

**CABINET MEETING – 18 JULY 2012**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I**

<b>Title of Report:</b> Foreign Travel Policy	
<b>Author(s):</b> Chief Executive	
<b>Purpose of Report:</b> The purpose of this report is to agree the Council's policy and associated guidelines on Foreign Travel.	
<b>Description of Decision:</b> Cabinet is requested to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- consider the contents of this report and agree the proposed Foreign Travel Policy and Guidelines as set out within the report.</li> </ul>	
<b>Is the decision consistent with the Budget/Policy Framework?</b> <b>Yes</b>	
<b>If not, Council approval is required to change the Budget/Policy Framework</b>	
<b>Suggested reason(s) for Decision:</b> The current policy was established in 1999. Since that time, the range of foreign travel undertaken by the City Council has changed. Although expenditure on foreign travel has been reduced in each of the last three financial years, a degree of foreign travel is required to continue to generate benefits for the city in line with the International Strategy. The revised policy and guidelines ensure that the objectives of each individual visit are clear at the outset, that these objectives are achieved and that value for money is secured whilst ensuring the safety of Officers and Members travelling abroad.	
<b>Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected:</b> The alternative option is to not revise the existing policy on this area. The existing policy dates back to 1999. The context for foreign travel has changed significantly since that date and this is not therefore considered an appropriate option.	
<b>Impacts analysed:</b>	
<b>Equality</b> <input type="text" value="n/a"/>	<b>Privacy</b> <input type="text" value="n/a"/> <b>Sustainability</b> <input type="text" value="n/a"/> <b>Crime and Disorder</b> <input type="text" value="n/a"/>
<b>Is this a "Key Decision" as defined in the Constitution?</b> No	<b>Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Is it included in the Forward Plan?</b> No	



**FOREIGN TRAVEL POLICY**

**REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**1.0 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to agree the Council's policy and associated guidelines on Foreign Travel.

**2.0 Description of Decision**

- 2.1 Cabinet is requested to:  
- consider the contents of this report and agree the proposed Foreign Travel Policy and Guidelines as set out within the report.

**3.0 Background**

- 3.1 The current policy on Foreign Travel was approved by Personnel Sub-Committee at its meeting of 31 March 1999.
- 3.2 Since 1999, the level and nature of international activity, and associated foreign travel, has increased. This was reflected in the decision to develop an International Strategy for Sunderland. The International Strategy was approved as a Consultative Draft in October 2006 and formally endorsed in October 2008 following the revision of the Sunderland Strategy.
- 3.3 The attached draft Foreign Travel Policy and Guidelines are set within the context of the International Strategy and include sections on: authorisation; travel and accommodation; subsistence; business hospitality; risk management; reconciliation of foreign travel expenditure and reporting arrangements. With the exception of the proposed Checklist for Managers (see 3.3 below), it is proposed that all aspects of the policy apply equally to Officers and Members.

**4.0 Current Position**

- 4.1 Key changes from the current policy are set out in sections 4.2 to 4.6 below.
- 4.2 Two separate forms have been produced to cover authorisation and subsequent reconciliation of foreign travel, which will be linked by the introduction of a reference number for each visit. They will replace the current 4-page form that combines both aspects. Copies of the completed forms will be held centrally in a file in the Chief Executive's Office and reconciliation will be required within 12 weeks of the visit itself.

- 4.3 A Self-Health Declaration Form has been included for the first time. This follows discussions with the Occupational Health Physician and advice that any new procedure should ensure that the Council is not placing an individual at an inappropriate risk by requiring them to travel due to their individual health circumstances, and can demonstrate that this is the case.
- 4.4 A Checklist for Managers, to be completed by the line manager in conjunction with the individual travelling, is also included for the first time. The Checklist will ensure Managers check all of the appropriate procedures have been followed before the visit and that they, and the travelling individual, have all the appropriate information in place ahead of the visit.
- 4.5 A process for risk assessments for both EU and non-EU travel have been developed. These will be made available on the intranet as set out in paragraph 6.1 of the Policy so they can be adopted for use by any team undertaking such travel, or amended in light of particular circumstances for an individual visit.
- 4.6 Offsetting carbon emissions in respect of flights undertaken is written into the policy for the first time. This is in line with the City Council's commitment to the principles of sustainability and can be achieved either direct with the airline concerned or through reputable schemes on the advice of officers responsible for Sustainability within the Council's Strategy, Policy and Performance Management service.

## **5.0 Reasons for the Decision**

- 5.1 The current policy was established in 1999. Since that time, the range of foreign travel undertaken by the City Council has changed. The City Council endorsed an International Strategy for Sunderland in 2006, signing a Friendship Agreement with Washington DC in the USA in June 2006 and with Harbin in China in May 2009. Within Europe, in addition to its long-standing relationships with its twin towns, the City Council became a member of the EUROCITIES network in November 2007.
- 5.2 Although expenditure on foreign travel has been reduced in each of the last three financial years, a degree of foreign travel is required to continue to generate benefits for the city in line with the International Strategy. An annual report on activity undertaken under the International Strategy is submitted to Cabinet each year and benefits generated between January 2011 and March 2012, including levels of investment and jobs created by overseas companies, were reported to the June meeting of Cabinet.

5.3 The revised policy and guidelines has been developed over an extended period and elements of the policy are already in operation. They ensure that the objectives of each individual visit are clear at the outset, that these objectives are achieved and that value for money is secured whilst ensuring the safety of Officers and Members travelling abroad. They also seek to ensure that the Council's duty of care as an employer is discharged to the best of its ability.

## **6.0 Alternative Options**

6.1 The alternative option is to not revise the existing policy on this area. The existing policy dates back to 1999. The context for foreign travel has changed significantly since that date and this is not therefore considered an appropriate option.

## **7.0 Relevant Consultations**

7.1 The Head of Corporate Assurance and Procurement has been involved in all stages throughout the development of this draft Policy and Guidelines. Discussions have taken place with the Assistant Head of Law and Governance, Head of Transactional Services, Insurance Policy / Underwriting Manager, Occupational Physician and officers responsible for sustainability on relevant areas within the attached draft. The Director of Human Resources & Organisational Development has also been consulted during the development process.

## **8.0 Background Papers**

8.1 The following background papers are available from the Office of the Chief Executive:  
International Strategy  
International Strategy Annual Report (January 2011 – March 2012)

