

Extract from minutes of -

STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

19th MARCH, 2010

“Democratic Services and Governance

**Publication of Information on
Payments made to Council Officers**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

‘Relevant Background Information

Members will recall that the Committee, at its meeting on 19th February, 2010, agreed to the following revised headings under which the details of Councillor’s allowances and expenses would be published:

Allowances

Basic

Special Responsibility

District Policing Partnership

Transition Committee

Civic Dignitaries Personal Allowances

Conferences/Visits

Subsistence (including the cost of accommodation and out of pocket expenses)

Travel (by public transport or car)

Conference Fees

Travel and Other Miscellaneous Claims

Mileage, etc., to and from meetings

Home Phone Rental/Broadband Fee

Hands Free Car Kits

At the Council meeting on 1st March, concerns were expressed in relation to a perceived differential in respect of the information being published for Councillors and that being published for officers and it was agreed that a report be presented to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee setting out the extent of the information included currently in the Council’s Publication Scheme in relation to payments made to Council officers and comparing and contrasting this with the information to be published in relation to elected Members.

Key Issues

At its meeting on 19th September, 2008, the Committee approved the publication of costs incurred by the Council as a result of employees attending events outside of Northern Ireland so as to demonstrate the Council’s commitment to accountability and openness.

This information, which is published annually, details payments made to employees in connection with expenditure incurred on travel which is outside their day-to-day operational duties.

The following details are included:

- *Department*
- *Job title and staff number*
- *Date of event*
- *Description of event*
- *Event location* - for example, Great Britain, Republic of Ireland, Europe or Rest of World
- *Travel Costs*
- *Accommodation and subsistence* - hotel and meal costs
- *Gross cost* - the total cost before any deductions are made in respect of funding received from external bodies
- *Percentage actual funding* - the percentage of any external funding received, for example, EU funding or charges to customers
- *Funding body* - organisation which provided the external funding
- *Net cost*

The following table illustrates for comparison purposes the information which is published currently in relation to payments made to Councillors and those made to officers:

<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Officers</u>
<p>Allowances</p> <p>Basic Special Responsibility District Policing Partnership Transition Committee Civic Dignitaries Personal Allowances (Members identified individually by name)</p>	<p>Salaries and Wages</p> <p>This information is published within the Annual Financial Report in respect of the number of employees within specific £10,000 salary bands from £50,001 upwards.</p> <p>(This information does not identify individual officers either by name or employee number)</p>
<p>Conferences/Visits</p> <p>Subsistence (including the cost of accommodation and out of pocket expenses) Travel (by public transport or car)</p> <p>Conference Fees (Members identified individually by name)</p>	<p>Conferences/Visits (outside of Northern Ireland)</p> <p>Subsistence (including the cost of accommodation and out of pocket expenses) Travel (by public transport or car)</p> <p>(Officers are identified by Job Title and Employee Number but not by name)</p>

<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Officers</u>
<p><i>Travel and Other Miscellaneous Claims</i></p> <p>Mileage, etc. to and from meetings Home Phone Rental/Broadband Fee Hands Free Car Kits</p> <p>(Members identified individually by name)</p>	

The Council does not publish the specific details of officers' personal salaries in order to protect the rights of individuals under the Data Protection Act. Furthermore, a difference exists in terms of the legal status of Members as opposed to officers. Members are elected for the full term of the Council, and because they are elected they are subject to a higher level of accountability to the public. Officers on the other hand are employed under contract of employment and are subject to a different level of public scrutiny, which is reflected by the provisions of the Data Protection legislation.

The information which is published in respect of officers' attendance at conferences and visits is restricted currently to those which take place outside of Northern Ireland, whereas the information in relation to Councillors is in respect of attendance at conferences and visits regardless of their location.

Options

1. The Publication Scheme should remain unchanged so long as Members are content with the current level of information being published.
2. Extend the Publication Scheme to include payments made to staff for attendance at events within Northern Ireland.
3. Extend the Publication Scheme to include payments made to staff for attendance at events within Northern Ireland and to include payments made to officers in respect of miscellaneous items, namely, home phone rental, broadband fee and hands free car kits.

Members should be aware that, in respect of Options 2 and 3, there will be a cost associated with the compilation and publishing of this information and that because of data protection legislation, this information would have to be provided by job title and employee number and not by individual name. Furthermore, the extension of the Publication Scheme to include this additional information will require consultation with the trade unions, as was the case before the current policy was agreed by the Committee on 19th September, 2008. This will require a future report to be

submitted to the Committee on the outcome of the consultation before any change can be made to the existing scheme.

Variation of Previous Decision

In carrying out this exercise I have had to scrutinise closely each of the elements listed in terms of both Members and officers and to satisfy myself that the entry is relevant. In doing so it has become apparent to me that the publishing under 'Payments to Councillors' of conference fees is misleading in that while it may be useful to capture and publish that information as part of the Council's Publication Scheme it is not accurate to include those amounts on the Council's website under 'Payments to Councillors' since these monies are not paid to them. Accordingly, I would apologise for this inaccuracy and would seek the Committee's authority, irrespective of any other action which may be felt necessary in terms of the perceived differential between Councillors and officers, to vary the decision taken by the Committee at its meeting on 19th February in order to omit the insertion of Conference Fees from the Section on the Council's website referring to 'Payments to Councillors'.

Resource Implications

N/A

Recommendation

To agree to omit conference fees from the section on the Council's website referring to "Payments to Councillors" and to determine which of the available options is the most appropriate having taken account of all the relevant information.

Decision Tracking

- Option 1 – No change required.
- Option 2 or 3 – The Director of Finance and Resources to submit a further report to Committee by June, 2010.'

The Committee adopted the recommendation in relation to the omission of conference fees from payments to Councillors and agreed to adopt Option 1 in that the Publication Scheme should remain unchanged in so far as it related to attendance at conferences and visits by officers."