

MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE – ANNUAL REVIEW 2007/2008**Standards Committee – 22 July 2008****Report of the Head of Corporate Services**

Statutory Powers: Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003

Financial Implications: Nil

Purpose:

1. The Standards Committee receives an annual update on the level of Members' attendance at public meetings of the Council so that it can monitor its performance target that councillors should attend at least 50% of all meetings of the bodies to which they have been appointed.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee RESOLVES to note the report.

Background

2. At its meeting on 26 February 2001, the Standards Committee recommended to Council that a minimum attendance requirement of 50% should be set for meetings of the Council and its various bodies (minute S.10/01 refers). Any Member whose attendance failed to meet this standard would be requested, on a voluntary basis, to return a proportion of their Basic Allowance. This recommendation was agreed by the Council at its meeting on 10 May 2001 (minute 16/01 refers). This convention has been backed by the Councils' Independent Panel on Members' Allowances as one of good practice.
3. A schedule of all councillors' attendance from the Annual Council meeting on 21 May 2007 to 30 April 2008 is shown at the attached Appendix A. In line with the request when Members' Attendance was last reviewed (Minute S.4/07 refers), Members will note that the comparative figures for the previous municipal year (2006/07) have now been included for those Members who were in office at this time.
4. Members will also recall that the Committee wished for an additional column to be included, which took into account Members who were unable to attend a meeting, because they were undertaking alternative duties on behalf of the Council at the same time. Despite reminders being placed in the Members' Bulletin publication, no such responses were forthcoming for the 2007/08 Municipal Year and a column has therefore not been included.
5. Statistics of particular interest include:-
 - (a) the constancy of the number of Members (5) achieving a 100% attendance rate;

- (b) 50% of Members achieving an attendance rate of 90% or more (a 17% increase on 2006/07 municipal year);
 - (c) 83% of Members achieving an attendance rate of 80% or more (a 13% increase on 2006/07 municipal year);
 - (d) the overall average attendance rate being 87% (a 3% increase on 2006/07 municipal year).
6. In addition, it should be highlighted that a large amount of interest was shown by Members who were not Members of a particular Council body but turned up to those meetings (either as an invitee or by their own request) so as to listen to the discussions and take part where felt to be appropriate.
 7. The Committee will note that one Member did fail to attend the required 50% of meetings, which was largely attributed to the Member being in full-time education. If so minded, the Committee can request that officers write to the Member to ask if they wish to return a proportion of their basic allowance.
 8. It should however be noted that attendance at meetings forms only one part of the role of a councillor and does not reflect the level of work done within their respective wards or in representing the Council on other bodies. It should also be noted that Members come from different backgrounds and some, particularly those in full time employment or with carer responsibilities, may find attendance at meetings more of a challenge. It should not, therefore, be regarded as a barometer of a councillor's effectiveness as an elected representative.
 9. There are two areas of attendance which are not included within the annual statistics but which effect Members' attendance, involvement and the performance of the Council:-
 - (a) Attendance at the outside bodies. The Council does not check Members' attendance at the 49 outside bodies on which it is represented. Members are reminded though of the Council decision (minutes 12/03 and 27/03 refer) which asked that they produce regular reports on issues which have been raised at meetings of the outside bodies. The Council has attempted to improve the community role of the Member by targeting representation on only those outside bodies which in some way or another align with the Council's corporate priorities.
 - (b) Attendance at training events. This is an area that will continue to be monitored particularly now that a Member's eligibility to sit on the Council's regulatory committees, Development Control and Licensing, is dependent on them achieving a minimum 80% attendance rate at related training events.

Risk Assessment

Risk	Mitigation
Poor attendance at meetings may impact on the reputation of individual councillors and the Council as a whole.	Attendance levels are monitored and reported annually.

Conclusion

10. Despite the limitations of the statistics, they do again demonstrate the degree of commitment and dedication shown by Members in attending formal meetings of the Council and its bodies. It is commendable that these statistics continue to improve on an annual basis, with the 'average' Member attending almost 90% of meetings during 2007/08. Clearly with a greater focus on attendance at training events etc, the role, experience and abilities of Members can continue to be developed.

Darryl White
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Standards Committee
22 July 2008

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Background Papers:
None