



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Review of Staff Travel Policy – Attendance of Members at Conferences
Date:	20th November, 2009
Reporting Officer:	Mr. L. Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services
Contact Officer:	Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Committee Administrator (extension 6313)

Relevant Background Information

The Committee, at its meeting on 24th October, 2008, approved the Policy for Staff Attending Events.

The policy was developed to ensure that the approval and control processes for staff attending training events, conferences, study visits, etc., were robust and that attendance at such events provided value for money for the ratepayers of Belfast.

However, when approving the policy the Committee agreed to the inclusion of the following at paragraph 2.7:

- Any event which is also to be attended by a Councillor must have Committee and Council approval prior to the event.

This has caused difficulties in recent months in that on a number of occasions Chief Officers have been unable to recommend the attendance of Members at conferences/awards ceremonies since notification of the events had not been received in sufficient time for both Committee approval and Council ratification to be obtained.

The Council, at its meeting on 2nd November, agreed that, since the current policy governing the attendance of Members at conferences can in certain circumstances prove unduly restrictive, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee be requested to review that policy at an early date.

Key Issues

Whilst it was the intention to devise a robust policy governing the attendance of staff at events, it is the Elected Members who have been curtailed in their attendance at certain events.

For example, if a Chief Officer receives an invitation, at short notice, to attend a ceremony at which a Council Service is due to receive an award and there is insufficient time for both Committee and Council approval to be obtained for the attendance of an Elected Member(s) and appropriate officers, the policy still permits the Chief Officer to authorise the attendance at the event of up to three officers.

Key Issues (continued)

Awards ceremonies, where the work and endeavours of the Council are being recognised, by their very nature involve judging of entries and decisions being reached at a late stage and accordingly there may not always be time to comply with the current terms of the policy as set out in point 2.7. It is inappropriate in these circumstances for the Council not to be represented by Elected Members, who authorise and oversee all work carried out by the Council. Obviously this is an anomaly which the Committee might wish to rectify.

Prior to the introduction of the new policy, the Council had delegated authority to both the Chief Executive, in consultation with the appropriate Committee Chairman, and to all Committees to approve attendance at certain events. If the Committee were minded to reintroduce the delegated authority, then it is recommended that the following would apply:

- Authority be delegated to all Committees to approve attendance at conferences, seminars or similar events in the United Kingdom and Ireland where there is not time for formal Council notification to be obtained; and
- Authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the appropriate Committee Chairman, to approve the attendance of the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman (or their nominees) at any conference, seminar or similar events held in Northern Ireland where there is insufficient time for Committee approval to be obtained.

Resource Implications

There are no human resource or financial implications associated with this report.

Recommendation

It is recommended that, with effect from 2nd December, 2009, authority be delegated as outlined for attendance at events where there is insufficient time for the obtaining of full Committee and Council approval.

Decision Tracking

Officer Responsible: Julie Thompson, Director of Finance and Resources.

Date action to be completed by: The amended policy will be implemented with effect from 2nd December, 2009.