

Finance and Resources Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 5 March 2020

Provision of Lunches and Refreshments for Councillors

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Executive
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That Committee instructs how the cost of Council lunches, and other associated refreshments, is addressed.

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Executive Director of Resources

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Report

Provision of Lunches and Refreshments for Councillors

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report addresses a motion to Council, on 21 November 2019, by seeking instructions on how the cost of Council lunches and refreshments should be accounted for.

3. Background

- 3.1 On 21 November 2019, the Council approved the following motion:

Council notes:

1. That Councillors are paid according to the rates set by the Scottish Parliament.
2. At regular meetings of the Full Council, lunch is provided to councillors and staff attending the meeting.
3. A light lunch is provided to councillors and staff taking part in all-day meetings of the Licensing Board and the Regulatory Committee's Licensing Sub-Committee.
4. Food and refreshments, i.e., tea and coffee, are sometimes provided for internal meetings of councillors.
5. No contributions are sought from councillors or staff in connection with 2, 3 and 4 above.

Council accepts there are legitimate reasons for the provision as described above, principally to ensure efficient time management for the meeting participants and to protect the meeting participants from undue lobbying.

Council therefore agrees to:

1. Continue the practice of providing lunches and refreshments as described above to ensure the smooth running of Council business; and,
2. Request a report to the Finance and Resources Committee within two cycles to explore options of a simple mechanism which could facilitate councillors' contributions to cover the direct cost of lunches and refreshments provided.

3.2 The purpose of this report is to address the above motion.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The current cost of providing a lunch for a Council meeting is £550, which is charged to the Members Services budget. This equates to 80 servings at £6.87 per head. Analysis of F/Y budget indicates that £12,480 was also spent on refreshments in the members lunch, again charged to the Members Services budget.
- 4.2 In preparation for this report, officers completed a straw poll of other Council arrangements as below:
- Stirling and Fife Councils – charge member services;
 - South Lanarkshire and East Ayrshire Councils – no provision offered; and,
 - Argyll & Bute and West Dunbartonshire Councils - recharge elected members.
- 4.3 Consequently, there is no consistency or pattern with each local authority making their own arrangements.
- 4.4 Each Political Group was consulted, and the formal feedback was as follows:
- Three Groups prefer the status quo as it provides for collegiality and convenience. One Group stated that if there is any change to the status quo then lunches should be scrapped;
 - One Group is in favour of charging but indicated that the majority of the Group concerned will opt out;
 - One Group is in favour of scrapping the provision and/or individual Councillors paying;
 - One Group is in favour of charging Groups with full cost recovery for lunches and any refreshments to Groups for internal meetings plus the withdrawal of biscuits from the members lounge;
- 4.5 As there is no consensus however, based on numbers, the majority view of the Political Groups is to retain the status quo. Council officers who currently participate in Council meetings will equally abide by the decision of the Finance and Resources Committee.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The decision that the Committee determines to implement will be effective from the next meeting of Full Council.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The financial cost is highlighted in paragraph 4.1 of this report. There can be no additional financial impact as any option could not incur more cost.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 All political group and independent councillor were given the opportunity to contribute to the potential outcomes.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 N/A.

9. Appendices

- 9.1 N/A