

By: Alex King – Deputy Leader
Peter Sass, Head of Democratic Services

To: Selection and Member Services Committee – 13 July 2011

Subject: County cars

Summary: This report invites the Committee to consider and reaffirm its policy on the use of the County car fleet.

Background

(1) Kent County Council's policy on the use of the County car fleet was last considered by this Committee in July 2005 and it is now considered an appropriate opportunity to review the policy and its operation given the changes that have taken place since 2005.

(2) The protocol agreed in 2005 in relation to the use of the County cars was as follows:

- (i) Members wishing to use the cars whilst undertaking official duties may do so in accordance with the policy adopted by Selection Committee on 22 July 2005. This specifies that any requests from Members and the Chief Executive (now Managing Director) for use of a car to assist them in carrying out their official duties will be acceded to. When making such a request, the purpose of the journey must be specified and a record of this is retained.
- (ii) Optimum use of all the fleet vehicles will be made on a daily basis, using a number of sessional drivers, based on a common-sense assessment of the relative importance of each journey. This supersedes the previous policy dated April 2002, which was based on priority users.
- (iii) If no fleet car is available, Members are asked to use their own car or train/bus wherever possible. If a Member does not have his/her own car available or easy access to train/bus services, taxis may be used to travel to the nearest appropriate railway station or bus stop. Taxis should not be used for the entire journey if train or bus can be used for a significant part of it. Subject to these guidelines, the Committee and Member Services Unit can book taxis for Members, but Members are responsible for paying the fare direct to the driver. Reimbursement of car expenses, train, bus and taxi fares should be claimed in the normal way at the end of each month.
- (iv) Cars may be made available for high status VIP visitors when it appears to the Chief Executive (now Managing Director) that it would be in the interests of the County Council to do so. Costs will normally be re-charged to the appropriate Directorate.

(3) Kent County Council has operated cars for Members' and Chief Offices' use since the 1960s. The service is available for all 84 Members to use but is provided primarily for the civic duties of the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council and for the work of the Leader, Deputy Leader, Leader of the Opposition, Cabinet Members and the Managing Director. Over the years, the Council has used different methods of procurement for its vehicles, i.e. by both lease and direct purchase, and has sought to reduce the cost of the service down to the absolute minimum. Continuing effort needs to be applied to reduce costs wherever possible and to make best use of what is an invaluable and value-for-money service.

(4) The service is efficient and effective, given the size of the County Council's area; the ability for senior Members and Officers to undertake confidential work whilst travelling; and the value for money achieved when two or three individuals share a car to travel to and from the same meeting, as is often the case. The service is also available for any Member who may be temporarily incapacitated and cannot drive their own car, perhaps as a result of medical treatment.

(5) The council's existing fleet comprises three 6-year old Volvo S80s and a 14-year old Volvo Estate. The three S80s were originally leased to the Council over a four-year period but were purchased by the County Council at the end of the lease period in 2009 at a total cost of £20,620. The Volvo Estate is currently worth only a few hundred pounds. There are no plans to renew any of the fleet until 2015, despite the fact that the mileage on each of the four cars exceeds 100,000. The Council expects each of its cars to do a minimum of 250,000 miles before being replaced.

(6) The total cost of providing the County car service in 2010/11 was as follows:

Vehicle repairs and maintenance	£7,063
Fuel	£9,222
Congestion Charges	£833
Drivers' costs	£34,057
Administrative costs	£13,823
Total	£64,998

(7) It forms part of the duties of one of the council's employees to ensure that economic use is made of the vehicles on a daily basis, using a number of sessional drivers, who are only paid each time they drive one of the cars on an hourly basis.

(8) In addition to the car fleet, the Members' Allowances Scheme allows Members to travel by taxi, if the use of public transport or their own vehicle is impracticable. Using a taxi for certain types of journey can be cheaper than a County car for the same journey, which is why flexibility must be maintained when supporting the travel requirements of elected Members.

Changes since the 2005 Review

(9) As indicated above, the three vehicles previously leased to the County Council have now been purchased and there are no plans to replace them until 2015. The other main change since the 2005 review is that none of the main drivers is employed permanently by KCC and are paid an hourly rate only when on duty.

Usage

(10) Whilst the service is available for all Members and Chief Officers to use, the attached **schedule** shows that the primary users of the service tend to be the Chairman of the County Council, the Leader and Deputy Leader, Cabinet Members and Managing Director. Officers in Democratic Services currently record the time that each journey takes, including waiting time, as this is the basis on which the drivers are paid. Mileage for each journey is not currently recorded.

Recommendations

- (11) The Committee is invited to determine the following:
- (i) Agree that the principle of providing a car service as an efficient means of travel, given the demands on Members' and Chief Officers' time and the benefits of being able to work whilst travelling should continue and for members when incapacitated or who don't drive
 - (ii) The Head of Democratic Services be requested to submit a report to this Committee on an annual basis, showing the costs incurred by Members using the County car service and taxis;
 - (iii) The variable costs of the service are reduced by at least 10% by the end of March 2013.

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