



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>Strategic Policy &amp; Resources Committee</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Business travel</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>20 August 2010</b>
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Ronan Cregan, Head of Finance and Performance, Ext 6184
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Martin McVitty, Head of Projects and Corporate Systems, Ext 4420

### Relevant Background Information

Members will recall that at their meeting of 18 June 2010 they discussed a recommendation concerning the authorising of travel by officers to locations outside the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, and requested that a further report be submitted to the committee in due course on the most appropriate mechanism for giving such authorisation.

### Key Issues

#### ***A. Travel by officers to locations outside the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland***

It is vital that members of staff undertake travel only where it is appropriate and justified and that the council has proper controls in place to ensure that this is the case. While the council has already established a significant number of controls to ensure that any such travel is justified and appropriately approved, it is proposed that a further control is added in relation to travel by officers outside the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland.

The following mechanism for approving such travel is therefore recommended:

1. Where an officer is travelling with members, then the relevant committee must approve the travel
2. Where an officer is not travelling with members, then the appropriate director and the Director of Finance and Resources must approve the travel
3. In cases under 2 where the officer travelling is the Director of Finance and Resources or where the Director of Finance and Resources is not available, then the appropriate director and the Chief Executive must approve the travel

4. In addition, in cases under 2 and 3, the relevant committee must also approve the travel, if in the judgement of the Director of Finance and Resources / the Chief Executive either:
- (a) the cost of the event is likely to be questioned or
  - (b) attending the event is potentially controversial or of interest to the media or the public.

**B. New travel contract**

On a related theme and as an update for Members, the council has agreed a reduced cost exclusive contract for the provision of travel services with Knock Travel. The new travel contract includes provisions to ensure that the cost price of travel services charged by Knock Travel will not be greater than the price council officers or members could obtain directly, for example, by visiting the web site of the airline concerned. The council will carry out routine checks to ensure that the supplier is adhering to these contractual provisions.

In addition, in order to make processes more efficient and improve the quality of management/reporting, bookings for all travel services (flights, accommodation, car hire, etc including low-cost flights and all hotel bookings), will be placed exclusively with Knock Travel through the centralised booking service within the Finance & Resources Department. Out-of-hours arrangements with Knock Travel are also being put in place to provide cover and support in emergency circumstances.

**Resource implications**

As was reported to the committee on 18 June 2010, the cost of staff attending events has reduced in the financial year 2009/2010 as compared to previous years.

It is envisaged that the introduction of further control as recommended, together with reduced charges for travel services, will help to consolidate this cost reduction for future years.

**Recommendations**

Members are requested to:

- (a) agree the mechanism for approving travel by officers outside the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland as set out in Section A above
- (b) note the new arrangements for booking travel under the new travel contract

**Decision Tracking**

None