
Member Development Steering Group

8 March 2012

Report of the Assistant Director, Governance & ICT

Member Training & Development Policy Update and Revised Protocol on External Conferences/Events

Summary

1. The report provides the updated Member Training & Development Policy (MT&DP), as previously reviewed by Members in December 2011, for their consideration. Specifically it includes a proposed revised protocol on attendance by Members at external conferences/events.

Background

2. At its meeting in December 2011, the Steering Group reviewed the full Member Training & Development Policy, as it is required to do annually under the terms of the Policy. The Policy has now been updated by officers, in accordance with Members' requirements. The updates to the Policy basically include revising the references to the new Council Plan for 2011-15 and reflecting the changes in officer support for developing Members, arising from the recent restructure of Civic & Democratic Services. The revised Policy is attached, in full, for information, at Annex A.

Reviewing the Protocol on Attendance at External Conferences/Events

3. At the time of reviewing the full Policy, officers identified concerns to the Steering Group regarding the practical interpretation of the existing Protocol governing Members' attendance at external conferences/seminars/events, outside of the Core Programme provided by the Council for the ongoing training and development of Members. As Members of this Group are aware the Protocol sits within the overall Policy. Attached at Annex B is a copy of the current Protocol.
4. **Current Protocol**
The current Protocol entitles any Member to attend one external conference/event per financial year. Such conference/event being match funded by Democratic Services, through the Member Development Budget, and by the relevant Services Directorate. Whilst the part and part funding arrangement has worked well, there have been other ongoing issues with the interpretation of the existing Protocol:

- Some conferences are free with minimal if any travel/accommodation costs;
- Some conferences are free but involve relatively expensive travel/accommodation
- Some Members don't want to go to any extra training outside the core programme at all
- Some Members (eg Cabinet Members, Group Leaders or Chairs of high profile Committees) have a greater need to attend external training activity

As a result, the current Protocol is proving to be rather too restrictive, in that, it:

- Restricts opportunities for those Members perhaps most in need;
- Takes no account of relative travel costs, nor of whether the event is charged or free; and
- Provides opportunities for all, when the majority are not required

5. A guiding list of 'recommended' Annual Conferences accompanies the Protocol. This is reviewed every year and the list for 2012/13 is currently under review with Services Directorates. The purpose of the list is merely to provide Members, and particularly newer Members and those who may have changed responsibilities, with some suggested external 'conferences/events' which they might find beneficial to their learning. Any 'conference/event' usually comes 'recommended' by the appropriate Service Director or Head of Service.
6. To date, 12 Members have taken up the opportunity to attend external 'external conferences/events' in 2011/12, in so far as the Policy entitles them. A number of additional requests have had to be rejected from some Members, where those Members had already attended their one 'external conference/event' and where the request could not otherwise be funded under the Members Scheme of Entitlements.
7. **Revised Protocol**
Attached at Annex C is a suggested revised Protocol, which has initially been discussed with Members of this Steering Group. The suggested changes to the Protocol for 2012/13 to include:
 - Providing Groups with an allocated 'pot' from which attendance at external conferences/events by Members of each Group will be funded;
 - Any requests for 'overspends' against this pot to be referred to the Steering Group for consideration;
 - Groups to provide Democratic Services with details of 'external conferences/events' to be attended, so that appropriate bookings and travel/subsistence arrangements can be made;
 - An updated list of Annual Conferences for 2012/13

Consultation

8. This Steering Group is the Member consultative body on Member training and development related issues. Members of this Group have already been consulted on the proposed revisions contained in the Protocol and on the review of the full Member Training & Development Policy.

Options

9. (a) to endorse the final revisions to the Member Training & Development Policy or suggest any further changes as may be appropriate; and

(b) to endorse or not the suggested changes to the Protocol on Attendance at External Conferences/Events, or, alternatively suggest other revisions.

Council Plan 2011-15

10. Having a Member Training & Development Policy demonstrates the Council's commitment to well trained and knowledgeable Members, in turn, making decisions relating to the new key priorities set out in the Council Plan.

Implications

11. There are no direct implications associated with the recommendations in this report. Clearly, there are financial and human resources implications which arise from any core training programme and opportunities provided by the Council to its Members, as a result of having a Member Training & Development Policy.

Risk Management

12. If Members do not revise the existing Protocol on Attendance at External Conferences/Events, then there is a danger that the Policy itself will not be responsive enough to the changing needs of Members, as their roles grow and legislative changes emerge.

Recommendation

13. Members are asked to endorse the updated Member Training & Development Policy set out at Annex A and to consider the proposed revised Protocol on Attendance at External Conferences/Events set out at Annex C.

Reason

14. To enable the Policy and Protocol to remain relevant and flexible enough to serve the best interests of providing well trained elected Members.

Contact Details

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Report Approved**Date** 1 March 2012**Specialist Implications Officer(s)**

None

Wards Affected:**All**

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None.**Annexes:**

Annex A – updated Member Development & Training Policy

Annex B – existing Protocol on Attendance at External Conferences etc

Annex C – revised Protocol on Attendance at External Conferences etc