



Committee to consider applications to undertake certain duties by Members and Foreign Travel by Officers	FTC/07/13
Date: 10 September 2013	
Officer Foreign Travel, Gifts and Hospitality Policy	
Report by:	
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1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. To review the list of employees/teams who have standing approval from the committee to travel overseas without needing to have each trip individually approved by the Committee.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Agree that subject to 2.3 employees in Appendix 1 (document entitled Guide 1) may travel abroad without needing the specific approval of the Committee.
- 2.2. Note that all other overseas travel by employees will continue to require approval from the Committee for each trip.
- 2.3. That where it is proposed that an employee will accompany a Member, then that travel by the Member and the employee will both require approval from the Committee, regardless of whether the officer is the subject of standing approval from the Committee.

3. Background and proposal

- 3.1. In May 2012 the Committee approved a formal process of approval of officer and Member travel; three categories of officer travel were approved.
- 3.2. These categories were: teams or individuals with an agreed prior need to travel, such as the Head of International Trade, where approval is delegated by

Members to the Director/senior officer, with the production of an annual report detailing visits, costs, and outcomes; any occasional (ad hoc) travel by other employees to be approved by the Executive Director and the Committee; and arrangements for prior approval by the Committee where employees would travel with a Member or Members.

- 3.3 An internal audit conducted in May 2012 highlighted conflicts that required resolution between some demands of foreign travel and ECC's existing officer travel and subsistence policy and gifts and hospitality policy – for example, where for health and safety considerations officers need to buy bottled water from vendors who may not issue a receipt, or the use of taxis in areas where this is the most reliable, safe and effective mode of transport.
- 3.4 A new policy and documents have been developed to address the auditors' report and formalise the current arrangements: these are designed to 'ensure all foreign travel and related activity supports predefined business objectives, is reasonable and proportionate, and meets the principles and standards required of every employee in the ECC Code of Conduct.' This has been approved by the Head of HR under delegated powers.
- 3.5 The content of the new documents is drawn from: the current process agreed by the Committee in line with the report by the Head of Scrutiny and Lead Governance Officer, Colin Ismay (24 May 2012); the Internal Audit recommendations made in the Essex Trade and Investment Limited audit report (28 July 2012); existing elements of other policies such as Gifts and Hospitality; and Local Government Association-supplied guidance on conduct and overseas partnership arrangements.
- 3.6 The new documents contain all the information relevant to officers, and present the policy in the standard format used for employee-facing ECC employment policies.
- 3.7 At the same time, references in the refreshed Gifts and Hospitality policy and Travel and Subsistence policy to foreign travel and related activity will be replaced with direction to follow the new policy on all such matters and published together to ensure all elements of existing processes are aligned.
- 3.8 The Committee have previously approved a standing list of officers who, as a result of their work, are permitted to travel abroad with the permission of the relevant senior manager without requiring each trip to be individually approved by the Committee.
- 3.9 This list has worked well, but there are some teams which were not included where there is a strong case for including them on the list. These include:
 - a) the Inward Investment Team who may need to respond swiftly to secure inward investment opportunities; and
 - b) the two staff reporting to the Head of International Trade, requested by the Head of Enterprise to give sufficient flexibility to deliver the team's outcomes efficiently.

- (c) staff participating in an Inter-Regional programme. International visits are necessary as part of the programme and the cost of travel, once a scheme is approved, is met externally.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1. As at present – no change. These proposals will not change the cost. All costs made known to the Committee as documented above.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1. It is necessary to have a clear policy governing when employees are permitted to travel abroad.

6. Staffing and other resource implications

- 6.1. There will be a slight reduction in the number of trips which need to be approved by the Committee which will result in a small saving in officer and member time.

7. Equality and Diversity implications

- 7.1. In making this decision ECC must have regard to the public sector equality duty (PSED) under s.149 of the Equalities Act 2010, ie have due regard to the need to: A. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act. B. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. C. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 7.2. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 7.3. The PSED is a relevant factor in making this decision but does not impose a duty to achieve the outcomes in s.149, is only one factor that needs to be considered, and may be balanced against other relevant factors.
- 7.4. An initial screening has been undertaken and it has been concluded that the decision in this report does not have any disproportionate impact on diversity or equality.

8. Background papers

- 8.1. Foreign Travel Arrangements Report to Committee May 2012 by Colin Ismay, Head of Scrutiny and Lead Governance Officer – published on ECC's 'Working here' intranet site
- 8.2. Final Internal Audit Report 2011/12 – Essex Trade and Investment Limited (ESH4) dated July 2012
- 8.3. Local Government Bureau Partnership guidance (Interaction International Development Toolkit) supplied by Local Government Association: 'Practicalities of International Partnerships' from 'Take your partners', Local Government International Bureau, 2006.