

NAME OF COMMITTEE	Council
DATE	17 February 2015
REPORT TITLE	MEMBERS' MEETING ATTENDANCE STATISTICS
Report of	The Democratic Services Manager
WARDS AFFECTED	All

Summary of report:

To consider a report that presents the recommendations of the Member Group that was tasked with reviewing the subject of Members' attendance at public meetings of the Council and its Committees.

Financial implications:

There could be potential (but unquantifiable) savings arising from any Member voluntarily returning a proportion of their Basic Allowance.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council **RESOLVES** that:

1. with immediate effect, the principle of publishing Members' meeting attendance statistics on the Council website on a quarterly and annual basis be agreed;
2. the meetings as outlined at paragraph 2.1 below be included on the published record, with an attendance threshold being set at 75% of those meetings to which a Member had been appointed;
3. the process for sanctions (as outlined at paragraph 2.6 below) be adopted to come into effect during the 2015/16 Municipal Year; and
4. the importance of Members appointed to Outside Bodies providing regular feedback to the Council be reinforced.

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Lead Member contact:

Cllr Robin Musgrave, Chairman of the Member Working Group (email: cllr.robin.musgrave@westdevon.gov.uk).

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At the Council meeting on 9 December 2014, the following motion was proposed by Cllr Musgrave and seconded by Cllr Pearce:-

'That this Council agrees to publish Members' annual attendance of all public meetings of the Council on the Council's website and where a Member fails to attend at least 65% of all meetings of the bodies to which they have been appointed, then the matter will be considered by the Monitoring Officer who will consult with the relevant Chairman of the Standards Committee. Where there are no justified reasons for the absences, the Monitoring Officer will write to the Member and request that they return a clearly defined proportion of their basic allowance.'

- 1.2 Upon the conclusion of a detailed discussion, the following amended motion was put to the vote and was declared carried (Minute CM 60 refers):-

"That the Council agrees in principle to publish Members' annual attendance of all public meetings of the Council and its Committees on the Council's website. With regard to setting potential meeting attendance thresholds and any consequent sanctions, this issue should be deferred to the four Group Leaders (or their nominees) for further detailed discussion, with their recommendations then being presented back to the Council meeting on 17 February 2015."

- 1.3 Subsequent to this decision, Cllrs Baldwin, Musgrave, Sampson and Whitcomb were nominated to serve on the Working Group and a meeting was convened on 20 January 2015. The Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Manager also attended this meeting in an advisory capacity. The agenda for this meeting was as follows:-

- Appointment of Group Chairman;
- Definition of meetings to be considered for inclusion;
- How and who monitors attendance (keeping admin to a minimum);
- Frequency and presentation of attendance summary;
- What constitutes an acceptable level of attendance; and
- Sanctions (if any).

2. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Definition of Meetings to be considered for inclusion

- 2.1 The Working Group felt that attendance at the following meetings should be included on the published record:-

- Council;
- Resources Committee;
- Community Services Committee;
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Planning and Licensing Committee.
- Audit Committee;
- Standards Committee; and

It was recognised that this list would need to be amended accordingly to reflect the revised Governance arrangements post May 2015 and that attendance at these meetings in a substitute capacity should also be reflected in the statistics.

- 2.2 The Group proceeded to question the merits of whether or not attendance at meetings of Outside Bodies should be included. In conclusion, the Group felt that these should not be included, but it did wish to formally reinforce the importance of Members providing feedback arising from Outside Bodies meetings (to which they had been appointed) to the wider membership via the Members' Bulletin.

How and Who Monitors Attendance (keeping admin to a minimum)

- 2.3 Officers confirmed that this piece of work could be absorbed by the Member Services team and the consequent resource implications would be manageable.

Frequency and Presentation of Attendance Summary

- 2.4 The Group felt it reasonable for the statistics to be published on the website quarterly (on a rolling basis), with the annual record then published in conjunction with the annual requirement to publish the total allowances which had been claimed by each individual Member.

What Constitutes an Acceptable Level of Attendance?

- 2.5 The Group considered the merits of a number of potential attendance target levels and concluded that the threshold of an 'acceptable level of attendance' should be set at 75% of those meetings (defined at paragraph 2.1 above) to which they had been appointed.

Sanctions (if any)

- 2.6 The Group wished to recommend the following process for potential sanctions:-

'If a Member fails to comply with the performance target whereby they should attend at least 75% of all public meetings of the Council and its Committees to which they have been appointed, then the matter will be considered by the Monitoring Officer, who will consult with the Chairman of the Standards Committee. Where there are no justified reasons for the performance target being missed, the Monitoring Officer will then write to the Member and request that they return a clearly defined proportion of their Basic Allowance.'

- 2.7 In relation to timing, the Group felt that, whilst the statistics for 2014/15 should be published on the website, the process for imposing sanctions should not be in place until the 2015/16 Municipal Year.

- 2.8 Once implemented, the Group was also of the view that the published record should include the names of any Members who have been invited to voluntarily return a proportion of their allowance and whether (or not) any monies had been subsequently returned.

2.9 In recommending these sanctions, the Group did recognise that, in accordance with legislation, the Council could only voluntarily request that a Member return a proportion of their Allowance. However, the Group did feel that the sanctions it was proposing would act as a sufficient deterrent to encourage any Member to comply with such a request.

Concluding Comments

2.10 Whilst the Group recognises that these statistics are a limited barometer of Member performance (e.g. they do not take account of Member casework within their wards or that some Members may be in full-time employment or have carer responsibilities), it is nonetheless acknowledged that there is an increased drive and emphasis upon elected Member performance, transparency and openness.

3. RISK MANAGEMENT

3.1 The Risk Management implications are shown at the end of this report in the Strategic Risks Template.

4. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate priorities engaged:	All
Statutory powers:	None
Considerations of equality and human rights:	None directly related to this report
Biodiversity considerations:	None directly related to this report
Sustainability considerations:	None directly related to this report
Crime and disorder implications:	None directly related to this report
Background papers:	The Council Constitution
Appendices attached:	None.

STRATEGIC RISKS TEMPLATE

No	Risk Title	Risk/Opportunity Description	Inherent risk status			Mitigating & Management actions	Ownership
			Impact of negative outcome	Chance of negative outcome	Risk score and direction of travel		
1	Reputation of the Council and its Members	Poor attendance at public meetings of the Council and its Committees may impact upon the reputation of individual Members and the Council as a whole.	2	1	2 ↓	By introducing the practice of publishing attendance statistics on the Council website will result in an element of the performance of an elected Member being accessible to interested members of the public.	Democratic Services Manager

Direction of travel symbols ↓ ↑ ⇄