

Overview & Scrutiny Task Group

Meeting Notes



Review topic	Date of Meeting
Civic Matrix	05 March 2024

Attendance	Venue
Members: D. Robertson (Chair) C. Ball J. Checkland J. Smith K. Vernon S. Woodward Apologies Officers: Will Stevenson (Principal Governance Officer) Witnesses: Lesley Bennett (Civic & Executive Officer)	Seward Room

Areas Discussed

The Chair of the Task Group, Councillor Dave Robertson welcomed everyone to the meeting. He explained that the task group was tasked with examining the administration of the civic function and the effectiveness of the current matrix. The views and recommendations of the task group would subsequently be reported to O&S for further discussion.

Lesley Bennett (Civic & Executive Officer) gave her thoughts on the effectiveness of the current civic matrix.

Members unanimously agreed that a points-based system for determining events would be preferable rather than the existing matrix. Members hoped this would produce a "common sense approach". Members suggested that the most appropriate Civic Head should attend functions and the Chair should ask themselves if they are the most appropriate civic head when considering event invitations.

Members discussed reducing the number of criteria from the current 10 that invitations were determined against. A few criteria from the matrix were recommended to be merged due to overlap with each other, whilst others were removed as they were deemed superfluous or no longer appropriate.

Members approved of accepting invites that were regarded as supporting the strategic plan.

Members recommended directing any unsuccessful event invitations to parish Chairs/Clerks or district councillors who may wish to attend by their own volition as alternative attendees.

The task group stated that if an event invite does not meet the necessary threshold of points for an invitation to be accepted with Lichfield District Council (LDC) support, event organisers would still be welcome to invite the Chair to their event. This subsequent invitation would be without the financial/resource support of LDC and the Chair would be attending through their own means.

Members agreed on allocating points as follows: 1 point for low priority criteria, 3 points for medium priority criteria, 5 points for high priority criteria.

Members recommended setting the threshold for acceptance of event invitations at 5 points. Members also recommended that if an event scores 4 points, this will be decided at the discretion of the Chair and the Civic Officer – the Chair should then have to record their justification as to why they believe the event that scored 4 to be an acceptable event to attend. An index of these justifications should be kept. Members were content that there was no score where determination of events required input from the Leader or Chief Executive.

Members were content to leave it to the discretion of the Chair, whether to wear the Chains when attending an event of their own volition that scored less than 4 points, subject to any insurance implications.

Members discussed whether the use of the car was appropriate for an event attended by the Chair. It was agreed that an event scoring 4 or above, where the Chair's attendance was supported by LDC, would mean use of the car would be appropriate. An event scoring 3 or lower, where the Chair chooses to attend under their own justification and volition, would not be supported by LDC resources and use of the car not approved.

Members agreed that it was appropriate to amalgamate the Chair and Vice-Chair's budgets.

Members concluded it was appropriate to have a budget for clothing, though they believed that there should be a maximum appropriate level set. A limit of £200 was suggested. This limit should be the same for all Chairs regardless of gender.

Members agreed a list of select invitations that would qualify for automatic presumption of attendance regardless of the scoring grid including:

- Royal Visits
- Remembrance Services (if not double booked at multiple parishes)
- Monarch's Award for Voluntary Service
- If the Leader or Chief Executive deem this to be an event of key value

Outcomes

- Members unanimously agreed that a points-based system for determining events was preferable to the existing matrix.
- Members suggested that the most appropriate Civic Head should attend functions.

- The number of criteria to determine invitations were reduced. Some of these were recommended to be merged due to overlap with each other.
- Members agreed on the following points system: 1=Low priority; 3=Medium priority; 5=High priority.
- Members set the threshold for acceptance of invitations at 5 points.
- Members recommended that if an event scores 4 points, this will be decided at the discretion of the Chair and the Civic Officer – the Chair should then record their justification as to why they believe the event that scored 4 to be an acceptable event to attend.
- Members were content that there was no score where determination of events required input from the Leader or Chief Executive.
- Members agreed use of the car was appropriate for an event scoring 4 or higher, but should not be permitted for an event scoring 3 or lower.
- Members agreed that it was appropriate to amalgamate the Chair and Vice-Chair's budgets.
- Members concluded it was appropriate to have a budget for clothing, though they believed that there should be a maximum appropriate level set.

Further Work Required/Next Steps:

- The agreed scoring grid be reported to Overview & Scrutiny, along with the notes of this meeting and written submissions received from previous Chairs of LDC.

Scoring Grid Agreed by Civic Matrix Task Group 05/03/2024

Event Criteria & Descriptions	Matrix Score	Applicable - Yes/No
Event can promote council initiatives, business opportunities, tourism or Strategic Plan	High - 5	
Event is within LDC boundary	Med - 3	
Event is organised by a registered charity includes a charity appeal or fundraising event	Med - 3	
Civic Circuit – visiting other civic heads once per year, as long as events are within Staffordshire County Council or any district or borough in Staffordshire county or any parish within Lichfield District.	Low - 1	
<p align="center">Total Event Score:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 or above = Attendance of Chair supported by LDC • 4 = Acceptance at discretion of Chair & Civic Officer with written justification by the Chair recorded. • 3 or below = Attendance of Chair not supported by LDC 		

Automatic Presumption of Attendance (if invited)

- Royal Visits
- Remembrance Services (if not double booked at multiple parishes)
- Monarch’s Award for Voluntary Service
- If the Leader or Chief Executive deem this to be an event of key value

Caveats and guidance

- The most appropriate Civic Head should attend functions
- Ideally, visits should attempt to be evenly distributed across the District

Submissions from Previous Chairs Of LDC, Submitted to The Task Group Before Their Meeting:

From Councillor David Salter (Chair 2016-2027)

Dear Chair and Members of the MATRIX Task Group.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my comments in respect of your discussions.

The MATRIX was introduced during my term of office as Chair of Council and it had a severe impact on what events the Chair and/or Vice Chair could attend.

I would agree that some of the more obscure events which previous Chairs had attended were both costly and without any significant public interest or value, thereby unnecessary and unjustifiable.

However, the calculations used meant that, amongst many others, no event at, or organised by, Staffordshire County Council could be attended, nor could any 'fund-raising' events at other Councils be supported.

This caused a great deal of bemusement and even ridicule towards LDC...when actually able to attend an event, I was regularly questioned by other Chairs, Mayors and Civics (commonly referred to as 'The Chain Gang') as to why I hadn't been at events the previous week or so?

I could only reply that "I wasn't allowed to go".

It was not just those Civics who were disappointed, the event organisers and beneficiaries, along with all the other attendees were also frustrated, confused and saddened.

Not only was it embarrassing that, what is considered to be, the 'First Citizen of Lichfield' was being constrained as to what they could and couldn't attend, but it also had an adverse impact when it came to inviting those same 'shunned' Civics, companies and organisations to District Council events.

I was the first Chair of LDC who had to cancel his own Chairman's Dinner due to lack of support from other Councils and businesses.

I am pleased to see that, despite our own past Chairs' not being on the task group, there are two members who have held a Civic post elsewhere within the past few years and can hopefully relate instances of when they attended event which LDC's Chair could not, and possibly re-count how that absence was received and perhaps even derided.

It got to a point during my term that the then Chair of County Council, who was also a District Member, and could see the damage it was causing, would send me a direct, personal invitation to their events and demanded that I wear the Chain of office to ensure LDC was represented.

The Chairman's role is to chair the meetings but they are also the non-political ambassador for the Council and should be permitted to carry out that duty as unfettered as possible.

The British public revel in pomp and pageantry, they love to see a chain procession and shake hands and chat to 'someone special' or considered to be 'important'.

To restrict activities and the opportunity for direct engagement with the public is damaging to Lichfield District Council.

I believe that there has been some slight relaxation in respect of attendance qualification, but I urge this task group to allow the incumbent Chair, along with the Civic officer, to use common sense rather than a fixed MATRIX or even a 'points system' when it comes to deciding whether an event is worth attending and importantly what the ramifications might be if they don't.

Kind regards.
David.

Councillor Salter (continued)...

In respect of use of the car, I cannot think of an occasion when its use would not be appropriate. Not only does the provision of transport allow for the Chair to relax and enjoy the hospitality generally proffered, it permits door-to door secure and safe arrival at a venue which may not have on-site or even near-by parking and importantly, the attending driver also acts as additional security for the person and the regalia.

It could be argued that a taxi could be used but it would be just as expensive and would not have the benefit of the attended security.

The other point that you will be discussing is the Civic Expenses Budget.

If I may comment on that; I would say that I felt the amount available to me for personal claims was more than I really needed, I have to confess that I did claim the purchase of a suit for me and a dress for Pam although for most of the events I attended I wore attire from my existing wardrobe or bought my own as I felt it was to my eventual benefit.

That said, it must be considered that some future Chairs may need more support than others and therefore the availability of a reasonable fund must remain though its use should not be compulsory. In respect of your point 3.10. In my own circumstance, during my term as Vice Chair, I attended almost every event for at least the last 6 months prior to my succession because the then Chair, Norma Bacon, and her husband, both suffered from ill health and so were unable to represent the Council.

It can and does happen, so the facility of a suitable amalgamated, or at least adaptable budget should be available.

When I was Chair it was rare for meals and other refreshments at events to be charged to the Council, hospitality and entertainment was generally included as part of the invitation itself. However, it is possible that that has changed, I don't know, but certainly any 'ticket prices' should be covered as should any 'out of pocket' expenses which could be considered obligatory, such as church service donations which could have a fixed figure of say £5 or £10.

Raffles, auctions etc. are optional participation at events and in my opinion should not be refunded especially as any prize or purchase would be to the Chair's advantage.

Sponsorship and donations to charities is a very difficult thing to put a value on and also to determine the extent to which it falls to funding from the public purse.

My suggestion would be a fixed maximum annual fund of say £300 (matching our Member's community grant amount) or perhaps up to £500 because of the nature and number of calls on the fund. Amounts for each individual occasion would be a matter for discussion between the Chair and the Civic officer prior to the event.

I hope that helps.

Regards.
David.

From Councillor Derick Cross (Chair May 2023 - December 2023)

I agree with and support everything Cllr. Dave Salter has said.

I am amazed that the panel chosen to debate this very important role to make recommendations have never undertaken the role and responsibility so therefore know nothing about how it truly functions and why and its difficulties.

You should not be looking to cut back on anything. it needs improving merely to bring up to the standards of our neighbouring Councils Civic role.

The Council had Independent advice some four years ago as mentioned by Kerry Dove in her Civic Review dated 14th September, just follow her recommendations and the professional advice we had four years ago and our Civic service will be just fine, its far from being so at present its a joke, and I found it embarrassing when with other Councils Civic Leaders.

Kind regards

Derick

From Councillor Joe Powell (Chair 2009-2010 & 2019-2021)

Dear all,

I hope you will accept the following as information and comment from which you can find an insight that no other member has experience of.

As the **only serving LDC member who was chairman under both the old system and then served again under the new** I think I have sound enough reasons to submit the following.

Firstly, under the **previous non matrix** system, there was much more involvement by the chair in matters all over the district and county.

Such as **attending with the then CEO** events at Stafford University to promote Lichfield as a place to come, indeed if we had not attended one particular session together the University departments we have in Lichfield, would have been opened in Tamworth.

Attendance at the the National Memorial at Alrewas, was almost every week as the memorial is in our District, not the City, and as a result of this attendance we were able to uprate the Lichfield District Memorial Garden, to some thing that is rather special, and how many councillors even know it is there now, our attendance is now so sparse.

It also involved many occasions of "providing support" to various groups, associations, etc

An example being , in the form of **donations** and **visits** to Cllr Kathy Coe, when she was running the abused ladies centre.

There was so much more to it than just being part of the chain gang.

Then for my second session under the matrix. I can agree that the restrictions on the charities and matters such as the Mayor of Wolverhampton's social day, etc made sense when the matrix first arrived.

However I believe now with so many charities such as **Food Banks, abused people, victims of conflict** that visits that give attention and support should be made.

Visits to **local industry and educational sites, communities, etc in the whole district**, , actually are needed and these areas encourage the show of support that the chair visiting gives.

The visiting to other Boroughs , Districts and County restrictions were to start pretty draconian and possibly did more harm to the district as a whole, than they did in any savings or "tidy up" of the Chair position, these visits are all part of promoting Lichfield to a wider audience and this can and does have very positive results in how we interact with these groups such as attracting employment, growth, joint council activities.

Visiting the Lord Lieutenant, or the County High Sheriff are not "Jollies" they are a chance to meet with charity workers, business people, educationalists, services, etc. **Allowing Lichfield** to be brought to the attention of a wider audience

We should be proud of being part of Lichfield District and should be promoting the district to as wide an audience as possible.

It is the Chair who is the figurehead and along with the CEO and leaders of the political groups on the council and councillors we should be showing our positive support for Lichfield District

I thank you for reading this and hope it has given a wider view to consider.

Best regards

Cllr Joe Powell

From Councillor Ann Hughes (Chair December 2023 – Present)

Dear Will,

Some thoughts on this, with the proviso that I have spent more of the last year as Mayor of Lichfield City than I have as Chair of the District. I understand that the broad value of the civic function is not to be discussed and that the focus is on technical aspects of the matrix and allowances. It is perhaps worth saying that the civic function in LDC is clearly attenuated compared to neighboring authorities (Cannock, South Staffordshire, East Staffordshire, Staffordshire Moorlands, Stafford Borough, and Tamworth). All these hold at least one charity event and some sort of Christmas celebration.

The matrix is outdated, and I am not sure of the value of any complicated process of assessment. Could there not be an assumption of acceptance (allowing for time constraints) of invitations to events organised by charities and community organisations, schools and colleges within the district, and for openings and other special occasions involving local businesses. Transport costs are the only expenses associated with these events and organisers are always appreciative of the council's involvement. There would be an expectation that the Chair is engaged with activities across the District.

The Council should be more prescriptive about functions outside the District. I presume that we would want representation at awards ceremonies where District residents were recognised (BEM ceremonies at Stafford, eg) and at acts of remembrance (eg at the Cannock Chase military cemeteries). The charity events organised by other authorities are more difficult. The current situation where the Chair of LDC is invited to nominate a Charity but given no means or support to raise money is invidious. Money is usually raised through reciprocal purchase of tickets by neighbouring civics. It may be that LDC should just drop the charity aspect, or, perhaps, support the Chair in organising one event that representatives of other authorities would come to. There are some benefits in maintaining personal relationships with SCC and other authorities (a list of authorities and a number of events could be defined).

Under agenda item 4 I naively wonder if common sense could apply? I did ask the leader and the chief executive for advice on invitations when I was elected; only one of them replied and told me to use my own judgement. Surely the Chair and civic officer could be relied on to check where invitations were not obviously appropriate (or not)?

For item 5 the car is undoubtedly a benefit for evening events distant from the Chair's residence, and where parking is difficult. There may indeed be equality issues here for older or less mobile Chairs. Limits where the events are near home or near the Frog Lane parking might be imposed.

On item 6 I think there are again equality issues. We would not want colleagues to be excluded from a civic role by anxiety over incidental expenses (such as donations at religious services). I was extremely surprised that clothing was a suggested expense, however; we could be pioneers in being relaxed about elaborate dress codes and hope we all have the resources to appear appropriately in public. Indeed I think the main costs are transport. Most events give you a cup of tea and a biscuit at least and claims for food and drink should rarely be necessary. Yes there should be a joint allowance for Chair and Vice Chair. My own view is that it is easier and pleasanter to perform some aspects of the role if you can bring a guest, but I would remove any reference to a consort from all civic guidelines and would not expect there to be any costs additional to the price of the tickets.

All good wishes,

Ann