

Report title: Annual Report	
Report to: Committee to Approve Foreign Travel by ECC Officers and Members	
Report author: Paul Turner, Monitoring Officer	
Date: 13 December 2016	For: Decision
Enquiries to: Paul Turner, paul.turner2@essex.gov.uk , Sophie Crane, sophie.crane@essex.gov.uk or Alex Polak alex.polak@essex.gov.uk	
County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To ask the Committee to agree to publish the attached report on foreign travel activity.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the reports at appendix 1 and 2 be published on the Council's website.
- 2.2 That the report for 2016/17 be prepared in summer 2017 and the policy of producing an annual report be reviewed at that time.

3. Summary of issue

- 3.1 The Foreign Travel Policy says that all foreign travel by Members must be approved by the Committee. It also says that Foreign Travel by officers must be approved by the Committee unless the officer is in a team where the Committee has given pre-approval to foreign travel because it accepts that there is a need to travel abroad. Those officers need to obtain prior approval from managers.
- 3.2 The Policy states that all foreign trips which have not been approved by the Committee (ie travel by pre-approved teams) must be reported to the Committee on an annual basis.
- 3.3 The report for 2014/15 and 2015/16 is attached. The report shows all trips and either the actual or estimated expenditure. In a small number of cases expenditure has been estimated because actual figures were not easily available, for example because the officer concerned has left ECC's employment.
- 3.4 In August 2016 we introduced a process to improve recording of actual costs. This involves a small amount of additional work for officers involved in foreign travel throughout the year but makes it easier to produce an Annual Report.
- 3.5 Appendices 1 and 2 show details of all trips reported centrally or where we have identified from checking payments for hotel bookings. The only

omissions are the cost of two tours a year led by the Council's music service. These trips were all to accompany a group of pupils and whilst the overall cost of the trip is known, the cost of the individual employees' travel cannot be disaggregated. The cost of these tours is fully covered by a grant from the Music Education Hub and by contributions made by parents.

3.6 The reasons that overseas travel is necessary are many and varied but most travel falls into one of the following categories:

- Travel to maintain and develop trading links with other parts of the world which brings trade into the County and its businesses, for example our links with the Jiangsu Province in China.
- Travel to obtain funding from international organisations.
- Travel as part of an education service (for example the two tours mentioned above).
- Travel as part of the Council's social care functions, for example where adoption or care cases have an international dimension.

3.7 It will be noted that some of the foreign travel is to destinations in the UK. This is recorded as the employees who travelled are based overseas and the the journey therefore involved international travel.

4. Options

4.1 The policy states that the Council will publish the cost of travel so any decision not to publish would require that policy to be changed.

4.2 Looking forward, it is clear that:

- The council will have significantly less resource available to it and collection of this information involves a significant amount of work.
- Whilst there was previously significant interest in overseas travel by officers and Members, this has now diminished.
- The Council now has clear systems in place to approve overseas travel which appear to be working.

4.3 The council has the option of changing the policy so as not to require this information to be published, but it is recommended that we publish a 2016/17 report which will use information collected using the new system and review how much officer time this involves.

5. Issues for consideration

5.1 Financial implications

5.1.1 The cost of foreign travel is an expense which the Council must sometimes incur in order to discharge its functions, as described above. All overseas travel is subject to prior approval in accordance with the policy and the Council's procurement rules.

5.2 Legal implications

- 5.2.1 Robust arrangements for managing expenditure are a key internal control which the Council is required to have in order to discharge its duties to council taxpayers. The arrangements need to be proportionate and appropriate to the risks and concerns.
- 5.2.2 The control arrangements and processes have been tested through the internal audit programme. The most recent audit which took place in 2014 said that the current system gave 'substantial assurance'. Five 'moderate' recommendations were made and have now been implemented. The final recommendation, which will not be implemented until early 2017, is to allow officers four months to make claims for foreign travel expenses, rather than the current two months. This cannot be implemented without a change to IT systems. These changes are scheduled as part of the 'transforming corporate systems' project.

6. List of appendices

- 6.1 Annual report 2014/15
- 6.2 Annual report 2015/16
- 6.3 List of [pre-approved teams](#).

7. List of Background papers

Foreign Travel Policy.