



meeting **ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE**

date **13 July 2009** agenda item number **5 (d)**

REPORT OF SERVICE MANAGER (MEMBER SUPPORT)

MEMBERS' SURGERIES

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To recommend a policy for payment of hire charges for members' surgeries.

2. Background

- 2.1 As part of their responsibilities to their constituents members are expected to make themselves available to meet constituents who have issues to raise. Some members do this by responding to specific requests, i.e. have contact details on the web site and arrange to meet constituents at mutually convenient times. Others hold surgeries – i.e. book a room and advertise that they will be at the surgery for members of the public to drop in without appointments.
- 2.2 For many members who hold surgeries there are suitable County Council premises in their division or in convenient locations – eg libraries. Members are encouraged to use these wherever possible.
- 2.3 Use of County Council premises should normally be free to members. However, in some instances suitable council premises have not been available and members have had to hire premises. These room hire charges have been met by the Council, through Member Support.
- 2.4 Members who are also district council members may have free use of district facilities – including community centres and leisure centres. It is assumed that surgeries held by dual hatted members will cover both their district and county roles and consequently that free use would cover both roles and that any costs would be shared between the two councils.
- 2.5 The new Members Handbook which was issued to all members after the election includes advice on staying safe in surgeries including advice not to hold surgeries in an otherwise empty building.

- 2.6 Holding surgeries for constituents is an approved duty for travel and subsistence under the members allowance scheme.
- 2.7 In its final report the Councillors Commission noted that some councils did not meet the costs of hiring rooms for members' surgeries because of concern about this being seen as party political activity. However the Commission took the view that surgery support and case work support is always legitimate. In its response the Government restated its view that "councils and their officers should be confident about operating in a political environment and giving their elected councillors the support they require to represent their voters".
- 2.8 The Committee is asked to endorse the practice of the Council meeting the hire charges wherever necessary.

Statutory and Policy Implications

3. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, personnel, crime and disorder and those using the service and where such implications are material they have been described in the text of the report.

4. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Service Manager (Member Support) be authorised to meet appropriate room hire charges for members' surgeries if necessary.

David Ellis
Service Manager (Member Support)

Service Director (Finance) Comments (JB – 3/7/09)

Any costs will be funded from the Members' Budget.

Legal Services Comments (JF – 1/7/09)

The Administration Committee has the authority to agree the recommendation.

Background Papers Available for Inspection

Nil

Electoral Divisions Affected

All