

**THE EXECUTIVE**

**24 JANUARY 2006**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE**

<b>FEEDBACK FROM THE INSTITUTE OF REVENUES RATING AND VALUATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2005</b>	<b>FOR INFORMATION</b>
<p><b>This report informs the Executive of the attendance of two officers from Revenue Services at the above conference and of the benefits to the Council of their attendance.</b></p> <p><b><u>Summary</u></b> The Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation (IRRV) is the professional body for revenue &amp; benefits practitioners and holds an annual conference each year. The Executive previously approved the attendance of two officers from Revenue Services and this report is submitted as requested outlining the benefits to the Council.</p> <p>The event was attended by the Head of Revenue Services and the Council Tax Manager. It consisted of a wide range of lectures on topical issues, workshop sessions, specialist lectures, as well as exhibitions and demonstrations from commercial organisations supplying goods and services to the Revenues arena.</p> <p><b>Wards Affected:</b> None.</p>	
<p><b>Implications:</b></p> <p><b>Financial:</b> The total cost of this proposal is estimated to be £1,441 which was met from the existing budget of Revenue Services.</p> <p><b>Legal:</b> There are no legal implications. However, attendance at the conference enabled officers to update themselves on any recent or proposed changes to the statutory framework in respect of Revenues &amp; Benefits administration.</p> <p><b>Risk Management:</b></p> <p>There are no key Risk management issues, other than to ensure service continuity and management cover whilst attendees were at the conference. It should be noted that attendance at the conference is a mitigating control measure to address the risk of the Authority's non compliance with statutory or good practice requirements in Revenues &amp; Benefits administration.</p> <p><b>Social Inclusion and Diversity:</b> As this report does not concern a new or revised policy there are no specific adverse impacts insofar as this report is concerned. The conference did highlight some areas of good practice on how authorities have addressed social inclusion</p>	

and diversity issues within a revenues and benefits context.

**Crime and Disorder:**

There are no specific implications insofar as this report is concerned.

**Recommendation(s)**

The Executive is asked to note the report.

**Reason(s)**

In accordance with agreed procedures governing the attendance of officers at conferences with a total cost in excess of £1,000, a feedback report to the Executive is required.

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## 1.0 The Role of the Institute and the Conference

- 1.1 The Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation is the only specialist professional organisation for officers engaged in Revenue Collection or Benefits Administration. The Institute is held in high regard in Local Government Finance circles and provides both technical and professional qualifications for officers. Both attendees at the conference are fully qualified corporate members of the Institute.
- 1.2 The institute holds a number of specialist conferences throughout the year on such issues as collection enforcement, benefits administration and fraud prevention. However, the main annual conference, with an emphasis on both strategic and operational issues across all Revenues and Benefits service areas, is recognised as being an important forum for senior managers in Revenue Services.
- 1.3 The event was attended by the Head of Revenue Services and the Council Tax Manager. It consisted of a wide range of lectures on topical issues, workshop sessions, specialist lectures, as well as exhibitions and demonstrations from commercial organisations supplying goods and services to the Revenues arena.
- 1.4 Attendance contributes to the continued professional development of officers and ensures that the Council is well informed of current and future trends in this service area. Attendance also helps to raise the profile of the Authority and effective contributions to the events were made by both attendees. The Head of Revenues was also one of the speakers this year.

- 1.5 Information was also available from exhibitions by various central government representatives, such as the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Department for Works and Pensions. There was also an Awards village where authorities that had been short-listed for the performance Awards displayed their successful entries as part of the IRRV's commitment to the dissemination of good practice.

## **2.0 Lecture and Workshop Sessions**

- 2.1 Some of the most influential names in the public sector spoke at the Conference this year including: -

- Baroness Andrews, Lords Minister for Housing and Planning opening with a keynote address to conference delegates.
- Polly Toynbee, Political and Social Commentator at The Guardian addressed the conference delegates on Poverty - The Challenge of the 21st Century.
- James Plaskitt, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Work & Pensions delivered a speech on Welfare and Reform.
- Terence Sandiford - Head of Public Sector Sales, Experian spoke on the importance of taking Revenue Assurance to the Top of the Office.
- Stephen Hughes, Acting Chief Executive, Birmingham City Council who spoke on the challenges presented by Gershon.
- Roger Black, MBE, former Olympian and now motivational speaker looked at Striving for Excellence and Maximising your Potential. Transcripts of speaker presentations are available on the IRRVs annual conference site.

- 2.2 Other subjects covered at the conference seminars & workshops included the following:

- Developing effective public/private partnerships
- Lessons learnt from first year of Freedom of Information Act
- Options for Land Tax
- IRRV response to Lyons Enquiry
- Funding changes in fraud and benefits
- Keeping track of your customers
- CPA –Getting your improvement planning right

- 2.2 Other key note speakers included:

- Sally Hammond – Head of Local Government Improvement, Audit Commission
- John Blundell- Director Service Transformation Team, The Cabinet Office

- Carol Cutler- Director of Business Services, Harrow LBC
- Graham Smith- Deputy Commissioner, Freedom of Information
- Dave Wetzel- Vice Chair, Transport for London
- Gary Watson- Chair of Local Taxation & Revenues Faculty Board IRRV

### **3.0 Exhibitions and demonstrations**

3.1 Examples of the exhibitions and demonstrations throughout the conference include:

- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
- Department for Works and Pensions
- Benefit Fraud Inspectorate
- Valuation Office Agency
- Software suppliers
- Bailiffs and enforcement agencies
- Consultancy companies
- Specialist staffing agencies
- Mailing services

### **4.0 Best Practice and Performance Awards**

4.1 The Conference also features a series of performance awards made to local authorities & other organisations that have achieved excellence in Revenue, Benefits & Valuation activities. This event helps highlight best practice and facilitates the dissemination of good practice to other authorities.

4.2 There was a performance award village this year, especially provided for the final nominees of the 9 award categories. This enabled them to show case their submissions and share their experiences with other delegates.

4.3 The 9 categories & the eventual winners are as follows:

- Revenues Team of the Year – North Warwickshire BC
- Benefits Team of the Year – London Borough of Harrow
- Anti-Fraud Team of the Year – Blackpool BC
- Valuation Team of the Year –Valuation Office Agency
- Best Use Of Technology - Suma
- Excellence in Customer Care – Liverpool CC
- Excellence in Debt Management – South Lanarkshire Council
- Excellence in Education, Training & Development – London Borough of Croydon

- Excellence in Social Inclusion – London Borough of Southwark

## **5.0 Benefits to the Council**

The benefits of officer attendance at the conference include the following;

- 5.1 Attendance at such events gives officers the opportunity to find out about new initiatives that have worked well in other Authorities. This stimulates ideas of how this can be adopted back in the work place and in our case, will also help towards the modernisation programme within Revenue Services.
- 5.2 Ensures that officers maintain their professional development and are abreast of developments in their field is an important aspect of providing a professional and modern service to Members and the public. In addition officers from the authority strive to make a positive contribution to the conference, for example by asking questions at lectures and delivering lectures which helps to promote a positive image of the authority in the Revenues arena.
- 5.3 Presents an Opportunity to talk to software suppliers and service providers in a non-pressurised environment that allows officers to find out latest developments in information technology and its application to Revenues operations.
- 5.4 The learning gained from attendance is cascaded through the Revenues Division through management and team meetings.

## **6.0 Highlights from some of the seminars were:**

- 6.1 E-government
  - John Blundell spoke about Central government's vision for the future of e-government. He encouraged Local Authorities to continue with the agenda by exploring more innovative ideas. It's more than just providing electronic access but more to do with the way this is linked up throughout the Council, so that it meets the customer's needs. The emphasis has shifted to using all the opportunities that new technology presents before us to foster joined up working, in order to meet the citizens' needs. Hence the re-branding of e-government to t-government (transitional government).

## 6.2 Gershon

- Stephen Hughes spoke about how Local Authorities can deliver Gershon efficiency savings. The key issues were, taking care when dealing with the people management matters and ensuring that the focus goes beyond implementation of service delivery, to building savings into the service planning aspect.

## 6.3 Business Processes

- John Maquire from Capita presented a seminar on delivering efficiency by changing your business processes. He mentioned examples of where business process re-engineering had realised efficiency savings that enabled organisations to re-allocate staff. i.e. the Warwickshire Authorities. His advice was that after re-engineering the processes a re-alignment of the officers jobs must take place and the processes selected must be viable. E.g processes that are used frequently.

## 6.4 Lyon's Enquiry

- Gary Watson's response to the Lyon's enquiry on behalf of the IRRV. Gary challenged the ODPM to commit to a robust consultation of all the Local Authorities, so that the final outcome would have taken the practitioners views into account. Gary passionately stressed that the debate should take place now and with this he encouraged the delegates to feed into the ongoing dialogue between central government and local government.

## 6.5 Career Conference

- This session was delivered by a group of people that had attained the IRRV qualification and were now successful in their careers as a result. Among them was our own Head of Revenue Services; Bola Odunsi. Bola vibrantly gave an account of his career progression which also put Barking & Dagenham on the map as an organisation that clearly values and recognises the skills that the IRRV qualification enhances. Helen Robertson from Fujitsu who is currently working with Barking & Dagenham on the business process re-engineering programme within Revenue Services also addressed the group.

## 6.6 Roger Black MBE

- Roger was the motivational speaker for the week and he had a large crowd completely captivated for 45 minutes while he took them through the momentous experiences of his successful career as an athlete.

## 7.0 Cost to the Council

7.1 The full cost to the Council is as follows:

Item	Cost £
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Delegate fee (for one officer)	£670
Accommodation (for two officers)	£665
Travel (for one officer)	£106
Total	£1441

**Background Papers**

- IRRV Annual Conference 2005 Programme & Promotional Brochure
- Executive Report (Attendance at the Institute of Revenues, Ratings & Valuation Annual Conference 2005) Minute 109, September 2005

**Persons consulted**

- Abi Oyelese - Council Tax Manager