

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

12 APRIL 2007

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
POLICY SELECT COMMITTEE**

CABINET DECISION

Corporate – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Coleman

MEETING VENUES

1. Summary

This report informs Cabinet of the outcomes of the review of Meeting Venues undertaken by the Corporate Policy Select Committee between December 2006 and March 2007.

2. Recommendations

That:

- (1) detailed information on all Council meeting venues and a range of external venues (previously used by the Council) be provided on the Council's intranet to enable officers to make informed judgements on the best choice of meeting venue and that the information provided include:
 - facilities and equipment available
 - occupancy
 - barriers to access where known
 - cost
 - arrangements for getting to the venue by public transport
 - distance from Stockton Town Centre
 - booking arrangements
 - whether Fairtrade refreshments are available
- (2) when calling meetings involving external invitees and Members, meeting organisers be asked to include information in a standardised format on the front page of meeting invitations directing those invited to where they can find further information on how to access the meeting venue, including parking and travelling arrangements and public transport and who to contact to discuss any access needs;
- (3) that officers be encouraged to make full use of suitable internal meeting venues available before booking external venues;
- (4) that operational Meeting Rooms not currently on the Council's outlook system be added for ease of booking;

- (5) the use of telephone conference calling be promoted for smaller meetings in order to reduce the pressure on conference facilities, unnecessary travelling and car journeys and, subject to available resources, the use of video calling be considered as a further alternative;
- (6) emergency evacuation arrangements from the Council's buildings be reviewed as a matter of urgency;
- (7) the wording of the Council's Conference Room Guide and meeting room confirmations be revised to stress that evacuation in an emergency is the responsibility of the meeting organiser and that a full risk assessment must be undertaken before knowingly inviting any member of the public or disabled person to a meeting in Council premises and reasonable adjustments made to conform with Disability Discrimination Act requirements where possible.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

The review was identified as the subject for a short and focused piece of work with a view to reducing the pressure on corporate meeting venues and ensuring consistency in the standard of the venues and facilities offered.

The attached report outlines the results of the Committee's work.

4. Members Interests

Members (including co-opted members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (paragraph 8) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (paragraph 10 of the code of conduct).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting is being held, whilst the matter is being considered; not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (paragraph 12 of the Code).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc.; whether or not they are a member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting, and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room during consideration of the relevant item.

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DETAIL

1. The review was identified as the subject for a short and focused piece of work with a view to reducing the pressure on corporate meeting venues and ensuring consistency in the standard of the venues and facilities offered.
2. The Committee found that usage of corporate meeting facilities was at capacity and that there was regular use of external meeting venues. After consulting with officers responsible for the management of operational meeting venues, the Committee felt that services should be able to continue to exercise discretion in releasing operational meeting rooms to other services. However, the Committee felt that information on operational meeting venues should be publicised on the Council's intranet so that officers were more aware of alternative meeting rooms and could approach the service concerned if there were experiencing difficulties in finding suitable accommodation for meetings.
3. The Committee felt that the information compiled on internal and external meeting venues was a valuable resource and would help officers in finding alternative meeting venues where corporate venues were unavailable or where there might be specific requirements for a meeting.
4. The Committee noted that Conference Calling through the Council's existing phone system provided an alternative to holding a meeting in a conference room. The Committee also acknowledged that this would reduce unnecessary travelling time and car journeys and support the valuable work being undertaken by the Council as part of the Workplace Travel Plan Review.
5. As a result of site visits to meeting venues, the Committee found that the quality and accessibility of the facilities varied from venue to venue but that there were specific problems associated with most of the meeting venues visited and improvements which could be made.
6. The Committee acknowledged that, although, the visits had been a useful exercise in highlighting the type of problems encountered by disabled people, they were not a substitute for a specialist audit of the facilities. The Committee were advised that full access audits were being undertaken of the Council's buildings and that this would include all internal meeting rooms. The audit was due to be completed by the end of 2007.
7. One area of concern which arose from the site visits was the evacuation arrangements for disabled people unable to use stairs in the event of an emergency. The Committee felt that this issue should be reviewed as a matter of urgency.
8. Following consideration by Cabinet an action plan will be submitted to the Select Committee setting out how the approved recommendations will be implemented detailing officers responsible for action and timescales.

