



meeting	COUNTY COUNCIL	
date	7 October 2004	agenda item number

REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

TRAVEL, ACCOMMODATION, CONFERENCES AND MEMBER TRAINING

Purpose of Report

To present the Standards Committee's:

- final recommendations on travel and accommodation.
- recommendations on decision-making and budgets for travel and conferences.
- interim recommendations on Member training and attendance at conferences and similar events.

Background

In late 2003/early 2004, there was a considerable amount of local media comment about a range of issues arising from the current Travel and Conference Policy and arrangements for Member Training and Development. Additionally, both the County Council and myself (as Chair of the Committee) received a number of representations relating to the same matters from individual members of the public.

As a result, I initiated a review by the Standards Committee of the Council's arrangements and policies relating to:

- travel and accommodation.
- conferences and seminars.
- councillor development.

The Committee's work so far has taken place during 5 meetings held between February and September 2004. During these meetings, the Committee has considered carefully the existing arrangements and reviewed the various elements of them against

- public perceptions/expectations.
- appropriate and adequate financial and audit procedures.
- practices adopted within a range of external organisations. (a large number of organisations were approached and replies were received from, amongst others, local authorities, Boots plc, Severn Trent Water, Queen's Medical Centre and other health trusts.)
- the needs of the County Council.
- other national and local policies relating to eg Members' Allowances.

There was the opportunity, during one of the Committee's meetings, for members of the public to contribute comments and suggestions.

Due to its complexity, much of the Committee's work is ongoing. However, the Committee has completed its consideration of issues relating to travel and accommodation. This report is therefore concerned mainly with that aspect of the review, where final recommendations have been made. There are also references to decision-making and financial matters, where the Committee has made further recommendations. Lastly, the report describes on-going work on councillor development and participation in conferences and seminars.

Information and Advice

a) Travel and Accommodation

The current Travel and Conference policy was introduced in April 2000. It was incorporated into the Members' Allowances Scheme in October 2004. The policy is wide-ranging, in that it covers

- participation in a range of events (both in the UK and abroad) and associated approval processes/criteria for approval.
- method/class of travel.
- type of accommodation to be used.
- allowances and expenses.

The Committee acknowledged that, since 2000, much work has been done within the Council to improve the quality of decision-making in relation to the existing policy and to ensure that it is followed. However, the outcome of our work is a clear view that the policy should be revised, in order to

- clarify decision-making responsibilities.

- respond to continuing concerns about transparency of decision-making.
- remove potential ambiguities.
- introduce clear descriptions of the class of travel normally to be used and the circumstances in which variations may be considered.
- provide improved public information about performance against the policy.

To progress this matter, the Committee commissioned the revised draft Travel and Accommodation Policy, attached at Appendix A.

The main differences between the new policy and existing arrangements are

- the policy is concerned only with travel and accommodation. Issues related to the criteria for participation in conferences, seminars, training events etc will be dealt with in the policy to be written on completion of the work described in b) and c) below.
- the policy sets a limit on the class of travel to be used unless there are particular circumstances relevant to a Member which should be considered on a case by case basis.
- the Administration Committee will become responsible for the operation of the whole policy.
- there is a new requirement for annual reports to Standards Committee, so that the operation of the policy can be monitored.
- the 'reasonable' level of allowances which may be claimed for visits to certain countries has been replaced with a maximum amount, to be considered and approved in advance by the Administration Committee.

The new draft policy indicates that, where there are differences between it and the Members' Allowances Scheme, then the terms of the policy should prevail. This will impact on the operation of the Scheme in three areas. The first is a requirement for receipts to be produced for claimable expenditure incurred whilst participating in a visit approved under the policy. Secondly, there is an expectation that first class rail travel will not be used unless there are special circumstances, approved in advance. Those circumstances could include health/disability issues, or 'special offers' available on certain trains or any other relevant consideration. Lastly, the policy requires all accommodation to be booked through a central point (Members' Services in the Chief Executive's Department).

b) Conferences and Seminars

The draft Travel and Accommodation policy outlined above relates only to those issues. It is not intended to describe the criteria for participation in an event. The Committee has concluded that such issues are more appropriately dealt with in a separate document which will also cover the arrangements for training and development. Ongoing work in this area should lead to a policy which outlines considerations/information to be taken into account when approving attendance. The Committee has, however, indicated that decision-making under the policy to be formulated should remain with the Administration Committee.

c) Member Training

The Committee found that although there is a decision of the former Policy and General Purposes Committee which established current Member training arrangements, there is not a clear, single document which sets out the rationale for Member training, the options for its delivery, how it is to be identified and approved and the arrangement for monitoring and evaluating its impact. That is not to say that these processes do not take place, but the Committee would wish to see more formality attaching to them. We felt also, as indicated above, that some of the processes which could be followed might equally apply to attendance at conference/seminars, whether in a representational role or to meet individual or organisational learning need. In these circumstances, we would like to see a single document/policy, which sits alongside the Travel and Accommodation Policy referred to above. This new policy should provide for approval to be given both annually for "known" regular events and as required for ad hoc events. It should also describe the criteria to be considered when approving participation.

Responsibility for approving attendance at Conferences/Seminars and Member Training currently sits with the Administration Committee and we feel that this should continue. We have a strong view that there should be a single point of approval/administration of travel, accommodation, conferences and training policies. This would assist clarity and consistency of decision-making. As indicated earlier in this report, we feel that the appropriate vehicle for this is the Administration Committee. We are also of the view that, to enable effective decision-making which includes awareness of the financial impact of decisions taken, all of the various budgets for Member travel, accommodation/subsistence, conferences and learning/development should be brought together into a single budget to be administered by the Administration Committee in accordance with the Policies.

We recognise that further work is needed in developing the training policy. Work on this has already started and Officers in Financial Services are collating the relevant figures. In the circumstances we have recommended that the Administration Committee should consider and bring forward a draft policy which takes account of the outcome of our investigations. We further recommend that the Administration Committee should establish a Steering Group, which should include independent experts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) (a) That approval be given to the draft Travel and Accommodation Policy attached at Appendix A to this report and that it be implemented with immediate effect.
 - (b) That the Head of Members' Services be instructed to prepare and circulate template reports to be used to support all requests for approval under that policy.
 - (c) That the Administration Committee be asked to consider and approve at its next meeting the urgency procedures described in that policy.
- (2) That it be noted a revised Training, Conference and Seminar policy will be brought to a future meeting, but in the meantime the Administration Committee continue to be responsible for approving participation in conferences, services and training events by Members and, where necessary, by Officers.
 - (3) That approval be given to the revised terms of reference for Administration Committee attached at Appendix B to this report.
 - (4) (a) That the Director of Resources be instructed to bring together into a single budget all the budgets/resources currently available within Departmental budgets for Members' attendance at conference, seminars, and similar events.
 - (b) That expenditure against the budget referred to above be under the overall control of the Administration Committee.

CHRIS PRESTON (Councillor)
Chair of The Standards Committee

Statutory and Policy Implications

The power to make a Travel and Accommodation Policy is reserved to the full Council.

Legal Services' Comments

The Standards Committee is authorised to make recommendations for adoption of Council policy in issues affecting Members including the matters set out in this Report and the proposed policy. This decision is within the Constitutional Delegation to Council Meeting.

Director of Resources' Financial Comments (NS 29/09/04)

Budgets held centrally for Members' travel, subsistence and training in 2004/05 are as follows;

	£000
Travel	178
Subsistence	71
Training	42

The estimated total budgets held in departments for Members attendance at Conferences and seminars etc (excluding Pensions Committee figures) is £46,000

Background Papers Available for Public Inspection

The papers relied upon to produce this report are those previously published in connection with meetings of the Standards Committee held on INSERT DATES

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION POLICY

1. General

- 1.1 This policy (the Nottinghamshire County Council Travel Policy) was approved by Nottinghamshire County Council on 7th October 2004. It covers the approval and booking arrangements for travel and accommodation required in connection with the Council's business. It does not apply to travel and accommodation required in connection with direct service delivery eg school, trips, service users' outings, where the relevant Departments will have their own procedures.
- 1.2 This policy replaces all previous policies, decisions and/or precedents relating to travel undertaken in connection with the business of the Council.
- 1.3 The power to amend this policy is reserved to the full Council.
- 1.4 The practices in this policy shall, as far as possible, reflect the contents of the County Council's Members' Allowances Scheme and the Terms and Conditions of Service for Employees. In the event of any differences, this terms of the policy will apply.
- 1.5 In the event that a conflict arises between this Policy and the Members' Allowances Scheme the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Executive will mediate and determine the matter.

2. General Principles

- 2.1 The policy is based on the following principles
 - the proper conduct of business, and the overall efficiency of the Council.
 - transparency and accountability
 - achieving best value in the use of the Council's resources, benefiting the community, the Council and Councillors.
 - meeting the needs of those with disabilities and/or health problems

3. Approval Processes

- 3.1 The following travel may be undertaken without prior approval:-

- day to day travel within Nottinghamshire in connection with Nottinghamshire County Council business
- travel in connection with training and development events within the East Midlands which have been authorised in accordance with relevant policies

3.2 All other travel must be approved in advance in accordance with the following:-

Participant	Description	Approval required from
Councillors, Statutory and other co-opted members	(a) All travel within mainland UK not described in Schedule ? of the Members Allowances Scheme.	Administration Committee
	(b) Outside the UK	Administration Committee
Officers	(a) Within the UK	Relevant Chief or other Officer in accordance with departmental procedures
	(b) Outside the UK	(i) up to 4 days/3 nights in Europe – Chief Officer (ii) all other foreign travel – Administration Committee

3.3 The County Council recognises that, in cases of genuine urgency, it may not be possible to obtain formal approval from the Administration Committee prior to the expected date of travel. In these cases, approval can be given by the Chief Executive following consultation with the Chair, Vice-Chair and Conservative Group spokesperson of the Administration Committee and subject to a report back to the next available meeting of the Committee each time this urgency power is used.

4. Booking Arrangements

4.1 With the exception of travel by private car in connection with the day to day business of the Council, all arrangements and/or bookings for travel and accommodation approved under this policy must be made by Members' Services in the Chief Executive's Department.

- 4.2 Provisional bookings will not be made unless approval has been given in accordance with 3.2 or 3.3 above.

5. Method of Travel

- 5.1 At all times, the chosen method of travel must be the most cost-effective method, taking into account the value of time saved, anticipated subsistence and other expenses and any other relevant matters

5.2 Travel within the UK (mainland)

- 5.2.1 Public transport should normally be used, unless the use of private/self-drive hire/civic cars is proved to be the most cost effective option, taking into account mileage charges, anticipated subsistence, other expenses and any other relevant consideration including but not limited to those at paragraph 5.1.2.
- 5.2.2 The use of private cars to attend events out of the County area must be determined in relation to the following criteria:
- Cost in comparison to other options
 - Availability of public transport
 - Business requirements
 - Disability or health considerations

Other options which must be considered prior to approving the use of private cars are:

- Car Sharing
 - Use of hire cars/pool cars
 - Use of civic cars
- 5.2.3 Any travel by train within mainland UK will usually be standard class fare unless travel by other classes of ticket is cheaper overall.
- 5.2.4 This policy acknowledges the ability of councillors or certain officers to be able to travel by first class train within the UK in connection with the Council's business. Any councillor or officer requesting first class rail travel must give reasons which shall be recorded in the register referred to in section 10 below.
- 5.2.5 Air travel within mainland UK will be permitted only where the cost/convenience brings benefits to the Council.

5.3 Travel to Northern Ireland/Republic of Ireland/Outside the UK

- 5.3.1 Where available, and subject as follows, economy class should be used for all air, sea or land (ie rail) travel where this is the most cost effective.
- 5.3.2 The County Council recognises that there will be occasions where it is not appropriate to use economy class ie where there are health or disability issues to be considered. In these cases, a higher class of travel may be permitted, subject to prior approval being given by Administration Committee in each case.

6. Accommodation

- 6.1 Mid range hotels of good standard with appropriate business facilities will be chosen within safe and reasonable access to where the business of the visit is to take place.
- 6.2 For conferences, the added value of all-inclusive packages will be evaluated against making separate hotel arrangements.

7. Subsistence and other expenses

7.1 Within the UK (including Northern Ireland)

- 7.1.1 All costs of the approved method of travel will be paid by the County Council.
- 7.1.2 Subsistence allowances may be claimed. They will be the same for Councillors, Statutory Co-optees, other co-opted Members and Officers. Details of the amounts which may be claimed are included at Schedule ? of the Members Allowances Scheme.
- 7.1.3 Claims should be made on the forms provided as follows:-
- Officers - from their Department
 - Councillors and others covered by the Members' Allowances Scheme - from Members' Services
- 7.1.4 Receipts should be obtained for all expenditure incurred.

7.2 Outside the UK

- 7.2.1 Accommodation will be booked and paid for by Members' Services on behalf of the County Council.

- 7.2.2 Subsistence allowance may be claimed for actual reasonable expenses incurred on meals, beverages, transport within the foreign country, laundry, phone calls etc.

The current maximum amount for subsistence per 24 hours for Countries within the European Union is £75.00 (plus £10 per day for unreceipted out of pocket expenses)

For travel to other destinations, Members' Services will calculate a maximum amount for subsistence per 24 hours. That amount will be notified to the Administration Committee when approval is sought for the travel to be undertaken.

- 7.2.3 The above rates assume that all meals (excluding breakfast) will have to be paid for from the subsistence allowance. If meals are provided as part of the visit and at no personal cost to the Council's representative(s) the daily allowance will be reduced by 20% for each meal provided.
- 7.2.4 Receipts must be obtained wherever practicable for all claimable expenditure. Where this is not possible, a written statement will be required from the person claiming allowances.

8. Administration of the Policy

- 8.1 All travel tickets and/or accommodation required under this policy must be booked through Members' Services in the Chief Executive's Department.
- 8.2 Before any bookings are made, Members' Service will require written confirmation of approval. Where the cost is to be met by a Department, the appropriate budget code(s) for the expenditure will also be required.
- 8.3 Subject to normal formalities, Members Services can arrange advances of cash, foreign currency and travellers cheques. Any unspent cash/currency or travellers cheques must be returned to Members Services within one month of return from the visit.
- 8.4 All claim forms, together with receipts and details of expenses incurred must be submitted within one month of return from the visit.
- 8.5 County Council Credit cards must only be used for claimable expenses incurred in carrying out the County Council's business and all receipts/vouchers in respect of any expenditure met in this way must be passed to Financial Services within one month of return from the visit.
- 8.6 Where the Council's representative wishes, for personal reasons, to extend their stay at the destination to which they have travelled, this is permitted on the strict understanding that no additional cost falls to be

met by the Council and that all expenses in connection with the extension of stay are reimbursed before the date of outward travel.

- 8.7 Where the Council's representative is accompanied by a partner, the Council must be reimbursed for all expenses to be incurred in respect of travel arrangements made by Members' Services in respect of the partner before the date of outward travel.

9. Record Keeping

- 9.1 Members' Services will maintain a public register of the following information in respect of each item of travel undertaken under this policy.

- Name of traveller/participant
- Purpose of travel/visit
- Dates of travel
- Destination
- Method/class/cost of travel and/or accommodation
- Cost of insurance
- Amount(s) of allowances paid
- Details of the date approval was given and the identity of the decision maker (including details of specific additional approvals from time given in respect of, for instance, travel by other than standard class).
- The date on which the Council's representative(s) submitted a report on the outcome/value of the visit, where appropriate.

- 9.2 The register shall be available for public inspection and shall be published on the Council's website.

- 9.3 Annual reports shall be made to the Standards Committee which shall give

- details of the totality of travel undertaken under this policy,
- information as to occasions upon which other than standard/economy class travel or its equivalent has been used.
- the occasions upon which urgency powers referred to in paragraph 4.3 above have been used.

11. DELEGATION TO ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

11.1. The exercise of the powers and functions contained in this section are delegated by the County Council to the Administration Committee and are expressly excluded from the delegation of the authority to the Cabinet.

11.2. Approval for:

11.2.1. expenditure to be incurred for Member attendance at conferences and seminars;

11.2.2. expenditure on accommodation and associated costs to be incurred and required by Members for the purposes of conducting County Council business or in connection with attendance at conferences, seminars or training courses;

11.2.3. expenditure on travel and associated costs associated to be incurred in connection with the matters at 11.2.1 and 11.2.2 or any other expenditure reasonably required in connection with those matters and/or for which approval is required in accordance with the Council's Travel and Accommodation Policy and Member Training Policy.

11.3. Approval of officer travel outside Europe or any travel in excess of 4 days.

11.4. Appointments to outside bodies, relating to functions of Council.

11.5. Determining the level and nature of support services for Members of the County Council.

11.6. Authorising hospitality to be offered by the County Council.

11.7. Advising on electoral issues including revision of boundaries of and within the Council's administrative area.