

MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE AT CONFERENCES

**ITEM 7
OSPR061005**

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Background

1. The purpose of this report is for Members to consider the approved attendance list for national conferences and make preliminary recommendations with a view to taking forward a report to Council in due course.
2. The approved list for members' attendance at national conferences, attached at appendix 1, has not been updated since 2002. It includes conferences, such as the Chartered Institute of Housing which is no longer relevant and attendance of Members at the Town and Country Planning Summer School, which would better sit under Members' training.
3. In 2004-05, there was an underspend of £3,848.92 on the conferences budget.

Issues to consider

4. There are conferences, such as the Local Government Association annual conference, at which every Local Authority might be expected to attend. There are other conferences which may crop up from time to time, for example on nuclear or regeneration issues, at which Copeland's presence might be considered equally important.
5. A clear framework for attendance at conferences is highly desirable to prevent any suggestion of 'jollies'. Equally, conferences can be highly effective networking and learning opportunities, and a further opportunity to raise the profile of Copeland.
6. That, officially, the budget is for 'national conferences', when clearly there may be equally valid reasons for attendance at regional or local conferences.

Options to consider

7. That the list stays largely the same, with the Chartered Institute of Housing conference withdrawn and the Planning Summer School transferred to the training budget (with an equivalent transfer of funding).

8. That the list becomes largely non prescriptive, mentioning only the Local Government Association Annual Conference as a given. Should any Members wish to attend any other conference, they would need to bid for available funding against a set of criteria, which would measure the value of attendance. The Planning Summer School and equivalent funding would still be transferred to the training budget.

This would mean that around £1,300 would be spent on the LGA Annual Conference, leaving £3,700 against which bids could be received (assuming the transfer of £1,700 to the training budget). Members would need to consider under this option:

- a) the criteria against which to measure the value of attendance and
- b) who would make the ultimate decision to confirm attendance (perhaps a similar process as urgent items?).

9. The list is updated by canvassing Members as to which conferences they feel the need to attend at the start of each year and have that list approved annually by Council.

Decisions

10. Members are asked to consider their preferred option, before any further development work takes place.