
Overseas visits and engagement policy

Decision to be taken by: City Mayor

Decision to be taken on: 15 January 2024

Lead director/officer: Miranda Cannon

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: N/A
- Report author: Miranda Cannon, Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance
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- Report version number: 0.1

1. Summary

This report seeks approval for a policy which defines Leicester City Council's approach to overseas engagement and visits by elected members. The policy specifies that the Council will at all times seek to minimise overseas travel on the basis of both cost and sustainability considerations and such travel will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where there can be clearly evidenced and measurable benefits to the city and residents that would be capable of standing up to public scrutiny.

2. Recommended decision

The City Mayor is recommended to adopt the policy on overseas visits and engagement as set out in Appendix 1.

3. Detailed report

Leicester is twinned with a number of cities internationally such as Strasbourg, Krefeld and Haskovo, and on occasion, invitations may be received from these cities to partake in specific events of either a civic nature such as anniversaries, or with a specific theme or focus such as climate change. Aside from our twinned cities, from time to time, elected members may also be invited to attend other European and Global conferences and events.

Whilst such opportunities may present some positive opportunities or benefits to the city and our residents, these need to be weighted against a number of other factors including the Council's significantly challenging financial position, the need for public transparency and accountability, and the environmental impact of travel in the context of the Council's declared climate emergency.

The policy set out in Appendix 1 presents an approach which aims to balance these and also takes account of the likelihood that the costs and resources involved in any overseas visits will be publicly disclosed via FOI or necessary statutory reporting, and therefore must be capable of being publicly defensible.

The policy will apply to all elected members including the City Mayor and civic office holders.

In summary the policy sets out that the Council will at all times seek to minimise overseas travel on the basis of both cost and sustainability considerations.

Wherever possible overseas engagement will be undertaken on a virtual, remote basis using video conferencing or other appropriate technologies which are time and cost efficient and have a low environmental impact.

Where engagement via a virtual approach is not a feasible option, overseas travel will only be considered on an exceptional basis where there can be a clearly evidenced benefit to the city and residents which is capable of standing up to public scrutiny.

Should members have a personal desire to attend a particular event or engagement that does not align with the policy, they are of course able to fund their own travel and accommodation costs in order to attend.

4. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

4.1 Financial implications

There is no specific budget allocation for this type of activity and this policy recognises in the current financial climate, the need to minimise costs associated with overseas engagement. Any visits or trips which are undertaken would need to be identified from other revenue budgets.

Martin Judson, Head of Finance

4.2 Legal implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report

Kamal Adatia, City Barrister, Ext 1401

4.3 Equalities implications

When making decisions, the Council must comply with the public sector equality duty (PSED) (Equality Act 2010) by paying due regard, when carrying out their functions, to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not.

Protected characteristics under the public sector equality duty are age, disability, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. This report seeks approval for a policy which defines Leicester City Council's approach to overseas engagement and visits by elected members, there are no direct equalities implications arising from it.

Equalities officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148

4.4 Climate Emergency implications

Overseas travel, in particular the use of flights, generally has a relatively high carbon footprint. The proposed policy takes these implications into account, setting out the need to minimise overseas travel and consider the environmental impact of travel, in line with the council's climate emergency declaration and ambition to reach net zero carbon emissions.

Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2284

4.5 Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

5. Background information and other papers:

None

6. Summary of appendices:

Appendix 1 - Policy on member overseas visits and engagement

Appendix 1: Policy on member overseas visits and engagement

Introduction

This policy aims to set out the council's position on overseas engagement and visits by elected members including the City Mayor.

Leicester is twinned with a number of cities internationally such as Strasbourg, Krefeld and Haskovo, and on occasion, invitations may be received from these cities to partake in specific events of either a civic nature such as anniversaries, or with a specific theme or focus such as climate change.

Aside from our twinned cities, from time to time, elected members may also be invited to attend other European and Global conferences and events.

Whilst such opportunities may present some positive opportunities or benefits to the city and our residents, these need to be weighted against a number of other factors including the Council's significantly challenging financial position, the need for public transparency and accountability, and the environmental impact of travel in the context of the Council's declared climate emergency.

This policy presents an approach which aims to balance these and also takes account of the likelihood that the costs and resources involved in any overseas visits will be publicly disclosed via FOI or necessary statutory reporting, and therefore must be capable of being publicly defensible.

Scope

This policy applies to the City Mayor and all elected members. It includes invitations and engagements received by Civic Office holders, as well as members of the Council's Executive.

Policy position

The Council will at all times seek to minimise overseas travel on the basis of both cost and sustainability considerations.

Wherever possible overseas engagement will be undertaken on a virtual, remote basis using video conferencing or other appropriate technologies which are time and cost efficient and have a low environmental impact.

Where engagement via a virtual approach is not a feasible option, overseas travel will only be considered on an exceptional basis where there can be a clearly evidenced benefit to the city and residents, for example where engagement provides a strong likelihood of attracting businesses and investment to the city. In these cases, the rationale must be capable of being justified publically as the costs will inevitably be the subject of FOI and media requests and will be required to be disclosed. The most cost-effective means of travel should be chosen in these cases and no first class or other higher-cost premium travel options will be permitted. Officers will not normally

accompany members unless there is a justifiable and robust business need and benefit for the city.

Overseas travel for more general purposes and occasions such as celebrating and maintaining twinning links where there is no clear direct or immediate benefit, will not be undertaken.

Members are of course able to fund their own travel and accommodation costs to attend events should they have a personal desire to attend.

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