

By email

09 April 2024

Dear Minister Hoare,

Thank you for your letter of 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024 regarding maternity, paternity, and neonatal leave for councillors. I welcomed the letter and the commitments it made to support and flexibility for councillors taking parental leave, particularly those around Special Responsibility Allowances and Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972.

As a result of discussions with councillors who have taken parental leave, we would welcome clarity on some of the issues that have arisen when parental leave for councillors is used in practice.

These are:

- **Payment of Special Responsibility Allowances** – your letter implies that those who receive a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) should continue to be paid when the councillor is on leave, which provides essential financial stability and is the right thing to do. We would welcome clarity around cover arrangements – for example, when a cabinet member takes leave and cover is appointed, can the councillor covering the cabinet role receive an SRA for the work they are doing in the interim? In practice, various approaches have been taken. All councils have paid the cabinet member on leave their SRA, but in some cases the cover has received an SRA, in others the cabinet role has been split between two or more other cabinet members, and in some cases, there has been no cover at all. Consideration should also be given to other councillors receiving SRAs, such as Opposition Group Leaders and Committee Chairs.
- **Number of payable Special Responsibility Allowances** – Section 9(5) limits the number of executive SRAs to no more than ten. This presents a challenge when a cabinet member takes leave as paying their cover an SRA would breach this limit, and not paying the SRA would leave them with no remuneration for their work whilst covering the role. In some cases, this limit of ten cabinet SRAs has been interpreted as ten working cabinet members making it possible to appoint an interim cabinet member, but in others this has left the cabinet member without cover, or with their cover not being paid or unable to attend and vote at cabinet members. Clarity around this would be welcomed.
- **Waiving the six-month rule** – at present, a vote of full council should take place to waive the need for a councillor to attend a council meeting once in a six-month period. In some cases, this has meant a councillor having to attend and make an argument as to why they need this to be waived. This can often involve divulging personal information, can be distressing for the councillor involved and has the potential to be weaponised politically. Clarity would be welcomed around the process to make it work in the interests of the councillor on leave so they are not made to feel uncomfortable doing so.

To our knowledge, over 80 councils have passed a parental leave policy which is encouraging, but this still means that most councils do not have a policy in place, which still needs to be addressed. Written communication to council leaders and Chief Executives about the importance of having a parental leave policy would be a helpful step, alongside clarity around the issues raised.

I would be happy to meet with you to discuss these issues and the experiences of councillors taking parental leave.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nesil Caliskan', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Cllr Nesil Caliskan,  
Leader of the LGA Labour Group and Leader of Enfield Council