AGENDA ITEM

PUBLISHING COUNCILLORS’ RECORDS OF ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

MEETING: STANDARDS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

DATE: 29th June 2007

REPORT BY: MONITORING OFFICER

WARD: ALL

COMMUNITY FORUM: ALL

FOR PUBLICATION:

Background Papers for Public Reports: None

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To decide whether the council should publish records of the level of attendance of each councillor at all council Cabinet and committee meetings.

2.0 BACKGROUND

At the full Council meeting on 13th June 2007, Councillor Gilby proposed the following motion, which was referred to this Committee for decision:

The Lyons report states that "Councils should place stronger performance management pressures on Councillors, including performance appraisal and mechanisms to provide the public with information about their activities."

In line with this recommendation, and to provide the public with information on how their Councillors are performing and whether they are delivering value for money:-

This council resolves to publish each council year, in addition to the amounts paid to each councillor:-

1. details of the total number of meetings actually attended by each Councillor; and
2. details of the total number of meetings that should have been attended

In proposing the motion, Councillor Gilby said that councillors' failure to attend meetings reflects badly on the credibility and reputation of the council, and that the public should be able to see individual councillors' attendance records, along with the amounts of allowances paid to councillors. He suggested that this information be published in "Our Town". He stated that other councils do publish this attendance information.

3.0 ATTENDANCE RECORDS

At Chesterfield, councillors sign attendance record sheets for all council, committee and cabinet meetings. We collate these records, which are available on request, but they are not published.

The amounts of allowances paid each year to each councillor and co-opted member under our allowances scheme have to be published by law.

Other councils publish attendance records on their websites and in paper form. An example of another council's web page is at Appendix 2.

4.0 PREVIOUS ADVICE OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE

In 2002, the Standards Committee sent advice to all councillors about attending meetings - it is included in our constitution and is at Appendix 1 to this report.

The advice makes points about the reputation of the council and councillors which are similar to those raised by Councillor Gilby in his motion. The advice also recognises that councillors reasonably have other commitments that can sometimes prevent them from attending meetings, and urges them to make apologies for absence in advance.

The advice says that in general failure to attend meetings in itself is unlikely to be a breach of the code of conduct.

5.0 PUBLISHING ATTENDANCE RECORDS

If the Committee agrees that attendance records should be published, they can be printed yearly or more often in "Our Town", or put on the Council's website (to be updated regularly), or both.

This Committee could also decide whether or not attendance records should be published alongside the statutory publication of amounts of allowances paid to councillors (on the website and/or in Our Town). The implication of
this in the public's mind might be that councillors are paid allowances wholly or mainly in recognition of their attendance at formal council meetings. Councillors' allowances are also meant to acknowledge (amongst other things) their constituency work as democratic representatives.

The costs of publishing attendance records should be relatively small, under the new arrangements for updating our website. Some extra staff time would be involved.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 That the Committee decide whether the Council should publish councillors' attendance records, and if so how often and in what form.

Keith Ross, Monitoring Officer
Appendix 1

ADVICE TO MEMBERS - CODE OF CONDUCT - COUNCILLORS' ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

There have been complaints from non-councillor Community Forum members and TARA members about councillors of both political groups not attending meetings of those bodies over prolonged periods.

The complainants say the non-attendance is made worse because no apology for absence is made. Allegations are that such absence:

- Destroys confidence in a councillor as elected representative
- Shows neglect of a councillor's duty
- Shows a disregard for constituents

The 1972 Local Government Act says a member not attending any Council or committee meeting for a continuous period of 6 months is disqualified from being a councillor unless the Cabinet approves the reason for the absence. Such approval can be limited in time or open (in which case the approval ends when the reason no longer applies).

The Code of Conduct says that a member must not conduct him or her self in a manner which could be reasonably be regarded as bringing his or her office (as a councillor) or the Council into disrepute.

The Code is interpreted according to General Principles. One of these is that members should be accountable to the public for the manner in which they carry out their responsibilities. Another says members should show leadership and act in a way that preserves public confidence.

On election, all councillors make a Declaration of Acceptance of Office saying that I take that office upon myself, and will duly and faithfully fulfil the duties of it according to the best of my judgement and ability. This may impose a moral duty to attend meetings as part of the duties of a councillor, but does not impose a specific legal duty to do so, and there is no specific legal sanction to enforce this Declaration. However the fact that the Declaration has been made may be relevant to show whether the councillor or the council is being brought into disrepute under the Code of Conduct.

The Standards and Audit Committee accepts that councillors have work and other commitments and that it would be unreasonable to expect them to attend every council or committee meeting. However in view of the complaints received, the committee urges councillors to make every effort to attend meetings, particularly those involving non-councillor constituents or
members of the public. Where attendance is not possible, an apology should be made.
Appendix 2  
Example of Publication of Attendance Records

Councillors Attendance Record Full Council and Committee Meetings

May 2005 - April 2006

Please note attendance is recorded at all full council meetings and the committees on which councillors are members. Attendance of councillors at committees on which they do not sit is not recorded

Cllr Lee Bartrop 7/9 meetings elected 28/09/05 resigned 10/04/06 77%
Cllr Anne Davies 63/67 meetings elected 01/05/03 resigned 10/04/06 94%
Cllr Brian Dixon 48/54 meetings elected 01/05/03 88%
Cllr Paula Dolphin 15/19 meetings elected 08/07/04 79%
Cllr Barry Garvie 40/71 meetings elected 01/05/03 56%
Cllr Ian Greaves 9/13 meetings elected 09/08/05 69%
Cllr Garry Howes 19/20 meetings elected 04/11/04 95%
Cllr Enid Greenwold 21/25 meetings elected 09/08/05 84%
Cllr Peter Gregory 8/8 meetings elected 24/11/05 100%
Cllr Keith Marshall 16/39 meetings elected 15/04/04 41%
Cllr Lesley Moores 21/25 meetings elected 16/10/03 84%
Cllr Peter Moores 34/37 meetings elected 16/10/03 92%
Cllr Frank Partridge 38/38 meetings elected 01/05/03 100%
Cllr Heather Partridge 34/37 meetings elected 01/05/03 92%
Cllr Joe Stocks 34/42 meetings elected 01/05/03 81%
Cllr Norman Tucker 20/26 meetings co-opted 02/09/04 77%
Cllr Richard Willoughby 37/37 meetings elected 01/05/03 100%
Cllr Joan Wonnacott 11/14 meetings elected 01/05/03 79%