

## **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference: C/082/2006-07.**

**Date of meeting: 18 December 2006.**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Portfolio: Finance, Performance Management and Corporate Support Services.**

**Subject: Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Subgroup on Civic Ceremonial.**

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### **Recommendations:**

**That the following recommendations of the Civic Ceremonial Review Subgroup of the Constitutional Affairs Standing Scrutiny Panel be adopted:**

**(a) That the following revenue CSB growth bids for 2007/08 be made subject to consideration of the Council's budgets later in the municipal year:**

**(i) An increase of £2,500 per annum in the budget provision for hiring of civic transport (Vehicle Leasing budget) for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council; and**

**(ii) An additional sum of £5,000 (including on-costs) to provide one further day of officer support per week to the Chairman of Council;**

**(b) That, with effect from the 2007/08 municipal year, £2,500 be retained by the Council out of the Chairman's Allowance and transferred to the Councils existing budget for Civic Hospitality;**

**(c) That the new Safe Custody Guidelines for the Civic Regalia attached at Appendix 1 be adopted and issued each year to the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council and their spouses/partners;**

**(d) That the current policy for awards based upon length of service or positions held by Councillors be discontinued and replaced by the following revised awards policy:**

**(i) Those serving as a Councillor for ten years or more – a presentation gift to the value of £50;**

**(ii) Those serving as a Councillor for fifteen years or more – a presentation gift to the value of £75; and**

**(iii) Those serving as a Councillor for twenty years or more – a presentation gift to the value of £100; and**

**(e) That a range of gifts be selected by the Head of Research and Democratic Services from time to time in consultation with the Chairman of the Council.**

### **Scope of the Review:**

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed as part of its annual work programme, a review of the Civic Ceremonial function of the Council. The Council's Standing Panel on Constitutional Affairs set up a subgroup to examine this review in greater detail. The review looked at the following elements:

- (a) Budget and Resources – civic ceremonial budget, staffing, the civic car budget, catering and civic events;
- (b) Promotion of the Chairman of the Council's Role – arrangements for entertaining external bodies, hospitality and media;
- (c) Chairman's Chain of Office and Other Civic Regalia - Custody;
- (d) Chairman/Vice Chairman's Allowances; and
- (e) review of the policy for recognising long serving members of the Council on retirement from the authority or when they are not re-elected.

### **Investigations Carried Out:**

2. Civic and Ceremonial support is a discretionary service provided by Research and Democratic Services to support the statutory role and ceremonial functions of the Chairman of Council. The subgroup have looked in detail at:

- (i) Budgets and Resources applied to support the Chairman including staffing;
- (ii) Use of hired transport for Chairman's functions;
- (iii) Use and levels of the Chairman's/Vice Chairman's Allowances;
- (iv) Promotion of the Office of the Chairman of Council;
- (v) The Council's policy for presentations to long serving Councillors; and
- (vi) How the Civic Regalia can be kept safely.

3. The Panel has sought information on best practice examples from other Councils.

### **Findings from the Review:**

4. These can be summarised as follows:

- (a) That staff support for the Chairman currently includes a substantial element of overtime mostly worked at plain time without which the Civic Events calendar could not be supported at the current levels;
- (b) That the current budget provision for hiring a civic car is not adequate and has now dropped below a level that allows the Chairman to use a car for events for which transport is essential.
- (c) That no reduction should be made to either the Chairman's/Vice Chairman's Allowances save a proposal to retain funds for civic hospitality from the Chairman's Allowance as a Council controlled budget.

(d) That any extension to the promotion of the Chairman's role can only be achieved if more staffing resources to support the Chairman are made available.

(e) That the Council's policy for presentations to long serving Councillors should be simplified.

(f) That good practice guidelines for Civic Regalia should be issued as none have been prepared previously.

### **Proposals:**

5. The following proposals are brought forward for consideration.

#### **Proposal 1 – Car Hire Budgets**

*That a bid for revenue CSB growth for 2007/08 for an increase in the Car Hire budget of £2,500 subject to consideration of the Council's budgets later in the municipal year.*

6. Up to 1997 use of a civic car was greater. At that point the Hired Transport Budget had grown over time to £8,240. In that year discussions with the Chairman led to the introduction of a separate Civic Awards Evening, in addition to the Chairman's Reception. This new event was paid for by reducing the Hired Transport Budget by over £6,000 and applying this sum to fund the Awards Reception. The expectation has always been that the Chairman funds from his own allowance mileage costs of attending most functions with a hire car only being used for certain events.

7. This budget (£2,240) remained static until 2004/05 when it was cut again to £1,100. In looking at the "ground up" requirements for this budget the Panel looked at those occasions when a hire vehicle should be used. Each Chairman decides when to use a hired car during their year in office. Criteria for the use of a car include those events that are:

- (i) engagements outside the District or at some distance from the Chairman's home;
- (ii) other authority civic functions;
- (iii) functions where it is known that the organiser can provide no parking; or
- (iv) functions where there is an expectation that the Chairman will have official transport.

8. The current cost of using a hire vehicle is £30 per hour. So an average evening event say of a total of say 5 -12 midnight would be charged at £210. Therefore the current budget could sustain only five events of this type in any one year. The Panel are suggesting an increase in the budget, as a growth bid, of £2,500 to allow the Chairman and Vice Chairman to attend those events that meet criteria.

#### **Proposal 2 – Officer Support to the Chairman**

*That a bid for revenue CSB growth for 2007/08 for an increase in the sum of £5,000 (including on-costs) to provide one further day of officer support per week to the Chairman of Council subject to consideration of the Council's budgets later in the municipal year.*

9. The Chairman is directly supported by one part-time Officer (Chairman's Secretary) contracted to work two days per week. In reality this post also provides additional hours from home on a voluntary basis and paid on the basis of additional hours worked in the office. This officer also is required to work at out of hours events. Other officers from Democratic Services and Public Relations teams also provide support. The Chairman's Secretary is the main point of contact for people wishing to contact the Chairman with the Member Support Officer also assisting with correspondence and diary management, on the 3 days each week when the Chairman's Secretary is absent.

10. During the last three years the Chairman's Secretary has worked overtime to make sure that events are delivered. This is particularly important in the immediate run-up to the major civic events and our view is that two days per week are not adequate to meet current expectations.

11. Details of hours worked during the financial period from April 2005 to March 2006 are as follows:

- Plain time: 241.5;
- Overtime: 24.0;
- Double time: 26.5;
- The total cost was £3,890 including the Council's on costs.

12. Payment of this overtime has been met from salary underspending within Research and Democratic Services in past years but this situation depends on vacancies existing on the establishment. This source of funding may not always be available in future. The Service is currently at full establishment. The other conclusion to be drawn is that the Council is effectively funding 3 days per week of staffing support through the Chairman's Secretary and the growth item proposed should be considered in that light.

### **Proposal 3 – Civic Hospitality**

*That with effect from 2007/08 municipal year, £2,500 be retained by the Council out of the Chairman's Allowance and transferred to the Councils existing budget for Civic Hospitality.*

13. The Panel has reviewed the items currently funded from the Chairman's Allowance. This includes hospitality at Council meetings and other catering. It is considered that the Council should retain an element of the allowance in order to provide this hospitality directly. This situation benefits both the Chairman (who does not pay tax on this element) and the Council (as it brings such hospitality directly within its control and subject to its financial procedures.) Any liquid refreshments will continue to be provided at the Chairman's discretion.

### **Proposal 4 - Safe Custody Guidelines for the Civic Regalia**

*That the new Safe Custody Guidelines for the Civic Regalia attached at Appendix 1 be endorsed and adopted.*

14. Attached at Appendix 1 are proposed Safe Custody Guidelines for the Civic Regalia that take into account the Council's current insurance position. The Panel has sought to strike a balance between clear guidance on proper custody of expensive items of regalia and a regime which will cause Chairmen considerable inconvenience.

### **Proposal 5 - Presentations to long serving Councillors**

*That the current policy for awards based upon length of service or positions held by Councillors be discontinued and replaced.*

15. The Panel was asked to review the current policy, which is based on completing 12 years or being a Chairman of a major committee:

- (i) Those serving as a Councillor for ten years or more – a presentation gift to the value of £50;
- (ii) Those serving as a Councillor for fifteen years or more – a presentation gift to the value of £75; and

(iii) Those serving as a Councillor for twenty years or more – a presentation gift to the value of £100; and

16. Such gifts to be selected by the Head of Research and Democratic Services in consultation with the Chairman of the Council

#### **Statement in Support of Recommended Action:**

17. The Panel agreed that there seems little doubt that on a conservative estimate the hired car budget is not sufficient at present. The budget also assumes that future Chairmen will be able to drive and have a car. This may not always be the case. The Panel considered that allowance levels should remain at their current level as any member should be able to become Chairman or Vice Chairman irrespective of their financial status.

18. If the current level of events is to continue in future years it is clear that additional resources for officer support to the Chairman are needed. The current arrangements rely on overtime to bring the basic programme of events together which is not sustainable if the service remains at full establishment.

19. The proposals for Civic Hospitality mean that the income tax element of the £2,500 is 'saved' by the Council and can be applied more effectively.

20. The proposed guidelines arise from an analysis of risks arising from the custody of regalia within the homes of the Chairman and Vice Chairman and bring together for the first time two elements:

- advice about the care and custody of civic regalia; and
- details of the requirements of the Council's Insurers.

21. The Panel considered that the current policy for awards excluded some Councillors worthy of recognition who had completed less than twelve years service or who had not been chairman of 'major' committees.

#### **Other Options Considered and Rejected:**

22. The Panel considered two further options for the funding of the proposed increase for the Car Hire Budget:

- To fund the increase from the Vice Chairman's allowance
- Not to increase the budget and curtail the number of hirings available to the Chairman and Vice Chairman.

23. Not to increase the officer support to the Chairman and curtail the number of events.

24. To continue the current arrangement for Civic Hospitality by placing this solely within the responsibility of the Chairman.

25. No alternative was identified for the safe custody of the Civic Regalia.

26. To continue the current policy for awards set by the Policy and Co-ordinating Committee in 1995:

- 12 years' service or, if less, chairmanship of a major committee – table centre engraved cut glass rose bowl;
- for 16 years' service or more - square engraved decanter; and
- for 20 years' service or more - presentation cut glass hand-engraved glass bowl.

#### **Consultation Undertaken:**

27. The Subgroup have sought the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 9 November 2006 who supported the proposals. The views of the Council's Insurance Officer have also been obtained regarding the new safe custody guidelines.

**Resource implications:**

**Budget provision:** The proposals seek two CSB growth items totalling £7,500. Current Budget provision is set out below:

<b>Exp Item</b>	<b>Budget 2006/7</b>
Vehicle Hire (Chairman's Car)	3,630*
Chairman's Allowance	9,810
Vice Chairman's Allowance	2,890
Other Expenses	2,940
Chairman's Awards	14,250

\* this budget was supplemented by virement from salaries of £2,500 this year

**Personnel:** Increase in staffing provision of one day per week at grade 5.

**Land:** Nil.

**Community Plan/BVPP reference:** N/A.

**Relevant statutory powers:** Local Government Act 1972.

**Background papers:** Two officer issues papers dated 11 September and 19 October 2006.

**Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications:** None.

**Key Decision reference (if required):** None.

## Civic Regalia – Safe Custody Guidelines

### Responsibilities:

1. The Council will:
  - (i) Maintain insurance cover for all civic regalia under a the Corporate 'All Risks' Insurance Policy;
  - (ii) Be responsible for the maintenance of the regalia including any damage or wear and tear etc as set out in the exclusions section 2 to the Corporate all risks policy.
2. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman will:
  - (i) Ensure the specific conditions of the Council Insurance are followed as outlined in the guidance below; and
  - (ii) As far as is practical follow the other guidelines as to the safe custody of the regalia.
3. Specific Conditions of the Insurance:
  - (i) The regalia **must** not be left in an unattended vehicle **unless** all the doors, windows and other means of access have been secured and locked and all keys of the vehicle removed to a place of safety, **and** the regalia is placed in the boot of the vehicle or is otherwise out of sight.
4. Other practical measures:
  - (i) The regalia, unless being worn should be kept in the case provided by the Council. The jewellery roll should only be used when storing the regalia in a home safe or on the way to or from a function.
  - (ii) If the regalia is not required over a period of two weeks, it should be returned to Research and Democratic Services for safekeeping.
  - (iii) During any holiday periods or when it is likely that the member will be away from home, the regalia should be returned to Research and Democratic Services for safe keeping.
  - (iv) The Chairman/Vice-Chairman should normally only wear the regalia on arrival at a function. In any event the regalia should kept covered in public areas. They should seek advice from Research and Democratic Services if this arrangement is not convenient.
  - (v) The regalia should not be left unattended in its case or roll.
  - (vi) Members should not attempt to clean the regalia other than with a soft cloth. Any damage or wear and tear should be reported to Research and Democratic Services as soon as possible.
  - (vii) Regalia should not be loaned or placed in the custody of any other person other than the Head of Research and Democratic Services.

(viii) The Chairman and Vice-Chairman should inform Research and Democratic Services immediately if their Chains of Office are lost, mislaid, stolen or otherwise missing in order that the Council's insurers can be informed.