
Council

28th March 2013

Report of the Monitoring Officer

Travel Allowances

Summary

1. The current scheme of allowances contains a number of anomalies as to when travel costs can and cannot properly be claimed by Members. The Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) reported to Council in October 2012 and recommended changes to the current list of approved duties alongside a number of other changes which Members felt unable to accept at that time.

Background

2. Members are entitled to claim reimbursement for travel and subsistence costs when engaged on “approved duties”. Members can also claim dependent care allowances for such duties. The current scheme allows for expenses to be claimed for attendance at:
 - (a) A meeting of the Cabinet
 - (b) A meeting of a committee of the Cabinet
 - (c) A meeting of the authority (Council)
 - (d) A meeting of a committee or sub-committee of the authority
 - (e) A meeting of any other body to which the authority makes appointments or nominations (including outside bodies)
 - (f) A meeting which has been authorised by the authority or a committee or sub-committee of the authority and to which representatives of more than one political group have been invited
 - (g) A meeting of a local authority association of which the authority is a member
 - (h) Duties undertaken on behalf of the authority in connection with the inspection of premises and schools
 - (i) Any meeting involving co-opted members

3. This does not prevent the Council paying travel costs directly for other travel and delegated powers permit this. However, this leaves many anomalies. For example currently member training is not an approved duty. This means that, although there is no legal difficulty in rail tickets being purchased by the Council to get the Member to the training event, any additional expenses incurred directly by the Member such as a taxi or bus fare from the railway station to the training venue, cannot properly be reclaimed. It is also the case that expenses claimed by Members are published and easily reviewed by anyone interested in doing so whereas travel paid for directly is only published within the Council's general transparency reports.
4. There are similar issues where Members attend events to promote the City. The relevant Department (but usually not Democratic Services) may agree to pay up front costs but there is no provision enabling additional expenses to be reclaimed. Given public concern around expenses generally it may also be thought that there is a strong interest in having a list of approved duties which is as clear as possible as to when Member travel will be paid for whether directly or by being claimed as an expense.
5. The solution proposed by the Independent Remuneration Panel was to extend the lists of approved duties by adding the following:
 - Meetings of the Local Government Association, any sub group of the Association or any body to which the Association makes appointments.
 - Visits by Cabinet Members, Chairs and Vice Chairs and Group Leaders on Council business associated with those Roles.
 - Attendance of Members at conferences, training courses and seminars approved in accordance with the Council's arrangements for member development.
 - Other travel approved [by the appropriate Officer] as being reasonably necessary to further the aims of the Council (excluding travel for party political or social functions).

It is suggested that the Chief Executive or an Officer nominated by her should be designated as the "appropriate officer"

6. The IRP did recommend that travel within the area of the City should not receive an allowance but did so having regard to the significant increase in basic allowance which was also being recommended. Following Council's decision in respect of the IRP recommendation the anomalies in respect of "approved duties" remain.

Consultation

7. The recommendation has regard to the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel presented to Council in October.

Options

8. The options then are:
 - To leave the scheme unchanged
 - To leave the list of approved duties as it is but make a clear statement , perhaps as an annex to the scheme, which explains that the Council will pay for other travel directly where the appropriate Officer is satisfied that it is a reasonable use of resources
 - For Council to approve the addition of the duties identified by the IRP as approved duties for the scheme

Analysis

9. The existing arrangement creates anomalies and makes it more difficult to achieve full transparency as to the cost of Member travel. The third option is the most transparent and flexible.

Council Plan

10. The IRP advised Members that they considered it: "important that councillors, particularly those holding senior positions, are able to travel to promote the City and to identify opportunities which the City might be able to grasp."
11. The report therefore links to a number of objectives but particularly of making the Council an effective organisation.

12. Implications

Financial

The recommendation would mean that some expenditure currently incurred within other Directorates will be transferred to Democratic Services. The implications of this will need to be addressed during the year. The recommendation may result in some additional costs to the Council. It is not anticipated that these will be significant.

Legal

The Council is entitled to amend its list of approved duties having regard to the recommendations of the IRP

Recommendations

13. Council is asked to:

1) Extend the list of approved duties in line with paragraph 5 above

Reason: To ensure that the list of approved duties properly reflects the range of work undertaken by Councillors

2) Request Officers to publish details of all travel and subsistence costs incurred on behalf of Members alongside the details of their allowances

Reason: To ensure complete transparency in this area

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Report
Approved



Date

18/03/13

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Implication ie Financial

None

Background Papers:

None

Annexes

None