

## A Refreshing Approach – Refreshments for Members



### Report of the Refreshments for Members Working Party

**August 2009**

*Report, together with formal minutes and written evidence*

## The Refreshments for Members Working Party



***Cllr Fenning***



***Cllr P Purver  
(Chairman)***

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## Summary, conclusions and recommendations

The Refreshments for Members Working Party reviewed the arrangements for refreshments for members at meetings one year after their introduction.

The working party had benefit of written evidence and oral evidence from a number of members.

We would also like to thank all those who have helped us with our work, particularly Councillors A Bridges, J Legrys, I Meller, G Partner and A Smith who came and spoke with us. This enabled us to assess members' views more widely.

There was considerable agreement that the informal gatherings following meetings of council were very useful and valued by members. They provide an opportunity to discuss matters with fellow councillors and officers. We would wish to encourage members to take up this opportunity.

We feel that tea and coffee should be provided after meetings of council at these gatherings.

We also feel that it is inappropriate to provide alcohol, whether or not it is paid for by the members at what is an informal working occasion.

**R1 Tea and coffee and soft drinks be made available, without charge, after meetings of Council.**

Members often attend meetings direct from a day's work or visit the members' rooms to use the equipment or library. We feel that it is appropriate for refreshment to be available to members in these circumstances.

**R2 Tea and coffee be made available, without charge, at all times in Members' Rooms.**

We feel that the group has now completed its work as defined in the remit for which it was established and we therefore feel that it should be dissolved.

**R3 The Refreshments for Members Working Party be dissolved.**

## Background

1. The Corporate Scrutiny Committee established this working party at the meeting on 19 May 2009 to review the provision of refreshments for members attending meetings.
2. Changes had been made to the provision of refreshments for members in June 2008 and the Leader of Council suggested that it was an appropriate time (twelve months on) to review the arrangements
3. The Working Party is comprised of Councillors F Fenning, P Purver (Chairman) and N Smith.
4. The Scrutiny Committee appointed Councillor P Holland to the working party but did not feel able to continue and withdrew.
5. Councillor Fenning agreed to participate in Councillor Holland's place.
6. Due to unavoidable circumstances, Councillor Smith was not able to be present at the meeting of the working party.
7. Other Councillors have expressed an interest in the work of the working party and Councillors A Bridges, J Legrys, I Meller, G Partner and A Smith attended our meeting.
8. We are grateful to these councillors and all who have submitted evidence for their contributions to our work.

## Areas of Work

9. The Working Party has;

- a. Reviewed the current arrangements for the availability and nature of
  - Refreshments for members
  - Refreshments at meetings
  - Refreshments in the members' rooms
  - Chargingto ensure that they are operating as intended and to members' satisfaction.
- b. Considered improvements to the current arrangements

10. The working party has not considered the provision of refreshments at Annual Meetings of Council.
11. Annual Meetings of Council are ceremonial occasions and involve invited guests.
12. The council will continue to arrange and fund refreshments on these occasions that take place just once a year.

## Evidence Gathering

13. The working party received an introductory report<sup>1</sup> that set the scene for the examination. This gave a background against which the group based its examination.
14. Before the current arrangements, the cost of refreshments after meetings of Council was approximately £58 each meeting.
15. In June 2008, the council introduced new arrangements for refreshments for members.

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<sup>1</sup> EV1 Page 14

16. At that time the council introduced charges for refreshments for members after meetings of Council
  17. The intention was for the prices to be charged would cover the costs to the council of providing the refreshments.
  18. The circulated financial position<sup>2</sup> shows an anticipated operating deficit of £160 at the end of the financial year.
  19. The Corporate Director was able to update us with a final figure for the end of the financial year of just under £100.
  20. Hot and cold soft drinks, crisps and snacks are available from vending machines on the first floor landing.
  21. Water is available from the coolers in various places around the building at no charge.
  22. We wrote asking for views on refreshments from the political groups and all members of council.
  23. We attach the written submissions that we received as evidence to this report<sup>3</sup>.
  24. We invited members to attend our meeting and welcomed their views.
  25. Both written and oral evidence have contributed to the conclusions and recommendations of the working party.
27. The occasion also offers the opportunity to extend hospitality to and continue informal discussion with those attending a meeting to make a presentation to members.
  28. The need for a Temporary Event Notice<sup>4</sup> to sell alcohol added disproportionately to the costs incurred.
  29. It did not seem to us appropriate or necessary to provide alcohol for what is an informal working occasion.
  30. Although the amounts of money involved might be thought relatively small, it would not be right for members to be perceived as receiving an inappropriate benefit.
  31. We considered a suggestion that, if alcohol was to continue to be provided, a voluntary deduction be made from members' allowances.
  32. We felt that this could lead to administrative difficulties.
  33. Very often members attend meetings direct from work. On these occasions, members appreciate tea or coffee before the meeting.
  34. Several of our written submissions made reference to this point.

## Issues Considered

26. We were very clear that Members value the opportunity, after meetings of Council to get

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<sup>2</sup> EVa1 Page 16

<sup>3</sup> EVa2 Page 17

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<sup>4</sup> Temporary Event Notice (TEN) required for sale of alcohol under the Licensing Act 2003 in the absence of a Premises Licence. A Premises Licence also requires a Licence Holder and Designated Premises Supervisor(s) with associated licensing fees and training costs.

35. Members visit the offices at other times, for informal meetings or to use the ICT or library facilities in the members' rooms.
36. We feel it beneficial, with minimal financial impact for tea and coffee facilities to be available for in the members' rooms.

### Conclusions

37. We feel that it is inappropriate for alcohol to be provided, even if members pay.
38. We wish to encourage the informal networking that takes place after a meeting of council.
39. We feel that tea and coffee after a meeting of council would be beneficial and encourage informal networking.

40. We feel that members would benefit from access to tea and coffee in the members' rooms.
41. These conclusions complete our work and lead us to our recommendations.

### Recommendations

42. The Working Party recommends that;
  - a. Tea and coffee and soft drinks be made available, without charge, after meetings of Council.
  - b. Tea and coffee be made available, without charge, at all times in Members' Rooms.
  - c. The Refreshments for Members Working Party be dissolved.

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Refreshments for Members Working Party

Keith Gordon  
Senior Scrutiny Officer  
August 2009

## Appendices - Evidence



## NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### REFRESHMENTS FOR MEMBERS WORKING PARTY – 8 JULY 2009

#### *Refreshments for Members – An Introduction*

##### **Background**

- 1 In June 2008, the Council introduced new arrangements for refreshments for members and the Leader of Council has suggested that it is appropriate now to review the arrangements.
- 2 At that time, the Council introduced charges for refreshments for Members after Meetings of Council<sup>5</sup>. The intention was that the prices to be charged would cover the costs to the Council avoiding any subsidy.
- 3 The latest financial position<sup>6</sup> shows an anticipated operating deficit of £160 until the end of the financial year.
- 4 The Senior Scrutiny Officer has sought Members' views<sup>7</sup>.

##### **Working party**

- 5 The Corporate Scrutiny Committee established a three-member working party and appointed Councillors P Holland, P Purver (Chairman) and N Smith. Following Councillor Holland's withdrawal, Councillor F Fenning has agreed to join the working party.

##### **Terms of Reference**

- 6 The Corporate Scrutiny Committee approved the Terms of Reference for the Working Party
- 7 The Working Party;
  - 7.1 Review the current arrangements for the availability and nature of refreshments for members,
    - refreshments at all meetings
    - refreshments in the Members' Rooms
    - charging

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<sup>5</sup> Excluding Annual Council

<sup>6</sup> EVa1

<sup>7</sup> EVa2

to ensure that they are operating as intended and to Members' satisfaction.

- 7.2 Consider improvements to the current arrangements
- 7.3 Report to Corporate Scrutiny Committee Meeting scheduled for 13 August.

### Issues

- 8 The working party might wish to address the following issues and no doubt, others will arise as the examination progresses.
  - 8.1 The provision of alcoholic drinks after Meetings of Council and meeting the cost by adequate charging
  - 8.2 The provision of tea and coffee at other Council Meetings including Working Parties
  - 8.3 The availability of soft drinks in Members' Rooms

### Meetings

- 9 The working party might feel that a single meeting will enable members to complete the required work to fulfil the terms of reference.

### Commentary

- 10 Annual Meetings of Council are ceremonial occasions and include invited guests. The Council will continue to arrange and fund refreshments on these occasions, which take place just once a year.
- 11 Water, hot and cold soft drinks, crisps and snacks are available from the machines on the landing.
- 12 Before the council introduced charges, the cost of providing refreshments after Council meetings was approximately £58 per meeting.

### Written evidence

- 13 In addition to collation of appropriate council data, the Senior Scrutiny Officer on behalf of the working group has invited members' views.
- 14 The financial statement to the end of the financial year 2008-09<sup>8</sup> and written statements received from members<sup>9</sup> accompany to this report.

### Witnesses

- 15 The Senior Scrutiny Officer has extended an invitation to Members who have submitted written comments, to attend the meeting to expand upon written submissions and answer members' questions.

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<sup>8</sup> EVa1

<sup>9</sup> EVa2

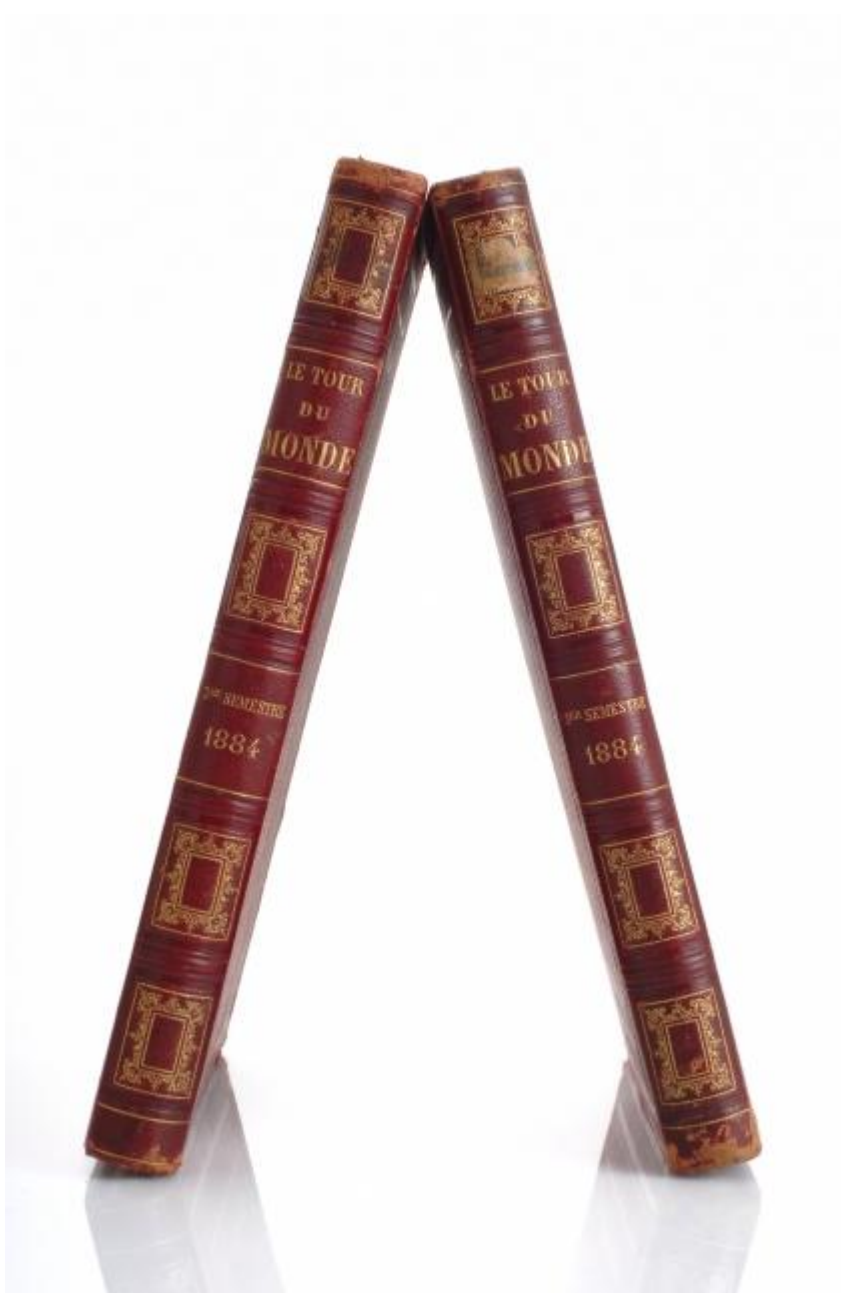
## Options

- 16 The working group can identify options for the future operation of refreshments for members and make appropriate recommendations.

Keith Gordon, Senior Scrutiny Officer  
June 2009

**Background Papers:** Report to and minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee held on 19 May 2009. Available at <http://minutes.nwleics.gov.uk:81/aksnwleicester/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmt=e=COS&meet=7&arc=71> or on request.

## Evidence



**Trading Account Bar Estimate for Period 1/4/08 to 31/3/09**

	Budget £	P10 £	P10	Est to 31/3/08	Est to 31/3/09	Comment
<b><u>Sales</u></b>						
Sales		167.71		250		Assumes 2 more months
Recharges	2550	365.03		370		Assumes no more
		<u>532.74</u>		<u>620</u>		
<b><u>Cost of Sales</u></b>						
Purchases	2550	365.58		440		Assumes continues at same rate to y/e
Licences		42		60		Assumed 1 more @£21
		<u>407.58</u>		<u>500</u>		
Gross profit	0		<b>125.16</b>		<b>120</b>	
<b><u>Less Current Overheads</u></b>						
Wages		150.41		260		Assumes 3 more months
NI		9.97		20		
	<u>0</u>	<u>160.38</u>		<u>280</u>		
Operating Deficit	<b>0</b>		<b>-35.22</b>		<b>-160</b>	

## **Members Comments**

### **Councillor Legrys (Labour Group)**

'[The Labour Group] will support refreshments at working parties – although I expect the drinks to be limited to tea, coffee fruit juice etc.'

### **Councillor Meller (Leader BNP Group)**

'Happy with arrangements as they are' – Telephone call

### **Councillor Blain**

'My view is that tea and coffee should be provided in both members' rooms, and additionally soft drinks after full council.

I do not support free alcoholic beverages and would question whether or not we even need to offer them on a pay basis?'

### **Councillor A Bridges**

'I do think it would be nice to be able to have a coffee or cup of tea prior to the meetings. Sometimes people rush from work etc to get to the meetings a nice cup of tea would hit the spot!

Otherwise everything else is ok.'

### **Councillor Meynell**

'IMHO, I think withdrawing everything was wrong, although the principle was OK as it should not be seen that Councillors enjoy special privileges.

Members should be allowed to get tea or coffee or water for free; other drinks at cost (or near to it).'

### **Councillor A Smith**

'I would like to see refreshments provided in the members' room in the format as previously. This should be paid for by stopping an amount monthly from each council member's allowance - maybe on a scale so that Councillors who are at the council more often due to their duties pay slightly more.

As for after full council drinks, I think it would be a shame if this stopped as it is an opportunity to talk informally to officers and other members. The problem is the license is at present costing far too much. Could we not again ask for a contribution stopped at source from Councillors? They could then have the opportunity to opt out, as certain councillors never stay after full council.'





## REFRESHMENTS FOR MEMBERS WORKING PARTY MEETING

*Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 8 July 2009*

6.30 p.m. in Board Room

### Attendees

#### Councillors

F Fenning and P Purver (Chairman).

In attendance

A Bridges, J Legrys, I Meller, G Partner and A Smith

#### Officers

Alan Davies, Corporate Director and Keith Gordon, Senior Scrutiny Officer

**1. Apologies for Absence.**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor N Smith.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared.

**3. Refreshments for Members**

The Senior Scrutiny Officer outlined the current arrangements for refreshments for members. It was appropriate to review these arrangements one year after their introduction. He referred to members' written comments accompanying the agenda.

The Corporate Director informed the meeting that a revised trading account up to the year-end showed a deficit of just under £100.

In response to a member's question, the Corporate Director confirmed that caterers were subject to a competitive process before inclusion on a select list.

During general discussion members referred to;

- Although the amounts involved were very low it could be perceived that Councillors might be receiving inappropriate benefit
- A donation deducted from each member's allowance might cause administrative difficulties
- There could be adverse public perception to members receiving refreshments including alcohol, however it was paid for
- Disappointment that the member who had been concerned about the provision of refreshments for members originally was not present at this meeting to review the arrangements
- The value and opportunity to discuss matters informally with other members and officers after the council meeting They did not feel, however, that the supply of alcohol could be justified even when members continued to pay for it

Members agreed that while tea and coffee with fruit juice was suitable refreshment for meetings it was inappropriate for alcohol to continue to be provided even though it was paid for by members.

Members also agreed, outside the remit of this working party, to discuss with their respective political groups the provision of members' rooms and the use of accommodation effectively.

**It is recommended that;**

- a. Tea, coffee and fruit juice be provided without charge as refreshment following meetings of Council;**
- b. Tea and coffee be made available without charge at all times in Members' Rooms.**
- c. The Refreshments for Members Working Party be dissolved.**

The meeting closed at 7.00 p.m.