

report



meeting	ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE	
date	31 MARCH 2004	agenda item number

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

International Association of Public Participation Annual Conference

Purpose

To seek approval for the attendance of an officer at the annual conference of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

Background

IAP2 was established to promote and improve the practice of public participation in relation to government, individuals, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest in nations throughout the world. The annual conference covers a wide range of topics demonstrating best practice in involving the public in decision-making and shaping public services. The conference also offers opportunities for the participants to take part in developing skills and competences in aspects of public involvement.

The International Association of Public Participation identifies the following core values for the practice of public participation:

1. The public should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. The public participation process communicates the interests and meets the process needs of all participants.
4. The public participation process seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected.
5. The public participation process involves participants in defining how they participate.
6. The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

7. The public participation process communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

This Council has prioritised the development of better connections with its communities and different ways of including local people in decision-making through consultation with citizens and users. The connecting with Communities project and work to improve access to services represent some recent attempts to improve our links with service users and citizens generally. Further work is being developed to bring coherence to the way the council understands and uses the huge range of information it gathers from users and citizens. In particular, there is a need to ensure that our approach is inclusive and includes voices that are not always heard in general consultations.

This conference will provide access to some valuable international experience and will help to exemplify different approaches that could be adapted for future use in Nottinghamshire. The conference takes place between 2nd May and 5 May 2004 in Madison, Wisconsin (USA).

Matters for Consideration

The Assistant Chief Executive has the responsibility for a range of customer access and communications issues and has experience of many aspects of this council's consultation and partnership work. His attendance at the conference would help to inform and guide some critical areas of work for the council over the coming year. He has already planned to be in the USA for a private visit over the period in which the conference is being held and has requested that his attendance at the conference on behalf of the County Council be authorised. As he is already committed to a private visit he will meet his own travel costs to the USA. The cost to this Council will therefore be restricted to the cost of conference registration and subsistence costs during the period of the conference.

Although there are occasional opportunities to explore public participation issues within the UK, the added dimension of international experience is not so frequently available. The IAP2 conference brings together the widest range of experience and techniques in a single event and, in terms of this breadth, it is unique. If attendance is approved, a report on the conference will be produced to feedback any issues which may be of value to the County Council.

In these circumstances, the potential benefits to the County Council are significant and relevant to the Council's priorities. The costs have been kept to an absolute minimum because the Council will not be required to meet the travel costs. The estimated maximum total cost of £700 will cover the conference registration fee and subsistence costs. Under the Council's Travel and Conference Policy, approval by the Administration Committee for attendance at this event is required in advance.

RECOMMENDATION

That approval be given to the attendance of the postholder at the Annual Conference of the International Association of Public Participation in Madison USA between 2nd May and 5th May 2004

Roger Latham
Chief Executive

Statutory and Policy Implications

There are a range of statutory consultation requirements which the county council must meet. The council also seeks the views of citizens and users on a wide range of services and policies in order to shape the council's plans. Information gained from the conference will be relevant to the review and development of such policies.

Executive Head of Democratic & Legal Services' Comments

The Travel and Conference Policy sets out the criteria which must be applied and document when considering an overseas visit as follows:

how the visit would further the work of the Council

whether there are alternative means of achieving the purpose and evidence that these have been considered.

the full costs involved and how these relate to the expected benefits

whether the number of elected members and officers attending is the minimum required to achieve the purpose for the visit

The report sets out the information required to enable consideration of each of the criteria [EB 09.03.020]

Director of Resources' Comments (NS)

As indicated in the report, the cost of £700 is to cover the conference fees and subsistence costs. This cost will be met from the budgetary provision for staff conference fees within the Chief Executive's Department.

Background Papers Available for Public Inspection

The Wisdom of Voices – Conference Brochure