

## **Policy & Resources Committee – 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025**

### **Report Title: Councillor Attendance Records – Scope of Recording and Publication**

#### **1. Introduction**

This report considers whether Faversham Town Council should formally record and publish councillor attendance at meetings beyond that which is already required for Full Council.

At present, councillor attendance at Full Council meetings is recorded in the Attendance Book and official minutes and published in accordance with statutory requirements. Attendance at committee and working group meetings is also minuted but not collated into a consolidated public record.

The Policy & Resources Committee is asked to consider the benefits and potential drawbacks of expanding attendance recording and publication.

#### **2. Statutory Requirements**

- Under the **Local Government Act 1972**, councils must record attendance at Full Council meetings in the minutes.
- Failure to attend Full Council (or qualifying committee) meetings for six consecutive months without approval leads to automatic disqualification.
- There is no statutory requirement to maintain or publish collated attendance records for committees, sub-committees, or working groups.

#### **3. Benefits of Expanded Attendance Recording**

##### **1. Transparency and Accountability**

- Demonstrates to the public how actively councillors engage in their role.
- Provides electors with clear information at election time.

##### **2. Consistency**

- Applies the same standard across all meetings, not just Full Council.
- Reduces the perception of “hidden” attendance.

##### **3. Improved Governance**

- May encourage councillors to prioritise attendance.
- Supports committee chairs and the Mayor in monitoring engagement.

##### **4. Public Confidence**

- Reinforces trust by showing the Council is proactive in self-monitoring.

## **4. Detriment of Expanded Attendance Recording**

### **1. Context Missing**

- Attendance figures do not show reasons for absence (e.g., work commitments, caring responsibilities, illness).
- Risk of unfair reputational damage to councillors, particularly where absence is due to long-term ill health.

### **2. Potential Detriment**

- Recording absences without explanation could be detrimental to councillors experiencing personal hardship or health challenges.
- Example: In recent years, councillors nationally and locally have been unable to attend for extended periods due to serious illness or medical treatment. While their absence was lawful (approved or within regulations), publicly listing repeated absences without context may stigmatise or discourage them from returning to public life.

### **3. Administrative Burden**

- Collating attendance records across all committees and working groups requires additional officer time.
- Increases reporting obligations with limited practical governance gain.

### **4. Risk of Misinterpretation**

- Electors may misinterpret non-attendance at optional working groups as lack of commitment, even where councillors contribute in other valuable ways.

## **5. Options for Consideration**

### **Option 1 – Status Quo**

- Continue to record attendance at Full Council only (as legally required).
- Attendance at committees remains in the minutes but not collated or published separately.
- **Pros:** Minimal officer burden, avoids reputational risks.
- **Cons:** Limited transparency.

### **Option 2 – Publish Committee Attendance Records**

- Publish annual summary of attendance at all Council committees (excluding working groups).

- **Pros:** Improved accountability, limited additional burden.
- **Cons:** Does not capture reasons for absence; may unfairly impact councillors with ill health.

### **Option 3 – Publish All Attendance Records (Full Council, Committees, Working Groups)**

- Most transparent approach.
- **Pros:** Comprehensive, demonstrates highest standard of openness.
- **Cons:** Significant officer burden, high risk of misinterpretation, may deter participation in optional groups.

### **6. Mitigation Measures if Expanded Recording is Adopted**

- Provide contextual notes in attendance summaries, e.g., “Absence due to long-term ill health” where appropriate and agreed with the councillor.
- Ensure the Mayor/Clerk has discretion to approve compassionate leave and annotate records accordingly.
- Focus publication on committees only (Option 2), to balance accountability with fairness.

### **7. Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Policy & Resources Committee:

1. Notes the legal requirement to record attendance at Full Council.
2. Considers whether to extend attendance recording to Council committees.
3. Agrees that attendance at working groups should not be formally recorded or published.
4. Ensures that, if expanded records are published, a mechanism is included to reflect absences due to long-term ill health or other exceptional circumstances to prevent unfair reputational harm.

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27<sup>th</sup> August 2025