

**RESOURCES COMMITTEE
17 FEBRUARY, 2010**

ELECTED MEMBERS' BUDGET

Agenda Item	
Report No	

Report by the Assistant Chief Executive

Summary

The purpose of this report is to outline proposals relating to travel, catering, councillor surgeries and accommodation which were identified by the Members Expenditure Group and to recommend that these proposals be implemented with effect from 1 April, 2010.

1. Introduction

- 1.1** The members' budget for 2009/10 is £2.334m of which £1.943m relates to salary costs for members and officers. The remaining £0.391m covers the costs of travel, accommodation, catering, communications, office equipment and stationary.
- 1.2** In relation to budget savings, £105,000 was removed in 2009/10, and £78,000 will be removed in 2010/11 which will come from reductions in subsistence, telephone grants, mobile phones and removal of overprovision in the budget for National Insurance contributions.

At the Council meeting on 17 December, 2009 it was agreed that a further £50,000 be removed from the budget in 2011/12.

- 1.3** Elected members have expressed a wish to explore ways in which the members' budget can be operated as cost effectively as possible. To assist with this objective, a small group of members has considered a number of measures which will contribute to achieving the saving target of £50,000 for 2011/12.

2. Saving Proposals

- 2.1** The proposals that have been identified focus on the main areas of expenditure such as travel, catering, councillor surgeries and accommodation.

3. Travel

- 3.1** In relation to travel, it is proposed that a car-sharing page be set up on the members' intranet to encourage members to car-share to both reduce the cost of travel and to contribute to the Council's commitment to reduce its carbon emissions. Where practicable, consideration should also be given to greater use of public transport and other, greener, forms of transport such as cycling.
- 3.2** It is also felt that more use should be made of video-conferencing and teleconferencing and it is proposed that further training on how to effectively maximise the use of these facilities be provided once the enhanced facilities have been introduced. In addition the expansion of web-casting is being considered and will be the subject of a report to the next meeting of the Council.
- 3.3** These enhanced video conferencing facilities will be located at Wick, Fort William,

Portree and Dingwall within the Chamber/Boardrooms, together with a mobile unit at Headquarters. There are also video conferencing facilities already in place in Golspie. In addition further telephone conferencing units have also recently been purchased to increase availability for member use. We are also exploring the possibility of sharing video conferencing facilities across the Community Planning Partnership at no additional cost.

3.4 The enhanced video-conferencing facilities will mean that members attending meetings remotely will be seen and heard much more clearly. Tenderers have been selected and it is anticipated that the contract will be awarded in early March, 2010 with installation as soon as possible thereafter. The existing video-conferencing equipment will also be retained to enable smaller groups to use video-conferencing technology.

4. Catering

4.1 The provision of lunches at Council headquarters is significantly more cost effective than if elected members were to claim for lunch. Currently the cost of a cooked lunch on main committee days is £8.20 per head and a light lunch on those days when other meetings are scheduled is £5.20 per head. If members were to claim for lunch they would be entitled to claim a maximum of £12.00 under the nationally agreed allowances scheme which applies to all local authorities in Scotland. The Highland Council has no authority to unilaterally vary these allowances.

4.2 Nevertheless savings can be made, and it is recommended that the cost per head for both cooked and light lunches be reduced by 20%. If ECS Catering were to continue to provide the member's catering this would result in a single course being provided for cooked lunches and a reduction in the quantity of provision for light lunches.

4.3 In relation to catering, it is acknowledged that members have indicated that they would wish to compare current internal catering provision with external catering providers. Consequently it is recommended that a tendering exercise be undertaken, in accordance with the Council's procurement policies, for the provision of member's catering at Council Headquarters. Meantime, trials with different suppliers for both light and cooked lunches are being undertaken on the basis of the reduced costs per head.

4.4 With regard to the provision of tea/coffee at Council headquarters, it is recommended that this ceases for those meetings that last less than two hours. If members wish to have tea/coffee then this will still be available in the members lounge.

4.5 The budget for catering for member meetings at Headquarters is £45,000 per annum. This equates to £10.81 per member per week. A 20% reduction would amount to £9,000 saving per year on a recurring basis and would reduce the per capita cost of catering to £8.65 per member per week.

5. Timing of meetings

5.1 At the Council meeting on 17 December, 2009 a Notice of Motion to re-schedule the start times of meetings for full Council and Strategic Committees to 1.00 p.m. was withdrawn on the basis that the issues which had been raised were already

being considered.

- 5.2** It is proposed that the timing of meetings should be kept under review for the next six months and, if it is considered at the end of that time that a change to start times would be beneficial, then this option would be presented to the full Council in September, 2010 when the Timetable of Meetings for 2011 will be considered by Members.

6. Councillor Surgeries

- 6.1** In considering councillor surgeries, members were impressed with the use by some councillors of telephone surgeries which they felt could be a more convenient way for the public to contact their councillors. This would also have the benefit of saving on the costs of hiring a venue to host a surgery.
- 6.2** In relation to the cost of advertising councillor's surgeries, it has been established that savings of approximately 14% could be achieved if members' photographs were no longer to be included in the press adverts.
- 6.3** To secure best value, it is proposed that the possibility of securing a corporate rate for the provision of councillor's surgery adverts be explored, and that in addition to the use of press advertising, the Council's own website also be used to advertise councillor's surgeries.

7. Accommodation

- 7.1** It is acknowledged that many members arrange overnight accommodation which is significantly below the amount allowed under the nationally agreed allowances scheme. This is either through the use of favourable discount rates at various hotels and travel lodges or through the use of bed and breakfast establishments.
- 7.2** To enable members to make informed accommodation choices, the Members Services Assistant will maintain a list of accommodation where favourable rates can be obtained.

8. Miscellaneous

- 8.1** In relation to computer consumables, it is recommended that the provision of colour printer cartridges be withdrawn and that standard black and white printer cartridges be used instead. On those occasions where members require colour printing, this can be arranged through the Members Services Assistant.

9. Implementation

- 9.1** It is recommended that these proposals be piloted with effect from 1 April, 2010 to enable an accurate full year assessment to be made as to the level of savings that can be achieved.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1** Members are invited to note the following recommendations will be going forward in a report to Resources Committee:-

- a) that the cost per head for catering at Headquarters be reduced by 20% and that the provision of tea and coffee at Headquarters cease for meetings lasting less than 2 hours;
- b) that a tendering exercise be undertaken, in accordance with the Council's procurement policies, for the provision of member's catering at Council Headquarters;
- c) that the use of photographs of Councillors in surgery adverts cease; and
- d) that the provision of colour printer cartridges cease and be replaced with black and white printer cartridges.

Signature:

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive

Author: Gordon Morrison

Date: 4 February, 2010