
Agenda Item: Dependants Carers Allowance

Meeting Date: Monday, 12 October 2026

Contact Officer: Town Clerk/CEO – Sharon Groth

The purpose of this report is to seek the Council's support for the campaign led by Weymouth Town Council, with the backing of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), to enable town and parish councils in England to pay dependants' carers' expenses, and to authorise the Town Clerk to write to the local MP in support.

Background

Previous administrations of Witney Town Council have supported efforts to address the anomaly whereby the Dependants' Carers' Allowance available to councillors at principal authorities does not extend to town and parish councils in England.

The cost of arranging childcare or care for a dependant while attending council business can discourage, or prevent, people with caring responsibilities from standing for election or serving as town councillors.

This exclusion can limit the range of candidates able to seek election and the extent to which local councils reflect their communities. The campaign seeks a discretionary power to reimburse care costs associated with official council business, rather than a requirement for every council to introduce an allowance.

Current Situation

The Town Clerk received correspondence from NALC on 28 September 2026 inviting councils to write to their local MP in support of Weymouth Town Council's forthcoming amended proposal under the Sustainable Communities Act 2007. A suggested letter is attached as Appendix A.

NALC's correspondence reports that the Government decided in April 2026 not to take forward the proposed change, and that Weymouth Town Council agreed on 2 September 2026 to seek reconsideration. Weymouth is gathering further evidence, with a view to NALC resubmitting an amended proposal in or by December 2026.

Writing to the local MP now would help raise awareness ahead of that submission and reaffirm Witney Town Council's previous support for addressing this barrier to participation.

The proposed change would provide a power, rather than a duty, to pay carers' expenses. Each council would therefore retain the choice whether to introduce a scheme, subject to the terms of any legislative change.

Corporate Strategy

Supporting wider participation in local democracy is consistent with the Council's Strategic Plan 2025–29 and its mission to make Witney a great place to live, work and visit. It would help the Council reflect the community it serves and enable a wider range of residents to contribute to local decisions.

This report contributes to the delivery of the following strategic pillars of the plan:

1. A Forward Looking Town Council
2. An Engaged & Supported Community
3. An Empowered Community
4. A Respectful Community

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality: Removing financial barriers associated with caring responsibilities could widen access to elected office and support more representative town and parish councils.
- b) Biodiversity: No direct implications arising from this proposal.
- c) Crime & Disorder: No direct implications arising from this proposal.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency: No direct implications arising from this proposal.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

The campaign's outcome and timetable remain outside the Council's control. Supporting the proposal would not authorise payments under the current arrangements. Any future scheme would need to comply with the legislation then in force and be subject to a separate Council decision.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Enabling more residents with caring responsibilities to participate in local democracy would bring a wider range of experience and perspectives to Council decisions and strengthen community representation.

Financial implications

There are no additional budget requirements arising from sending a letter of support, which can be undertaken within existing staff resources. Any future allowance scheme would require separate consideration of eligibility, payment limits and budget provision.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and resolve to:

1. Support Weymouth Town Council's forthcoming amended Sustainable Communities Act proposal, backed by NALC, to give town and parish councils in England the discretion to pay dependants' carers' expenses for councillors undertaking official council business.
2. Instruct the Town Clerk to write to the local MP on behalf of Witney Town Council using the suggested letter at Appendix A, adapted to reflect the Council's support and with any necessary factual or legal corrections before issue.