
Subject:	REVIEW OF MEMBER CATERING PROVISION
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet – 15 January 2024
Report of:	Rebecca Brough, Head of Corporate Services and Democracy
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Kevin Mills, Leader of the Council
Decision Type:	Non-Key
Classification:	Unrestricted

Purpose of the report: To review the future provision for catering for Members at Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings following the withdrawal of the current service provider at the end of December 2023.

Recommendation: That Cabinet instructs officers as to the preferred option for catering provision.

1. **Summary**

The Cabinet is asked to review the future provision of catering for Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings following the end of the current external catering contract.

2. **Introduction and Background**

2.1 The Council has no statutory duty that requires a catering service to be provided for Council, Cabinet or Committee meetings. However, the Council has historically provided catering for Members attending evening meetings.

2.2 The current level of provision is as follows:

- Council - Light buffet
- Cabinet – At the request of the Leader no provision for catering is made for meetings of the Cabinet since the switch to 6.00pm starts. This is a continuation of the arrangement from when the Cabinet met at 11.00am.
- Committee meetings - sandwich, crisps/cake/fruit and juice
- Other meetings (Project Advisory Groups, Sub-Committees, etc.) – Ad-hoc as required

2.3 In order to reduce the level of food waste, Democratic Services currently caters for fewer Members than are on a given committee and has been reducing that number over recent years based on levels of consumption. Given that consumption varies between meetings of even the same committee, this has only reduced food waste, not eliminated it.

2.4 In consulting previous minutes there has been no formal rationale articulated for the provision of Member catering at Dover but it is assumed that the decision is likely to have been based around the duration of evening meetings.

2.5 For comparison, there is no catering provision made for council officers as they are expected to make their own arrangements. Furthermore, officers are only permitted to claim for subsistence payments where working “outside of the East Kent districts of Dover, Thanet, Canterbury and Folkestone and Hythe”.

Duration of Meetings

2.6 The length of meetings varies depending on the Committee concerned. In drafting this report the focus has been on the evening meetings – Cabinet, Council, Dover Joint Transportation Advisory Board, Electoral Matters Committee, Governance Committee, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Planning Committee. In looking at the meetings held in the calendar year 2023 the average meeting duration was as follows:

- Cabinet – 25 minutes
- Council – 1 hour, 35 minutes
- Dover Joint Transportation Advisory Board – 43 minutes
- Electoral Matters Committee – 7 minutes
- Governance Committee – 1 hour, 21 minutes
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 1 hour, 36 minutes
- Planning Committee – 2 hours, 57 minutes

2.7 In terms of the Project Advisory Group meetings, the Dover Beacon and Dover Town Regeneration Project Advisory Group had two meetings in 2023 with an average meeting duration of 1 hour 6 minutes. These meetings did not have catering provided.

2.8 During 2023 only five evening meetings lasted longer than three hours. Four were Planning Committee meetings. These were the meetings held in January, February, March and July 2023. The fifth was an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in September 2023 that had a duration of 3 hours, 2 minutes. Two of those meetings were longer than 4 hours, which were Planning Committee in January 2023 (4 hours, 24 minutes) and March 2023 (4 hours, 51 minutes).

3. **Identification of Options**

3.1 Option 1: To tender for and provide catering for Council and Committee meetings based on the existing level of provision.

3.2 Option 2: To tender for and provide only limited catering provision for selected meetings.

3.3 Option 3: To provide only tea/coffee/juice/biscuits for Council and Committee meetings.

3.4 Option 4: To provide no catering for Council and Committee meetings.

4. **Evaluation of Options**

4.1 Option 1: To tender for and provide catering for Council and Committee meetings based on the existing level of provision.

4.2 The previous offer was based on approximately £5.00 per head (sandwich, crisps/cake/fruit and juice) for committee meetings and approximately £8.00 per head for a Council buffet, although as mentioned earlier in the report, the catering provision was based on fewer Members than served on a given committee in most cases. In preparation for this report some soft market testing was conducted with the Council operated Kearsney Abbey Cafe. It should be noted that this is not a like-for-like comparison as the provision is based on a different offer than the previous contract but it is expected that there would be a small but not insignificant increase (approximately £1 to £2 per head) if it were to be assumed typical of the broader market rate. While this would need to be tendered for a definitive cost, it is estimated that it should be sustainable within the overall budget allocation.

4.3 As part of any tender, the Council would ensure that a wide variety of dietary needs could be met such as, but not limited to, vegetarian, halal and kosher options.

4.4 Option 2: To tender for and provide only limited catering provision for selected meetings. If this option were to be chosen, it is suggested that catering be provided for

Full Council meetings and individual meetings of committees where Democratic Services would envisage a duration of 3 hours or more based on agenda size and anticipated length of debate.

4.5 Option 3: To provide only tea/coffee/juice/biscuits for Council and Committee meetings. This would be a self-service option with facilities made available in the Members' kitchen area. It would be a resource effective alternative to no provision and would result in the smallest levels of food waste.

4.6 Option 4: To provide no catering for Council and Committee meetings. If this option is chosen, it would be the intention to reserve a small budget for provision of catering for all-day meetings such as Licensing Sub-Committees or Regulatory Committee where the Council would want to ensure that Members could remain isolated from other parties at the hearing during the lunch break.

5. **Resource Implications**

5.1 The Council currently has a budget provision of £4,000 for Member catering, the majority of which is for catering at Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings. The remainder is used to provide tea and coffee for the Members' kitchen and for the Leader's office.

5.2 There would be a small budget saving involved with any option other than Option 1. While it would require a formal tender to be sure, soft market testing suggests that Option 1 could be funded from within the existing budget provision.

6. **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

6.1 Whichever option is chosen, the overall climate change and environmental implications will be minimal, particularly when considered in the context of the Council's wider carbon footprint. Additionally, depending on which option is selected, efforts will continue to be made to minimise food waste.

6.2 However, it should be recognised that food production, consumption and disposal all have a significant climate footprint when considered nationally, the majority of which is generated on the journey from farm to consumption. Food waste in the UK is responsible for 18 million tonnes of CO². Additionally, food waste releases methane, a potent greenhouse gas, as it decomposes.

7. **Corporate Implications**

7.1 Comment from the Director of Finance (linked to the MTFP): Accountancy has been consulted on the report and have no further comments to add. (SK)

7.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make.

7.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: This report regarding the review of the Member catering provision does not specifically highlight any equality implications, however in discharging their duties members are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>

8. **Appendices**

None.

9. **Background Papers**

Cabinet Minutes.

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