



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

D293

Democratic Renewal Working Party 14 February 2013

Members' Overnight Subsistence

1. Summary and reasons for recommendations

- 1.1 Following a question raised at Democratic Renewal Working Party by Councillor Cox regarding the maximum amount claimable by Members for overnight subsistence, the Working Party requested a report setting out the circumstances in which a variation from these limits could be authorised.
- 1.2 Councillor Cox also felt that, for the sake of clarity, a line should be added in the Travel and Subsistence part of the Members' Allowances Scheme to state that these maximums may be exceeded on occasion where authorised by a Head of Service, and this issue is also covered in the report.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That, for the sake of clarity, the sentence "the overnight subsistence allowance may, on occasion, be exceeded on the authorisation of a Head of Service, in order for a Member to stay in a hotel associated with a particular conference" be added to Schedule 4 of the Members' Allowances Scheme in the Council's Constitution.

Contact details

Name	Patricia Warby	Adriana Stapleton
Title	Chairman of the Working Party	Democratic Services Manager (Interim)
Telephone	(01284) 704138	(01284) 757613
E-mail	patricia.warby@stedsbc.gov.uk	adriana.stapleton@stedsc.gov.uk

3. Corporate priorities

3.1 The recommendations meet the following, as contained within the Corporate Plan: Corporate priority: *'working together for an efficient council'*.

4. Key issues

- 4.1 For many years, pre-dating the introduction of the cabinet system, senior councillors have attended national conferences and events, principally those organised by the Local Government Association (LGA). This includes the LGA's national conference and its conferences for specific policy areas such as rural areas. In addition to the main Conference, these events include other presentations, networking and workshops, over 2 to 3 days, from the morning through into the evening each day.
- 4.2 It is therefore clearly practical, in the interests of the conference attendee being able to do business effectively, for the Member to stay at a hotel officially associated with the Conference, rather than have to drive to and from an alternative, albeit possibly cheaper hotel, further away from the Conference venue. Often, the cost of the nominated accommodation is included in the booking fee. This can mean that, on occasion, the limit for overnight stays outside London is exceeded.
- 4.3 On these occasions the full overnight cost of the accommodation has been met from the relevant service budget alongside the Conference fee itself, ie the Member has not needed to pay for accommodation and claim it back through payroll. Instead the whole cost of the Conference and accommodation has been administered by the Head of Service.
- 4.4 Authorisation to make payments for overnight accommodation in excess of the maximum shown in the Members' Allowances Scheme is too minor an issue to warrant its own line in the Scheme of Delegation to Officers. Instead, it would be dealt with under standard financial authorities in the Council's Constitution which require all Heads of Service to:
- prepare budgets on the basis of service priorities, within the overall context of the Cabinet's agreed priorities; and to
 - utilise resources allocated, and further allocate resources, in the most efficient, effective and economic way.
- 4.5 As explained above, on occasion, in order that attendees are able to effectively carry out their business, Heads of Service can choose to allocate resources above the usual cap for hotel stays. Should they choose not to do this, valuable networking and workshop attendance opportunities would be lost, or additional costs would be incurred in travelling to and from the Conference location. In officers' opinion, the marginal extra cost is therefore justified as being an efficient and effective way for the Member to obtain the maximum benefit and value from attendance at the Conference.
- 4.6 However, Cllr Cox's point is acknowledged and it is proposed that the Constitution be clarified to make it clear that the allowance may be exceeded on those occasions when the official accommodation associated with a Conference exceeds the nightly allowance.

5. Other options considered

- 5.1 An alternative option would be to find a hotel as close to the Conference as possible which does not exceed the maximum nightly cost. In many major cities this would simply not be possible and, as stated above, there would be opportunity costs to this in the ability of the attending Members to carry out their business effectively.
- 5.2 The other alternative is to ask the attending Member to meet the difference between the maximum nightly cost and the actual cost of the hotel per night. This would discriminate against less well-off Members who might miss out on the extra-curricular activities of the Conference because they could not afford to stay nearby.

6. Community impact

6.1 Crime and disorder impact *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998)*

6.1.1 Not applicable.

6.2 Diversity and equality impact *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

6.2.1 See 5.2 above.

6.3 Sustainability impact *(including completing a Sustainability Impact Assessment)*

6.3.1 Staying further away could increase travel and associated financial and environmental costs.

6.4 Other impact *(any other impacts affecting this report)*

6.4.1 Not applicable.

7. Consultation *(what consultation has been undertaken, and what were the outcomes?)*

7.1 Overnight subsistence rates are set in consultation with the Independent Remuneration Panel, with the final rates being set by full Council.

8. Financial and resource implications *(including asset management implications)*

8.1 As stated above, the saving which might have been made if cheaper hotels could have been identified would have a negative impact on the attending Members' ability to carry out their business effectively.

9. Risk/opportunity assessment *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
Should a Member not be able to attend all workshops and events offered at a particular conference, important networking and business opportunities could be lost.	Medium	Head of Service to determine the value of opportunities at conferences in accordance with budget priorities.	Low

10. Legal and policy implications

10.1 The Council is required to utilise its resources in the most efficient, effective and economic way, to meet its priorities.

11. Ward(s) affected

11.1 Not applicable.

12. Background papers

12.1 None.

13. Documents attached

13.1 None.