
Ethics Committee

3 December 2020

Name of Cabinet Member:

N/A - Ethics Committee

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Law and Governance

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title: Conference and Travel Policy

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

The Council's Conference and Travel Protocol has recently been reviewed as part of a wider review of the Constitution. On 8 September, Council resolved that:

- (a) The Conference and Travel Protocol be removed from the Constitution;
- (b) Officers be authorised to produce a policy for the approval of conference and travel costs for members and officers;
- (c) Once drafted, the policy be approved by Ethics Committee;
- (d) A register of travel and conference attendance costing more than £500 and all travel outside of the UK be maintained and published; and
- (e) The register of travel and conference costs be scrutinised by Ethics Committee twice a year.

This report sets out a draft revised Conference and Travel Policy for Ethics Committee to consider and approve.

Recommendation:

The Ethics Committee is recommended to:

Approve the Conference and Travel Policy set out in the Appendix to this report.

List of Appendices included:

Conference and Travel Policy

Other useful background papers can be found at the following web addresses:

Report to Council 8 September 2020

<https://edemocracy.coventry.gov.uk/documents/s48063/Proposed%20Changes%20to%20the%20Constitution.pdf>

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Conference and Travel Policy

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 The Conference and Travel Protocol at Part 4E of the Constitution sets out the procedure for Councillors wishing to attend conferences, seminars or fact-finding visits or inspections. It also deals with foreign travel by both Councillors and employees. The Protocol had not been reviewed for some years.
- 1.2 As part of a wider review of the Constitution, Council on 8 September 2020 resolved that:
- (a) The Conference and Travel Protocol be removed from the Constitution;
 - (b) Officers be authorised to produce a policy for the approval of conference and travel costs for members and officers;
 - (c) Once drafted, the policy be approved by Ethics Committee;
 - (d) A register of travel and conference attendance costing more than £500 and all travel outside of the UK be maintained and published; and
 - (e) The register of travel and conference costs be scrutinised by Ethics Committee twice a year.

2. Options Considered and Recommended Proposal

2.1 Attached as an Appendix to this report is a draft revised Conference and Travel Policy for consideration and approval by the Committee. The purpose of the new policy is to ensure that there is clarity and transparency in the process, not to increase or decrease the cost such activities. Therefore, it is not expected that there will be any financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

2.2 The draft policy provides that:

- travel and conference attendance for officers and members requires the approval of the appropriate budget holder;
- the requirement for members to seek Cabinet Member approval for attendance at conference is removed (subject to the approval of the appropriate budget holder)
- any expenditure which is likely to be £500 or more (including subsistence costs) must be entered onto a public register, together with all travel outside the UK; and
- the register will be scrutinised by the Committee twice a year, which is in line with its current practice on scrutiny of gifts and hospitality received by members and officers.

2.3 The introduction of a public register and scrutiny by the Committee provides a measure of openness and transparency which is not present in the current Protocol.

For example, having a register online will make it easier for members of the public to see the extent of travel and attendance at conferences than at present.

2.4 Recommendation

The Committee is recommended to:

Approve the Conference and Travel Policy set out in the Appendix to this report.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

N/A

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

The Policy will be implemented once it is approved for use.

5. Comments from the Director of Finance and Director of Law and Governance

5.1 Financial implications

There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

5.2 Legal implications

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. The issues referred to in this report will assist the Council in complying with its obligations under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011.

6 Other implications

None

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

Not applicable.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

There is no direct risk to the organisation as a result of the contents of this report.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

No direct impact at this stage

6.4 Equality Impact Assessment

There are no public sector equality duties which are of relevance at this stage.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None at this stage

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Suzanne Bennett	Governance Services Officer	Law and Governance	25.11.20	25.11.20
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Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)				
Finance: Graham Clark	Lead Accountant	Finance	20.11.20	23.11.20
Legal: Julie Newman	Director of Law and Governance	Law and Governance	20.11.20	25.11.20
Councillor Walsh	Chair of Ethics Committee		23.11.20	23.11.20

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www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings

APPENDIX

POLICY FOR THE APPROVAL OF CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE AND TRAVEL FOR COUNCILLORS AND EMPLOYEES

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that there is clarity and transparency in the process for authorising travel by both elected members and employees and for authorising elected members to attend conferences, seminars or fact-finding visits or inspections.
- 1.2 In this Policy “Conferences” includes seminars, working parties, fact-finding visits and inspections. It also includes:
- (a) Conferences in respect of which, historically, there has been “standing” approval for certain Councillors, defined by role, to attend (e.g. certain teacher conferences);
 - (b) All inspections or fact-finding visits outside the City Council boundary;
 - (c) All visits abroad by councillors (including by the Lord Mayor and civic delegations) to countries outside Europe, irrespective of whether a conference or seminar is part of the programme. In considering requests for foreign travel outside Europe by the Lord Mayor, the budget holder will take into account the discretion of the Lord Mayor to undertake foreign trips in accordance with the objectives of the mayoralty.
- 1.3 The Policy also applies to Employees when they wish to accompany a Councillor either in the UK or abroad. Foreign visits by employees without Councillors are dealt with at paragraph 5 below.

2. Attendance at Conferences by Councillors

- 2.1 Any Councillor (including Cabinet Members) or Member of the Strategic Management Board who believes that it would be appropriate to have Councillor representation at a conference must obtain prior authority to do so where the total cost (including conference fees, travel and subsistence) is likely to exceed £500. The Councillor or Member of Strategic Management Board must complete a “Conferences/Seminars Authority for Attendance” form and send it together with details of the Conference to the budget holder responsible for the appropriate service area, with a recommendation as to who should attend.

- 2.2 When a request for authority for attendance at a conference is submitted, the costs involved must also be identified, together with the relevant budget code from which those costs are to be funded.
- 2.3 Where the event includes attendance with other participants as part of a group, the total number of participants must be shown on the form. This applies irrespective of whether the City Council is funding the costs of those other participants.
- 2.4 An approval granted under this Policy can only cover one visit or journey. If further travel is required as part of an on-going project, then a separate application will need to be made for each visit or journey.
- 2.5 Details must be given on the form of anyone, who is not a Councillor or employee, and who is travelling with the Councillor or employee and for whom some or all of the costs of their travel, accommodation or other expenses are being paid by the Councillor or employee or individual concerned.
- 2.6 Copies of the form are available from the Governance Services team.

3. Reporting on Conferences and Visits

- 3.1 The relevant Scrutiny Board or Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee may request that a councillor provides a report on any conference that he or she has attended. Likewise, the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee may request a report on any visits/conferences attended by the Lord Mayor.

4. Exclusions

This Policy does not apply to:-

- (a) Visits by a Cabinet Member/Cabinet/Scrutiny or City Council Committee, where the visit is part of a meeting for the purposes of inspection and the visit is to an establishment within the City Council boundary.
- (b) Regular (bi-monthly or quarterly) meetings of the board of management or similar of a “professional” institute or body to which the Council belongs (such as the Management Committee of the Local Government Information Unit).
- (c) Meetings (and associated national conferences and exhibitions) of bodies of which the Council is a member e.g. the Local

Government Association, unless absence from the City for two or more days is involved.

- (d) Attendance at any conference etc where the cost to the City Council, including travel and subsistence costs does not exceed £500. However, there is still a requirement to submit a report to Scrutiny outlining the benefits of attendance.
- (e) Visits by the Lord Mayor/Deputy Lord Mayor within Europe.

5. Approval of Travel by Employees

Except where an employee wishes to accompany a Councillor either in the UK or abroad (as stated in paragraph 1.3), attendance at conferences and travel, either in the UK or abroad by employees are not covered by this policy. Approval of such attendances or travel will be in accordance with normal Directorate procedures.

6. Register of Attendances at Conferences and Travel

All instances where Councillors and employees attend conferences or travel in the UK where the cost including subsistence exceeds £500 will be recorded on a register and published on the Council's website. This includes occasions when employees are travelling or attending conferences without being accompanied by a Councillor, as well as when they do. All instances of travel abroad by Councillors or employees, regardless of the cost, must be recorded in the register.