
Report of the Parental Support Working Group

Background:

At the Protocol Committee meeting on the 1st December the following motion from Cllr. Patrick Costello was discussed:

"That Dublin City Council shall do its utmost to facilitate councillors with young children who bring their children to meetings, and shall have particular regard to facilitate councillors who are breast-feeding."

The Members of the Committee supported the overall objective of the motion and acknowledged the need to facilitate and support Councillors with young families. However it was recognised that there were many factors to be taken into account before proceeding. To this end they recommended that a Working Group be established to investigate the issues raised by Cllr. Costello's motion and which would report back to the Protocol Committee with recommendations.

Membership: Councillors Patrick Costello, Claire Byrne, Janice Boylan and Tina MacVeigh along with Deirdre Ni Raghallaigh from Chief Executive's Office formed the working group to investigate the issues.

Progress:

The Committee met on the 5th January 2017 when the terms of reference for the Working Group were accepted. These included:

- The Group would focus on council / committee meetings occurring in City Hall and applicable area offices only.
- By legal definition children are those under 18 years of age who are not married.
- DCC employees are required to comply with "Safeguarding Children in the Workplace" guidelines. (DCC 2011)

The following issues were identified by the Working Group for consideration:

1) **The Provision of a Parental Room in City Hall:**

Following a survey of City Hall by the City Architects Section it was established that the most suitable place to provide the facilities would be on the first floor in the small rear space off the 'Members Cloakroom', currently in use as a Gents Toilet. The proposal has been discussed with the Conservation Officer and she see's no issues in principle. City Architects are now in the process of drawing up plans for the layout

of the room and a draft programme of works with a view to carrying them out in August 2017 during the summer recess.

2) The DCC Crèche

Corporate Services have confirmed that priority is given to staff and Councillors over non DCC applicants on the crèche waiting list. The crèche can provide once off or occasional day-care to Councillor's children, provided advance warning is given. However crèches apply staff ratios depending on the age of the child which cannot be breached. If intending to use the crèche Councillors would be advised to book the sessions as soon as the date of the SPC or area meetings are known. The cost of availing of this facility would be borne personally by the Councillor.

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3) Children in City Hall

Given the risks inherent in the building, all babies or Children in the Council area of City Hall or in the visitors gallery need to be under the constant direct supervision of the councillor concerned or another adult nominated by him/her. In compliance with guidelines staff assigned to City Hall or to council meetings can have no role in the supervision or oversight of any visiting child. Members enquired whether there could be scope for councillors to bring their child into the chamber at lesser attended area and SPC meetings.

Options Considered but not recommended at this stage

Remote Voting /Teleconferencing

Maternity and paternity leave does not apply to councillors at present. Councillors often return to Council meetings very soon after giving birth. We discussed the option of remote voting, teleconferencing software and proxy voting. The electronic voting system in the Chamber is a closed system and therefore it is not possible at present to vote remotely. The cost of installing such a teleconferencing system would be prohibitive and may be difficult to manage in the Council chamber. The procedures for payment of Councillors attendance at meetings are governed by ministerial regulations derived from legislation and therefore we are restricted in implementing any variation. It should be noted that Members can still receive their full allowance if they attend 80% of their meetings annually, which allows for some periods of absence for maternity or illness without affecting overall payments. The government has also brought forward proposals to amend the Social Welfare Bill which will allow Councillors to access a range of social welfare benefits

Provision of Childcare outside hours:

The Chief Executive's Office carried out a survey of Members asking if they would avail of childcare facilities for the monthly City Council Meeting if they were provided. Although Members were supportive of the idea of providing such a facility, the response to the survey indicated there was little or no demand for it at present.