

Meeting date: 29 September 2022

Report to: Governance Committee

Subject/report title: Travel, Subsistence & Personal Expenses Policy

Report from: Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive

Report author/lead contact officer: Helen Flinter - Policy Development & HR Business Manager

Wards affected:

- All Wards | Bickenhill | Blythe | Castle Bromwich | Chelmsley Wood |
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath | Elmdon | Kingshurst/Fordbridge | Knowle |
 Lyndon | Meriden | Olton | Shirley East | Shirley South |
 Shirley West | Silhill | Smith's Wood | St Alphege
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Public/private report: Public

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Governance Committee of proposed changes to the existing Travel & Subsistence Policy.

2. Decision(s) recommended

- 2.1 To approve the attached Travel, Subsistence & Personal Expenses Policy.

3. Matters for Consideration

- 3.1 The Travel & Subsistence policy was last updated in 2019 and has been reviewed as part of the new Smarter Ways of Working policy review project. The review has incorporated feedback from key stakeholders across the Council.
- 3.2 The policy has been updated to reflect changes to how we work and travel, including the introduction of hybrid working. Additional sections have been added to the policy on personal expenses, so it is proposed to rename the policy '**Travel, Subsistence & Personal Expenses**' policy to better reflect its scope.

3.3 The key changes proposed from this review are:

- Less focus on travelling by car and **more emphasis on sustainable travel options** to reduce carbon emissions due to business travel. The Policy asks employees to consider the most efficient use of working time to achieve the environmental benefits of hybrid working.
- **Additional information has been added to clarify the work base for travel expenses and travel time** when working in a hybrid way. This does not change the current contractual base. Examples are given in the policy to explain this further.
- As recommended by Audit, **approval of all expenses** (except air travel expenses, which needs approval by a Director) **is approved by the 'budget manager'**. Previously there were differing levels of authorising managers for different types of expense which was confusing, this change simplifies the approvals required whilst retaining a stringent approval framework.
- The policy wording has been strengthened in relation to the rules relating to alcohol at work events by the inclusion of wording to expressly state that **public funds should not be used to purchase alcohol** at any Council events or meetings without the express approval from either the Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive or a Director. A separate review of the Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Misuse policy is also being undertaken and proposed changes to that policy will be shared with the Governance Committee later in 2022.
- **Inclusion of the option of using hired bicycles and e-bikes** using the West Midlands Cycle Hire scheme for local business journeys around Solihull. The scheme will be further promoted to employees by the sustainable travel team.
- **A new section on working from home related expenses has been added**, linking to the Hybrid working guidance. This section provides clarification relating to the potential tax relief an employee could claim for homeworking expenses. The Council does not reimburse such costs.
- **Other new sections** include reference to existing policies that are related such as the **Relocation** policy, **Post Entry training** policy for course fees, exams, Reimbursement of **Eye Tests** and **Data Protection**. A statement about **false claims** is now also included.

4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?

- 4.1 As part of the current review there was feedback from Audit Services where it was highlighted that further clarification was needed to remove ambiguity around the rules relating to expense claims for alcohol at events. The recommendation in the report was to make it clear that Public Funds should not be used to purchase alcohol for Council events without express approval. The level of approval required is now set out as the Chief Executive or Deputy Chief Executive or Corporate Director.
- 4.2 Audit also advised that the policy should be clearer on the levels of authorisation for different types of expenses and it should be the budget manager in all cases for consistency.

4.3 We know that since the introduction of hybrid working following the pandemic, many employees are working from home and there was an increase in enquiries about how this affected their travel expenses. The policy now clarifies this further and gives practical examples.

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

5.1 Ensures compliance with Audit recommendations and protects public funds.

5.2 A review of the policy was agreed with the trade unions and they are agreeable to the changes suggested. The policy needs to be up-to-date to reflect current hybrid workplace practices and will help to avoid inconsistency with travel expense claims and unnecessary workplace issues.

6. Implications and Considerations

6.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the priorities in the [Council Plan](#):

Priority:	Contribution:
Promote employee wellbeing. Enable an environment and culture that supports smarter ways of working	The policy ensures that employees are reimbursed for expenses detailed in the policy that they incur as part of their role to ensure their financial wellbeing. The policy gives more practical examples of reimbursement for travel when working in a hybrid way to give employees more choice on modes of travel and to consider if travel is really necessary.
Enhance our natural environment, improve air quality and reduce net carbon emission	The policy has more emphasis on sustainable travel options to reduce carbon emissions due to business travel by car.

6.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.2.1 Consultation has taken place across the Directorates and with Trade Unions. Key stakeholders from HR, Audit, Finance, Equalities and the Sustainable Travel team have been consulted on the proposed changes.

6.2.2 The Assistant Directors Group and The Smarter and Wellbeing Board, with delegated authority from CLT, have endorsed the proposed changes.

6.3 Financial implications:

6.3.1 The policy assists the Council in ensuring only necessary business travel is reimbursed and that Council/School monies are being appropriately managed in terms of probity and scrutiny.

6.4 Legal implications:

6.4.1 The policy is legally compliant

6.5 Risk implications, including Risk Appetite:

6.5.1 There are no risks associated with the proposed changes.

6.6 Equality implications:

6.6.1 The changes have no negative impact on any group of people covered under the Equality Act 2010. Reasonable adjustments for staff with disabilities will be taken account of in relation to journey times or means of travelling on Council business.

6.7 Linkages to our work with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), Local Enterprise Partnership or the Birmingham & Solihull Integrated Care System (ICS):

6.7.1 N/A

7. List of appendices referred to

7.1 None

8. Background papers used to compile this report

8.1 N/A

9. List of other relevant documents

9.1 N/A