

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Report to: Full Council

Date: 20 October 2021

Subject: Dispensation of absence for all Councillors

Report of: Councillor Stephen Cowan - The Leader of the Council

Responsible Director: Rhian Davies – Monitoring Officer

Summary

This report seeks approval of a special dispensation granted to all Councillors for any non-attendance at meetings of the authority for Covid-19 related reasons to 9 November 2021.

Recommendation

To agree that any member unable to attend a council meeting for a period greater than six months for Covid-19 related reasons, receives a dispensation further to section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to 9 November 2021.

Wards Affected: All

| H&F Values | Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Priorities |
|---|--|
| Doing things with residents and not to them | Councillors have a key community leadership role to represent all constituents within their wards. |
| Building shared prosperity | The participation of all Councillor members in decision making and community engagement activities is line with the Council's policies and priorities. |

Financial Impact

There are no direct financial implications.

Legal Implications

Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 makes provision in relation to member attendance at meetings. It provides that if a member fails to attend qualifying meetings for a period of 6 consecutive months from the date of their last attendance, they shall cease to be a member of the authority unless, before the expiry of that period the authority has approved such non-attendance.

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Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None.

Detailed Analysis

1. Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 makes provision in relation to member attendance at meetings. It provides that if a member fails to attend qualifying meetings for a period of 6 consecutive months from the date of their last attendance, they shall cease to be a member of the authority unless, before the expiry of that period the authority has approved such non-attendance.
2. The Council has taken a proactive approach to public safety during the pandemic, reducing the number of in-person meetings and the number of attendees at in-person meetings. The safety risks still posed by the pandemic also prevent some members from attending meetings in-person. Therefore, not all Members will have the opportunity to attend a qualifying meeting during this period of the pandemic, putting them at risk of inadvertent disqualification.
3. In order to avoid this eventuality, it would be reasonable for Full Council to grant a general authorisation of absence for all members until 9 November 2021 if the non-attendance is Covid-19 related. During the pandemic the Council has previously agreed two other dispensation reports in July 2020 and April 2021.

Consultation and engagement

4. Both Groups support this proposal.

Reasons for Decision

5. Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 makes provision in relation to member attendance at meetings. If a member fails to attend qualifying meetings for a period of 6 consecutive months from the date of their last attendance, they shall cease to be a member of the authority unless, before the expiry of that period the authority has approved such non-attendance.

Equality Implications

6. There are no anticipated negative implications for groups with protected characteristics, under the Equality Act 2010, by these proposals.