

DRAFT MEETING SCHEDULE 2026/27 & NON-ATTENDANCE REGULATIONS

Due to the number of Parish Council meetings that have required cancellation due to inquoracy, it has been suggested by the External Auditor that a schedule should be established and passed by resolution of the Parish Council. The following schedule is submitted for consideration by the Members of the Parish Council.

Date	Venue	Time	Comment
16th September 2026	Rockbeare VH	18.45 hrs	
21st October 2026		18.45 hrs	Work Programme Setting for 2027/28
18th November 2026		18.45 hrs	Budget/ Precept Setting
16th December 2027		18.45 hrs	Final Budget
20th January 2027		18.45 hrs	
17th February 2027		18.45 hrs	
17th March 2027		18.45 hrs	
21st April 2027		18.45 hrs	
19th May 2027		18.45 hrs	Annual Parish Meeting/ APC Meeting
16th June 2027		18.45 hrs	
21st July 2027		18.45 hrs	
Aug-27			No Meeting

Apologies for Absence – Local Government Act 1972, Section 85, sets out the regulations governing the submission and acceptance of apologies:

Parish councils operate under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, local attendance policies, and GDPR constraints. An apology may be *received*, but only certain reasons constitute a “good reason approved by the authority”. Leisure-based absences (e.g., eclipse-watching) are not acceptable. Valid reasons must be capable of being approved as “good reason” under s.85.

Statutory Framework: Section 85 LGA 1972

A councillor is disqualified if they fail to attend any meeting for six months, *unless* the failure is due to “some good reason approved by the authority” *before* the six months expires.

- Approval must be explicit and minuted.
- Simply noting an apology does not amount to approval

What Counts as an Acceptable Reason (Governance-Safe)

Local policies and sector guidance show a consistent pattern of what is normally treated as a **valid** apology or “good reason”:

- Illness / medical appointments / hospitalisation
- Convalescence / recovery
- Employment commitments preventing attendance
- Official council business (including district/borough duties)
- School governor / trustee duties
- Caring responsibilities (family or dependent care)
- Maternity / paternity / adoption leave
- Training required for the role
- Holidays (generally accepted as reasonable)

These reasons are capable of being approved as “good reason” under s.85 because they relate to unavoidable personal circumstances or official duties.

What Is *Not* an Acceptable Reason

Sector guidance is explicit that apologies cannot be given simply because a councillor “does not want to turn up.”

The following are not valid reasons for absence and should not be approved:

- Leisure activities (e.g., watching a solar eclipse, attending a concert, hobby events)
- Social engagements (parties, nights out, informal gatherings)
- Preference-based non-attendance (“I don’t like that committee”, “I don’t get on with X”)
- Political protest absences (boycotting meetings)
- Convenience-based excuses (“too tired”, “too busy with personal errands”)
- Any reason lacking explanation (no reason given = cannot be approved under s.85)

These cannot meet the statutory threshold of “good reason approved by the authority” and must be treated as unapproved absences.

Recording and Acceptance of Apologies

1. Recording

Many councils record only that an apology was received, without stating the reason, due to GDPR concerns. However, for s.85 purposes, the council must still *consider* the reason internally and decide whether it is a “good reason”.

2. Acceptance vs Non-Acceptance

Minutes should distinguish:

- Apologies with consent → reason accepted; resets the six-month clock.
- Apologies without consent → reason not accepted; six-month clock continues.

Simply noting an apology does not equal acceptance.

Governance Consequences of Invalid Reasons

If the reason is not acceptable:

- The apology is recorded but not accepted.
- The absence is treated as unapproved.
- Repeated unapproved absences may justify:
 - referral to the Monitoring Officer;
 - Code of Conduct concerns (failure to fulfil representative duties);
 - evidence of disengagement for Ombudsman purposes.

District Councillor Conduct

The **same principles apply to district councillors**, but with **even greater force**, because district councillors have statutory duties to **represent their wards, attend parish meetings when invited**, and **provide reports**. If a district councillor fails to attend and fails to provide an apology, the absence is treated as **unapproved**, and the failure forms evidence of **non-engagement, maladministration, and breach of the Nolan Principles**.

Below is the full, governance-safe explanation.

- **1. District councillors are not governed by s.85 LGA 1972 for parish attendance — but they *are* bound by statutory duties of representation**
- Section 85 (six-month rule) applies only to **members of the authority itself**. A district councillor is not a member of the parish council, so they cannot be disqualified from the parish council under s.85.

However, district councillors are bound by:

- **Local Government Act 2000** (executive arrangements and member responsibilities)
- **Localism Act 2011** (Code of Conduct duties)
- **Nolan Principles** (Accountability, Leadership, Duty)
- **Their own council's Constitution** (duties to engage with parish councils and residents)

These impose a **positive obligation** to:

- attend parish meetings when reasonably expected;
- provide ward reports;
- respond to parish concerns;
- support local governance.
- Failure to attend **without apology** is a breach of those duties.

2. What counts as an acceptable reason for a district councillor's absence?

- The same governance standards apply as for parish councillors.

Acceptable reasons

- Illness / medical treatment
- Work commitments
- Caring responsibilities
- Official district-level duties
- Holidays
- Emergencies
- Training
- These are legitimate reasons for non-attendance and can be accepted.

Not acceptable reasons

- Leisure activities
- Social events
- "I don't like that parish"
- "I don't get on with X councillor"
- Boycotting meetings
- No reason given
- Any reason that is purely personal preference
- If no apology is given, the absence is automatically **unapproved**.

3. Why non-attendance without apology is more serious for district councillors

- A district councillor who fails to attend and fails to apologise is not merely “absent” — they are failing to discharge **statutory representative duties**.
- Consequences include:

a. Breach of the Code of Conduct - Non-attendance without apology breaches:

- Accountability
- Leadership
- Duty to act in the public interest
- Respect for the role of the parish council
- b. Evidence of maladministration.

For Ombudsman purposes, repeated non-attendance without apology demonstrates:

- failure to represent residents;
- failure to engage with parish governance;
- failure to support complaint resolution;
- obstruction of local democratic processes.
- **c. Grounds for Monitoring Officer referral**
- A pattern of non-attendance and silence is grounds for:
- formal standards investigation;
- possible sanctions;
- mandatory training;
- public censure.

4. How the parish should record district councillor non-attendance

- Minutes should show:
- District councillor X: no apology received.
- Absence recorded as unapproved.
- Council noted continuing failure to provide ward reports / attend meetings.

This creates a clear evidential trail.

It will be proposed that the following minute entry for district councillor non-attendance;

District Councillor Report

The Council noted that the District Councillor was not in attendance. No apology for absence was received, and no written report or update was provided to the Parish Council.

The Council further noted the continuing pattern of non-attendance and non-engagement, including the absence of district-level information required for informed decision-making and the lack of any response to matters previously raised with East Devon District Council.

The absence was therefore recorded as unapproved.

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