

Item 18.00. Councillor recruitment v1.1.docx

Introduction

Great Waldingfield Parish Council (GWPC) has difficulty, like many other parish councils (PC), in recruiting Councillors (Cllrs). There are a number of preventing factors:

- The role is an unpaid volunteer role,
- In an active PC there is a lot of work,
- There are policies and procedures to follow, and in GWPC's case
- There are a couple of vexatious and harassing residents who make the role of being a Cllr unattractive.

Proposal

That potential Cllrs can join GWPC, elected or co-opted, and attend only a few meetings and do not have any responsibilities. This gives them a chance to see how a meeting happens and what work is involved. This would only be if there are vacancies and only last for 18 months. The full proposal is at the end of this document.

GWPC standing orders

There is nothing in GWPC standing orders about attendance at meetings, so we must go to external guidance and legislation.

Core obligation

Once elected or co-opted, a parish councillor signs a Declaration of Acceptance of Office, committing to "*duly and faithfully fulfil the duties*" of the role. Attendance at council meetings is one of those duties.

The **Local Government Act (LGA) 1972** provides the statutory framework that underpins this obligation. It establishes that councillors are expected to attend meetings of the council to which they are summoned.

Is attendance a legal requirement?

Yes. Councillors are legally required to attend meetings unless they have a valid reason for absence. The Good Councillor's Guide (2024) reinforces this: councillors have a *duty* to attend, and if they cannot, they must give apologies to the Clerk.

Giving apologies

If a councillor cannot attend, they should notify the Clerk (or Chair) in advance.

- Apologies are recorded in the minutes.
- Some councils mark whether apologies were "received" or "accepted," but there is no legal requirement for how this is handled.

The Six-Month Rule (LGA 1972, s.85)

This is the key enforcement mechanism. A councillor is automatically disqualified if they:

- fail to attend any meeting for six consecutive months, and
- have not had their absence formally approved by the council.

What counts as "attendance"?

Attendance includes:

- attending a full council meeting
- attending a committee or sub-committee meeting
- attending an external body *as the council's appointed representative*

It does not include simply being present at the Annual Parish Meeting, unless the councillor is there in an official, delegated capacity (e.g., delivering the council's report).

What reasons are acceptable for absence?

There is no statutory list, but guidance suggests:

- Acceptable: illness, work commitments, emergencies
- Not acceptable: social events (e.g., football match, darts night)

It is for the council to decide whether to approve an extended absence.

Summary table

Obligation	Legal Basis	Practical Expectation
Attend meetings	LGA 1972	Councillors must attend all meetings to which they are summoned.
Give apologies	Good Councillor's Guide	Notify Clerk/Chair if unable to attend; apologies recorded.
Six-month rule	LGA 1972 s.85	Missing all meetings for 6 months = automatic disqualification unless approved.
What counts as attendance	LGA 1972 s.85(2)	Must be in an official capacity; APM only counts if representing the council.

Proposal

To have a clean, legally-sound template resolution GWPC can use to approve a councillor's extended absence under s.85(1) LGA 1972.

Template Resolution: Approval of Extended Absence (s.85 LGA 1972)

Agenda Item: Approval of Extended Absence – *Cllr [Name]*

Minute Reference: [e.g., 2026/XX]

Resolution:

"In accordance with section 85(1) of the LGA 1972, the Council RESOLVES to approve the reason for absence given by Cllr [Full Name] and to grant a period of extended absence from attending meetings of the Council for a period up to [date], after which the matter will be reviewed if required."

Reason for absence recorded:

[e.g., medical treatment, caring responsibilities, work commitments]

Notes:

- The approval prevents automatic disqualification under the six-month rule.
- The Clerk will notify the councillor of the resolution.

Decision:

- *Proposed by:*
- *Seconded by:*
- *Vote:* (e.g., unanimous / carried / abstentions noted)

Optional strengthened version (for longer absences)

If the absence may exceed six months:

"The Council RESOLVES, under section 85(1) of the LGA 1972, to approve the continued absence of Cllr [Name] from meetings until [date], on the grounds of [reason]. The Council

further RESOLVES that this approval shall prevent disqualification under s.85(1) and that the Clerk will bring the matter back to Council for review should circumstances change.”

Optional privacy-sensitive version

If the councillor prefers not to disclose personal details:

“The Council RESOLVES, under section 85(1) of the LGA 1972, to approve the absence of Cllr [Name] from meetings until [date], for reasons notified confidentially to the Clerk.”