

AGENDA ITEM NO 8(b)

TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET AND POLICY COMMITTEE TUESDAY 28th May, 2024

BRIEFING NOTE RECORD OF COUNCILLOR ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Committee will recall that the matter of the format used to record Councillor attendance at meetings was recently raised in full assembly.
- 1.2 The origin of recording attendance at meetings largely derives from principal Council practice in the last century. At that time principal Authorities were able to offer to all Members, in addition to a 'basic' allowance, an 'attendance' allowance (i.e. a sum of money at a fixed rate) for set periods of a meeting attended.
- 1.3 The facility for payment of 'attendance' allowances was discontinued by the Government in the early part of this century on the basis that it encouraged 'presenteeism' without necessarily reflecting the value of contributions actually made when in attendance. As the Committee will be aware the statutory minimum number of eligible meetings which a member is required by law to attend in order to retain their membership of the Council is one meeting in every six months.

2. CURRENT POSITION

- 2.1 Notwithstanding that there is no obligation to maintain a record of attendances it is something which some principal authorities, and many Town and Parish Councils, continue to do - in part by way of a loose proxy for participation. It is therefore very much a matter for the Council as to whether or not it wishes to continue this practice.
- 2.2 More generally over the years attendance has been recorded in different ways, and at times has also included Civic/Ceremonial functions (but not currently).
- 2.3 The question which recently arose was as to whether attendance at outside bodies could/should also be included. However, as matter of general administrative practice this does present issues not least:
 - o It is a matter for each independent body to set and monitor its own arrangements for attendance at meetings through its own

constitution, terms of reference, articles of association or similar governing document(s);

- The Council is not aware (and it would be impracticable to accurately monitor) the number and type of meetings of outside bodies, which a Councillor attended as a Councillor representative. Not least as some could be attended as a representative of another organisation, or in a personal capacity, or on a consequential basis, notwithstanding their appointment to that body;
- The diverse nature of appointments – in some cases as full members, in others as observers, others trustees etc. Likewise the potential that the number of meetings attended may be different to the number of meetings which appear to be available (or vary from the appointment actually made), but in practice are not for that class of membership.

2.4 It should also be noted that the example which drew attention to this topic is perhaps in a special category. It is the only meeting (Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group) which whilst, as do the others, represents an appointment to an external and separately constituted body, is simultaneously an appointment to a body which

- exists alongside the auspices of the Town Council,
- is funded wholly (excepting grants) by the Town Council; and
- whose output is dependent upon endorsement by the Town Council.

2.5 As such it represents an anomaly - both in relation to past and prospective future appointments to outside bodies.

2.6 Should the Council wish to separately address this then the most appropriate mechanism would be if, through the normal reporting arrangements to the Development Management & Licensing Committee, the Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group were to draw attention to the occurrences of attendance by all those Councillor appointees at full meetings of the NDPSG over the past 12 months in order that same can form part of the public record in the normal way.

3 NEXT STEPS

3.1 Turning to the current reporting format (attached at Appendix 1) the Committee is invited to express a view as to whether or not any changes, including in particular with regard to 'ranking', might be considered.

- 3.2 In addition the Committee may also wish to consider a suggestion which has been received that (for example), at the meeting which precedes Annual Council each year each member appointed to an outside body provides a short written report (of not more than one side A4) on the work of that group or organisation over the course of the year to apprise colleagues of their work.
- 3.3 The instruction of the Committee and Council are sought.

**CARL HEARN
TOWN CLERK
TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
May 2024**

