

 Finance and Audit Scrutiny Committee 8 October 2013		Agenda Item No. 6
Title	Investigation into Members' Travel Claims	
For further information about this report please contact	Richard Barr Tel: (01926) 456815 E Mail: richard.barr@warwickdc.gov.uk	
Service Area	Finance	
Wards of the District directly affected	Not applicable	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	Not applicable	
Background Papers	Internal Audit Reports	

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	No
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	No

Officer/Councillor Approval		
With regard to officer approval all reports <i>must</i> be approved by the report author's relevant director, Finance, Legal Services and the relevant Portfolio Holder(s).		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	Various	Chris Elliott
Head of Service	Various	Mike Snow
CMT		
Section 151 Officer	Various	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer		
Finance	Various	As S151 Officer
Portfolio Holder	25/26 Sept	Councillor Mobbs
Consultation Undertaken		
Jane Pollard, Governance Advisor for WCC Legal, and Meena Lekhi, Solicitor for WCC Legal, 26 September 2013		
Final Decision?	Yes	
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1 **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Report advises on the results of investigations into travel claims submitted by Members.

2 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the report be noted and its contents be accepted or, where appropriate, acted upon.

3 **REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To bring to Members' attention the results of investigations including what is being done to improve controls.

4 **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 There is no alternative other than to investigate any concerns of substance that are raised within the organisation.

5 **BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK**

- 5.1 Although there are no direct budgetary implications arising from this report, Internal Audit provides a view on all aspects of governance including that of the Budgetary Framework. An effective budgetary framework helps to ensure that the Authority manages its resources and achieves its objectives economically, efficiently and effectively.

6 **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

- 6.1 Although there are no direct policy implications, Internal Audit provides a view on all aspects of governance including the Council's policies.

7 **BACKGROUND**

- 7.1 Concerns were identified on 4 July 2013 in respect of a Member's travel claim. A new team member was being trained so that they could process travel claims. Upon review of the first claim to be processed, it was noticed that the distances recorded appeared to be excessive. It was also noticed that mileage was also being claimed in respect of meetings that the Councillor had not actually attended.
- 7.2 Following this, all available claims submitted by the Councillor were reviewed by staff in the Democratic Services Team to ascertain if this was a one-off occurrence or if previous travel claims had included similar erroneous claims. This revealed that previous claims were also incorrect.
- 7.3 Following consultations with the Deputy Chief Executive (AJ), the Democratic Services Manager (DSM) reported the matter to the police for investigation. (After several weeks the Police advised that the matter did not necessitate their continued involvement.)
- 7.4 On 18 July 2013 the Audit & Risk Manager (A&RM) was advised of the matter and asked to undertake a sample check of all Members' travel claims and to verify the control framework that enabled errors to go undetected.

- 7.5 Although the Democratic Services Team had examined all the claims submitted by the Councillor in question, Internal Audit verified these further in order to provide greater assurance on the results. The results of this are set out in Appendix 1.
- 7.6 The findings in relation to the wider checks of travel claims and an evaluation of the control framework are set out in Appendix 2.
- 7.7 Both reports were issued to management on the dates recorded on the reports.
- 7.8 Appendix 3 sets out the discussions that have taken place with Councillors to date and the actions that will be taken in each case. Any developments since the publication of the agenda will be reported at the Finance and Audit Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- 7.9 Officers have taken legal advice on the publication of Members' names within the reports because of potential implications of this being personal data. The advice received was that, technically speaking, this information is personal data as it is information which relates to 'identifiable' individuals. However, given the very public facing role of Councillors and the need for accountability and transparency in the spending of public money, the Councillors should have a reasonable expectation of this information being published (and disclosed pursuant to a request under the Freedom of Information Act) because there is a legitimate public interest in this information. Therefore, the advice was that this information can be published and the Councillors involved were advised of this, by email, on 27 September 2013.
- 7.10 The details of one Councillor have not been included at this stage because the Councillor is yet to be informed of the details of their specific case. However the name of this Councillor will be reported at the meeting.