Leave can be taken without prior notice in the initial period (within 56 days of the child's death). Where leave is to be taken after the initial 8 week period, a minimum of one weeks' notice should be given to the relevant Group Leader, where possible. There is no requirement to provide the council with a copy of the death certificate.

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