

Parental leave for Councillors – Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently asked questions

1. What is parental leave for councillors?

Parental leave for councillors entitles any councillor who becomes a parent, whether through birth or adoption, to take a period of paid leave as they adjust to their new parental responsibilities, as they would be with any normal job. The role of a councillor isn't always seen as a formal job, but it is an incredibly demanding role with significant time commitments, and it is just as difficult to juggle the demands of being a new parent with council responsibilities as with any other job. The councillor taking leave would be entitled to take a set period of leave, during which they would receive maternity or paternity pay at the equivalent level to the allowances they previously received - and so it is applicable to both backbench councillors and councillors that receive a Special Responsibility Allowances (for example Committee Chairs or Cabinet Members). Where applicable, a parental leave policy allows another councillor to be appointed to cover the responsibilities of the member who is taking parental leave, and this councillor would be entitled to receive an the relevant responsibility allowance as normal.

In October 2018 the LGA Labour Group launched a Parental Leave Policy for Councillors. This is a model policy that can easily be adopted by either Labour Groups or by councils. It sets out provisions relating to allowances, support and cover, length of leave and campaigning. [It can be viewed here](#).

2. Why do we need parental leave for councillors?

As more efforts are made to encourage a wider range of people to become councillors, more support needs to be in place to facilitate this. Traditionally, people think of councillors as being older and retired, and in 2018 the average age of a councillor was 59. But over the last few years there have been greater calls for councillors to better reflect their communities, and political parties are making a greater effort to do this. As more and more councillors are elected who don't fit the usual stereotype of a councillor we need to make sure that structural barriers that have previously put people off standing and remaining as councillors are broken down. If a young woman or man is elected as a councillor and becomes a parent, they're entitled to take parental leave from their job, but no provision exists for them to take a similarly paid leave of absence from their duties as a councillor. Therefore it's important that Labour Groups and councils have a parental leave policy in place, both to support existing councillors who become parents, but also to show that they are open to and supportive of new councillors who may want to become parents in the future.

Young parents are also an important demographic for councils, relying a lot on council services. Councils should be reflective of the communities that they serve, and having councillors who are young parents can only improve decision making.

3. Which councils have a parental leave policy for councillors?

As of September 2019, eighteen Labour-run councils and three Tory-run councils have passed the LGA Labour's model parental leave policy for councils. Thirty Labour Groups have adopted the LGA Labour's model parental leave policy for Labour Groups. In addition to this, eight councils have developed and passed their own similar parental leave policies.

4. Does the law allow parental leave for councillors?

There is no specific mention of parental leave in legislation covering councillor allowances, which has sometimes wrongly been interpreted as it not being allowed. Many councils, and the LGA Labour

Group, have received legal advice that it is perfectly acceptable for a council to put in place a parental leave policy. The Government has privately indicated that it is supportive of parental leave but that is not something that is a priority to legislate for. In 2019, the LGA co-produced an Equalities Toolkit with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government which included a link to the LGA Labour Group's model parental leave policy – the document had a foreword by the then Minister Jake Berry. [The toolkit can be viewed here](#). It is also unclear who exactly would launch a legal challenge against a council that put a parental leave policy in place.

Our policy requires a councillor taking leave to attend one meeting every 6 months as per the legal requirement of meeting attendance – this is likely to be useful to the councillor as a way of keeping in touch with what is happening at the councillor.

Our policy allows for an SRA holder who takes parental leave to still receive their SRA for an initial six months (or until an election or AGM, whichever is soonest), with a possible extension for a further six months, in recognition of the fact that a role holder's SRA often forms a significant part of their income. Temporary cover should be appointed for the role holder and they should receive an SRA payment on a pro rata basis for the period that they are providing the cover. Our policy allows for both of these payments and has been legally checked – only one of these payments would be counted as an SRA. Other parental leave policies also allow for this – Birmingham and Stockport both make provision for this in their parental leave policy, and Islington's original parental leave policy (before they adopted the LGA Labour Group model policy) also made provisions for this.

The first parental leave policy for councillors was introduced by Islington in 2014. One of the reasons that we produced our model policy was because other councils, who wanted to do this, told us that they didn't have the resources or knowledge to produce their own policy. Whilst we don't know exactly how many councillors have taken parental leave since the first policy was introduced in 2014, we do know that there have been no legal issues when any councillor has taken parental leave. Birmingham City Council introduced a parental leave policy in summer 2018 – since then, five councillors have made use of the policy and there have been no legal challenges.

5. What does the Labour Party think about this?

The Labour Party Democracy Review recommended that all Labour Groups adopt a parental leave policy. All Labour Groups are advised to adopt the LGA Labour's model policy, or if they wish to adopt their own policy, they should submit this to the Regional Executive Committee. The Labour Party is supportive and encouraging of councillors taking parental leave as they recognise that this encourages a wider range of candidates to stand to be councillors. Based on this, we'd recommend that all Labour Groups adopt our model policy as a matter of priority.

6. Why can't arrangements be made on a case by case basis?

New parents need certainty about what leave and support they will get as councillors. Having a policy in place gives councillors a clear idea about what will happen if they have a baby or adopt a child whilst in office, and includes provisions about what will happen with other colleagues covering their work whilst they are off. Where there isn't a policy in place, councillors who are about to become parents have no certainty about whether they will be able to take parental leave, and it will depend entirely on having a supportive group leader, chief whip and ward colleagues. Having a parental leave policy in place also sends a signal to those residents who are thinking of standing to be a councillor that they will be supported if they have become a parent whilst serving as a councillor.

7. What about political opposition to this?

In the councils where this has been passed so far, there has been broad support for this policy. Three Tory-run councils have passed the policy due to a Labour Group motion, and in other councils the vote has been unanimous (any combination of Lib Dems, Tories, Independents and smaller parties such as the Greens). Whilst there has been some opposition, there's generally broad support for increasing the support in place for councillors who become parents.

8. Our Labour Group is in opposition – isn't this just relevant for groups in power?

No. All Labour Groups can adopt the Labour Group policy, whether they are in opposition or in power. The Labour Group policy is different as it makes provision for campaigning arrangements when a councillor is taking parental leave. We'd suggest that all Labour Groups adopt the Labour Group policy, and that if you're in opposition you take the policy to full council – as it has passed through Tory-run councils in the past.

9. Isn't this just for women?

No. Our policy is for mothers, fathers, for same sex couples and for adoption. If we are to get councillors from a wide range of backgrounds then our parental leave needs to encompass all types of parents. So far, both men and women have taken advantage of a parental leave policy, showing that this is a policy for everyone.