

Executive Member Response To Members' Expenses & Hospitality Scrutiny Review

**Date Recommendations agreed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee:**

Thursday 23 January 2014.

**Date responses should be made by:**

Executive responses should be received by Monday 24 March 2014

**Recommendations:**

**Executive Response:**

**1.** The input into the review from Stephen Hollingsworth be noted and that the use of a 'critical friend' be encouraged in subsequent reviews.

**Action: Scrutiny Officer**

**2.** The real and symbolic value of the Mayor, and the level of support required to carry out this important role, be recognised.

The practise of inviting a 'critical friend' to help assist a review has been used for some time in Scrutiny and will, when appropriate, continue to utilised in future reviews.

I don't believe anyone doubts the value of the Mayor to the town. In Stevenage the office of mayor is an important element of a council's governance structure. The role is often demanding and frequently governed by complicated rules,

<p><b>Action: Scott Crudgington</b></p>	<p>regulations and official procedures. The public profile accorded to the office provides little room for error. And while the powers of the Mayor may have diminished over the years, the role has retained its importance in the history and cultural heritage of our town. The ‘first citizen’, as they are sometimes known, can come from any class, gender or ethnic background and has a key democratic role to play. Each year I am proud to see our chosen mayors support local initiatives aimed at providing benefit to the council area and its diverse communities. In this role, the mayor regularly speaks and acts in multiple capacities, as ambassador, and facilitator. This may involve highlighting relevant causes and helping members of the local community to receive the recognition they deserve.</p> <p>In support of this role the Council provides both financial and dedicated officer assistance which has been protected from the majority of funding reductions brought about from the government’s austerity programme of cuts.</p> <p>In summary, the value of the Mayor is understood, fully supported and will continue to be in the future.</p>
<p><b>3.</b> That it be noted that the proposed realignment of staff and Member mileage rates under the Single Status agreement to those advised by HMRC was being actioned.</p>	<p>Noted. Members mileage rates will align with HMRC rates from the 1 July 2014.</p>
<p><b>4.</b> The reduction in the spending on Members refreshments as detailed in paragraph 3.2 in the report be noted.</p>	<p>Noted. I feel it important that it be re-iterated that the cost of the current approach to providing light refreshments before meals is over 75% cheaper than if Members claimed meal allowances as defined within the Council’s allowances scheme.</p>
<p><b>5.</b> Consideration be given to renaming ‘The Community Reception’ ‘The Mayor’s Community Reception’ as detailed at paragraph 3.5.1 in the</p>	<p>The view of the Committee will be forwarded to the lead officer for the Community Reception. The event has been sponsored in the last few years. Inevitably, sponsors views had to be taken into account, however this is no</p>

<p>report.</p> <p><b>Action: Scott Crudgington</b></p>	<p>longer the case and the re-naming will be discussed with the Mayor.</p>
<p><b>6.</b> Any future policy regarding Mayoral transport should be supportive of a situation whereby the Mayor attending particular high profile civic functions should not self-drive as detailed at paragraph 3.6.2 in the report.</p> <p><b>Action: Scott Crudgington</b></p>	<p>Agreed, but this is already the case. The Mayors secretary undertakes weekly scheduling of the Mayors commitments including appropriate transport arrangements for the event in question.</p>
<p><b>7.</b> The Committee is supportive of a Leader led review into Town Twinning activities.</p> <p><b>Action: Scott Crudgington</b></p>	<p>Noted. This will commence in the Summer.</p>
<p><b>8.</b> There should be more publicity to advise Members of the availability of conferences and training events to assist Member's development, as detailed at paragraph 3.4.1 in the report.</p> <p><b>Action: Wendy Earl</b></p>	<p>Links between Learning and Development and Member Services continue to strengthen. Communication is improved and there is heightened awareness of the need to share information and to promote and publicise a variety of learning interventions. Every effort is made to share information on training opportunities and to facilitate and encourage attendance.</p> <p>Work is being progressed to introduce a new Intranet across SBC in 2014/15. A request has been placed for a dedicated Member Development page, allowing continuous access to information on all available learning opportunities for Members. The MMP Programme would be posted here along with details of any relevant seminars, conferences and other development opportunities. The page could contain links to e-learning, guidance information and Member feedback or blogs.</p>
<p><b>9.</b> Members attending courses and conferences should be encouraged to share their experiences with all Members, perhaps through MMP sessions and where they consider the content to be of poor</p>	<p>All events delivered to Members request feedback following training, at the point of delivery. All feedback is reviewed to provide quality assurance. Where attendance at conference/seminars is known. Learning and Development will write out to individual Members to seek feedback and to invite either the formal</p>

<p>value they should be encouraged to give feedback to the provider.</p> <p><b>Action: Wendy Earl</b></p>	<p>or informal sharing of knowledge e.g. via a post on the Member Intranet page or via a Modern Member Programme session.</p> <p>All Members have an open invitation to discuss any learning intervention with the Learning and Development Team.</p>
<p><b>10.</b> There should be (i) a review of the induction process for new Members especially with regard to expenses, allowances and support services so that new Members are clear as their entitlement to claim for and take advantage of training opportunities and (ii) new Members induction should consider teaming new Members with a mentor.</p> <p><b>Action: Wendy Earl</b></p>	<p>A full programme of New Member Induction was in place to immediately follow elections. The current programme of induction runs from 26th June to 12th August. The programme was carefully considered with input from Member Services, Cllr Joan Lloyd and Nick Parry as CEO. The programme will be reviewed on completion so that any required improvements can be incorporated next year.</p> <p>A programme of forward events was discussed with Cllr Joan Lloyd on 25th June, this was to shape the annual Modern Member Programme for 2014/15. Account was taken of all training requests received in year and to any residual training needs arising from last year's training needs analysis exercise. Wendy Earl is working on the confirmation of bookings for the agreed sessions, before communicating out the annual programme to Members. A further training needs analysis exercise will be conducted over the summer months, to ensure that new and emerging needs are included in the programme going forwards.</p> <p>As part of the programme for 2014/15 Members will receive a session introducing them to Coaching and Mentoring, this is so that they are properly equipped to take on more formal Buddying or Mentoring roles. A degree of coaching support already operates but it was felt that some further instruction would increase capacity. This will ensure that formal buddying will be in place to support newly inducted Members or those taking on new roles.</p>
<p><b>11.</b> All Members should have a Personal Development and Training Plan as detailed at paragraph 3.4.1 in the report.</p>	<p>Good practice as identified in the Member Charter suggests that there should be a Councillor led strategy for Councillor Induction and Development. There should be a structured process for regularly assessing individual learning and development needs based on focused objectives. Both individual training needs analysis and Personal Development Plans (PDP's) are effective in determining</p>

<p><b>Action: Wendy Earl</b></p>	<p>individual learning and development need. Training needs analysis – as conducted in 2013/14, will continue to be offered at least annually. All Councillors should be offered a PDP delivered through Council hierarchies. A decision needs to be taken as to who will be responsible for which reviews. Due account must be taken of the need to succession plan. Learning and Development can provide supportive documentation should a formal process be agreed. Identified learning needs will be collated and arrangements to meet specific training requirements made.</p>
<p><b>12.</b> The Carers Attendance Allowance be reviewed, particularly in respect of the ability to pay family members for performing caring duties and the monthly payment cap plan as detailed at paragraph 3.7.3 in the report.</p> <p><b>Action: Scott Crudgington</b></p>	<p>Noted. The Strategic Director (Resources) will investigate widening the eligibility of carer attendance allowance to family members.</p>
<p><b>13.</b> Members and Member Services give due consideration to the Council's Green Travel Plan when selecting the most appropriate mode of travel to attend events.</p> <p><b>Action: Maureen Nicholson</b></p>	<p>Noted. However, a balance between cost, calendar commitments before and after events and green travel issues must be struck.</p>

A copy of these recommendations have been sent to the named officers for a response on behalf of the Executive