



Spratton Parish Council

Meeting Attendance Policy for Councillors

Adopted: 17th September 2024 Ref: 87.24

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INTRODUCTION

This policy is designed to promote efficient administration of meetings, avoid inquorate meetings, and permit timely rescheduling of meetings where necessary. It will also provide accountability for Councillors.

Councillors are elected to represent the interests of the whole Parish. To fulfil this role, it is expected that all councillors will make a full contribution to the work of the Council throughout their term of office. This includes:

- attendance at meetings of the Council
- attendance at meetings of committees and working parties to which they may be appointed
- being available to deal with queries and requests from the Parish Clerk in person, by telephone, in correspondence and email as appropriate
- responding to consultations from the Parish Clerk on matters such as planning applications

All councillors will have satisfied themselves before standing for election that they are able to commit the necessary time to fulfilling this important role within the community. Any councillor who, whether through change of circumstances or otherwise, finds they are no longer able to give sufficient time to the role should in the first instance consult the Clerk to discuss what further support may be available but may have to consider whether, in the interests of their electorate, it is appropriate for them to continue as a councillor.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors should give as much advance notice as possible of absence from a meeting, either by noting it at a previous meeting, or by email or telephone call to the Parish Clerk.

The deadline for receipt of an apology for absence shall be a minimum of 24 hours, and preferably 48 hours, prior to the date and time of the meeting. This allows the Clerk time to assess if the meeting will be quorate and inform the Council.

Apologies for absence shall be made directly in advance and not via a third person such as another Councillor at the meeting.

Circumstances when attendance is not possible and are acceptable for approval by the Council include (but are not limited to):

- Illness (under the Council's data protection policy and the Data Protection Act 1998, no details of illness can be disclosed without the councillor's permission)
- Maternity, paternity, adoptive or parental leave
- Work commitments
- Other Council business or duties
- Caring responsibilities

NON-ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

Councillors should make every effort to attend all meetings of which they are a member but where this is not possible, they should submit their apologies to the Parish Clerk in advance as noted above.

A Councillor who is absent from all meetings of the Council and any committees of which they are a member for a period of six months automatically ceases to be a member of the Council unless they have been given leave of absence by the Council before the expiry of that six-month period – s.85 Local Government Act 1972

While the Parish Clerk will make every effort to monitor attendance and forewarn any councillors who may be nearing the expiry of the six-month period, the responsibility for ensuring that they comply with the requirements of s.85 is that of the individual councillor.

There are some specific points and exceptions to note:

- s.85 relates to meetings of Council, committees and sub-committees. It does not apply to working parties or task or policy groups and so attendance at those meetings is not sufficient for the purposes of the s.85. Neither does attendance as an observer at a meeting of a committee of which the councillor is not a member count, even if invited to speak by the Chairman.
- A councillor who is represented at a committee meeting by a substitute is regarded as being absent from that meeting.
- Where a councillor has been suspended from office (e.g. following a breach of the code of conduct) the period of suspension is disregarded for the purposes of calculating the six-month period of absence
- Absence due to service in HM Forces (including Territorial or reserve duties) will normally be disregarded for the purposes of s.85

REQUESTS FOR LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Any councillor whose absence from meetings is likely to extend to six months or more should request a leave of absence by writing to or emailing the Parish Clerk stating:

- the reasons for the absence
- the anticipated period of absence
- whether the councillor will be available to continue performing any Council functions during this period e.g. continuing to deal with Parish matters by telephone or email

Requests will normally be considered by full Council and should therefore be made in sufficient time, having regard to the programme of meetings, to allow this to happen before the period of six months expires. Only in the most exceptional circumstances will a request for a leave of absence be considered under the Council's 'urgent business procedure'.

GRANTING LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Each request for a leave of absence will be considered on its own merits having regard to:

- the reasons for the proposed absence, from future meetings, and the extent to which this is unavoidable;

- the duration of the proposed absence;
- the extent to which the member will be able to continue carrying out any functions of a councillor notwithstanding their absence from meetings

Requests for leave of absence will normally be granted in cases of:

- serious illness for periods up to 12 months in total
- pregnancy (for the equivalent period during which an employee of the Council would normally be entitled to maternity leave – see the Council’s separate Maternity Policy)

A leave of absence may be granted for such period as the Council thinks is reasonable in all the circumstances. Once that leave of absence expires, the clock re-starts so far as s.85 is concerned and the councillor has a further six months in which to attend a meeting (or seek a further leave of absence)

VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Councillors are allowed to observe Council and sub-committee meetings using a virtual/online platform such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. a councillor can only observe and cannot comment, propose, second or vote on any of the agenda items.

Under current regulations, attendance using a virtual/online platform does not count as attendance at a Council meeting or sub-committee meeting.

If a councillor wishes to attend a meeting using a virtual platform, it is the responsibility of the councillor to ensure they have the hardware, software and viable internet connection to allow them to attend the whole of the meeting. In accordance with a physical meeting, the “room” is closed at the start of the meeting and any virtual attendees must be in the “room” by the time the meeting opens.

DISQUALIFICATION

Once any councillor loses office through failure to attend for the six-month period, without approval, the disqualification cannot be overcome by the councillor subsequently resuming attendance. Nor can retrospective approval of the Council be sought for an extension.

RECORDING AND PUBLISHING ATTENDANCE:

The Minutes of meetings will show Members in attendance and Members absent with and without apologies. An attendance record for the year will be published on the Council’s website at the end of each financial year in accordance with the Council’s adherence to open and accountable local government.