

International Travel Policy and Procedures for Members

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Bristol City Council Members and Officers may travel internationally as part of civic visits, projects, conferences or business meetings that support delivery of our International Strategy and priorities in the Corporate Strategy (aligned to Mayoral priorities), in terms of attracting funding and investment, joint research and best practice exchange. This document provides guidance to Members undertaking international travel on Bristol City Council business. It is complementary to a similar policy for Officers. It aims to ensure that:

- All travel is in line with the Corporate Strategy and International Strategy
- There is consistent and focused international engagement across Bristol City Council and with our city partners
- Best value for money is obtained and that the benefits are maximised through following clear processes for approval and sharing outcomes after the visit has been undertaken
- Limited resources, (including time as well as money) are managed effectively
- We are open and transparent about our travel
- We improve corporate knowledge about our international connections.
- Clear guidance is offered to Officers and Members pre, during and post international travel.

1.2 This guidance complements Bristol City Council's Expenses, Benefits and Travel Policy and the Allowances and Expenses Scheme for Members.

COVID19 UPDATE: In the context of the global pandemic many countries, including the UK are urging against all but essential travel. Therefore please consider whether your travel is necessary and ensure that you have completed the risk assessment form as part of any travel approval and spoken to the insurance team as your trip may not be covered. See more at 3.1 and 3.10.

QUERIES: please contact the International Service on international@bristol.gov.uk

2 INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL APPROVAL

2.1 An International Travel Approval Form must be completed and approved prior to travelling. This sets out the reason for the visit and the value to the City aligned with priorities in the Corporate Strategy and the International Strategy.

The international team should be consulted to provide feedback on existing relationships, issues to flag and their comments included on the form. The form will also need to state the details and costs of travel and accommodation as it will be used by ABS to make your travel and accommodation bookings once approved, and/or for ABS to record the information for FOI purposes where travel is booked directly. ABS will need at least 4 weeks' notice to book international travel.

All work related international travel requires approval even if part of or the entire trip is being externally funded and/or managed. A relevant cost centre should be identified in the Travel Approval Form (generally that of the relevant council service). If there is a significant cost increase (above 30%

unless otherwise agreed) between travel approval and booking, then the budget holder and Director will need to reapprove.

Travel for projects: Note that when a project is approved at CLB and/or Cabinet this will include approval for the specific trips which are stated as part of the project contract. However, during the project when travel is booked for specific trips a further check and approval is needed to ensure it is in line with the Council's travel policy and project contract. See below for appropriate approval.

2.2 Officer approval

A complementary policy exists and the process for Officers is explained there, but please be aware that Directors are requested to discuss Officer travel with their relevant cabinet member.

2.3 Member approval

The Monitoring Officer and/or Legal Team will provide advice to Members in relation to the principles set out in the travel policy and the International Team will provide advice on international relations. In terms of approval:

Mayor: The Monitoring Officer (or appointed Deputy) will need to approve the Mayor's travel where it is funded by the Council.

Cabinet Members: The Mayor will approve international travel requests for Cabinet Members and Councillors representing Cabinet portfolios. Where travel is funded by the Council they will need approval from the Monitoring Officer.

Lord Mayor: The Head of Paid Service and the Monitoring Officer will approve international travel of the Lord Mayor for their civic duties, funded by the Council or externally, and the Mayor kept appraised for strategic overview.

Non – Cabinet Members/Councillors: International travel funded by the Council or externally requires the approval of the Head of Paid Service and Monitoring Officer.

3. PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

3.1 Risk Assessment

An individual travel risk assessment must also be completed and submitted with the approval form.

An example Bristol City Council international travel risk assessment is available at:

<http://intranet.bcc.lan/ccm/content/articles/transformation/shared-transactional-services/hr/expenses-travel/international-travel.en> or contact international@bristol.gov.uk

The risk level should be based on the International and Commonwealth Office travel advice <https://www.gov.uk/international-travel-advice> as well as the traveller's personal circumstances.

3.2 Visas

It is the traveller's responsibility to ensure that they have the right visa and documentation to travel on Bristol City Council business. It is important to check the latest requirements and processes as

these frequently change. Advice can be provided by the International team or through visa service organisations, such as:

- CIBT (cibtvisas.co.uk)
- TrailFinders (<http://www.trailfinders.com/visas>)

The costs of a visa should be included in your International Travel Approval Form.

3.3 Travel

Challenging goals have been set for both the council and the city to be carbon neutral by 2030¹. Bristol City Council is already recognised as an environmental leader. To show leadership in this context means achieving our goals in an integrated way so that delivering one piece of work enhances and does not undermine our climate goals. We can do this by using alternatives to travel and making good choices about how we travel.

Alternatives to travel should be considered first. Greater availability and widespread use of high-quality live streaming and video and teleconferencing options have made avoiding travel much more viable. These solutions avoid the financial, carbon, and time costs of travel and accommodation. Where travel is necessary, travel by rail or coach is recommended wherever it is possible. Air travel is associated with substantial carbon emissions and should be avoided where the journey time by rail is:

- Less than six hours or
- Less than the total door-to-door journey time of flying (journeys to central Europe can be quicker by train, where airports can be significant distances from the starting point and destination).

If air travel is needed, economy flights must be used unless paragraph 3.5 applies. An additional day/travel time may be required to ensure there is adequate rest before business meetings.

If Members personally wish to upgrade they can do this at their own personal cost through contacting the relevant airline after the initial booking and paying for the upgrade with their own bank details.

If the use of public transport or Council credit cards results in the receipt of promotional offers, e.g. Air Miles, these are the property of the Council and must not be used for private purposes.

3.4 Accommodation

Hotel accommodation must reflect value for money taking in to consideration the city you are staying in, health and safety and consideration of other reasons for your choice of hotel (such as it being the specified hotel for a conference). Evidence is required to support your choice (3 quotes given at time of approval or of exceptional circumstances.)

3.5 External funding

If travel and hotel accommodation is externally funded then the conditions of the funding need to be adhered to or permission sought from the funder to cover any exceptional circumstances including business class travel.

¹ This includes work through the [Climate Emergency Action Plan](#) and [One City Climate Strategy](#) which is currently ongoing
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3.6 ABS Booking Service

Travel and accommodation for international travel should be booked through ABS, unless a separate arrangement exists with a service team due to volume of travel requests and manager holds a corporate credit card (in this instance, the travel must still be logged with ABS for recording purposes – see item 4 for guidance). Requests should be sent to ABS as soon as approval is given in order to minimise the risk of prices increasing.

Requests should be sent to ABSfinanceservices@bristol.gov.uk stating 'International travel booking request' in the title at least 4 weeks before the date of travel and copy in International@bristol.gov.uk and insurance@bristol.gov.uk

Please ensure you complete all required details to book travel on the booking form, otherwise your request and specific requirements cannot be guaranteed.

3.7 Expenses, Benefits and International Currency

When travelling, Members are entitled to claim expenses and benefits as described in the Expenses, Benefits and Travel Policy.

Specific EU-funded projects may set maximum thresholds for claims and/or other advice on expenses – contact the project manager for advice.

If claiming back expenditure in Euros, advice on the exchange rate used should be sought from the Cash Office and detailed in the claim. Alternatively, international currency can be obtained from the Cash Office. This needs to be arranged at least a week in advance. It is not possible to take out cash on a Bristol City Council corporate credit card.

Contact: Emma Dimond, Finance Advisor, Corporate Finance Tel 0117 352 1404,
Emma.dimond@bristol.gov.uk

Bristol City Council corporate credit cards do not need to be activated to be used overseas.

Lost or stolen corporate credit cards should be reported to Natwest immediately by calling 0870 909 3702. This must also be reported to Emma Dimond as soon as possible for the Council's own records and so a replacement can be ordered.

3.8 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, Gifts and Hospitality and Declarations

Members must consider the [Members' Code of Conduct](#) when travelling and decide whether any travel that is being externally funded would need 1) A pecuniary interest to be registered, or 2) if any gift/hospitality should be declared and added to their 'Register of Members' Interests and Gifts and Hospitality' form/register. Generally it would be anticipated that external funding for a trip should be disclosed. Members should take legal advice if they are not sure and they must also remember to register any interests on their return from travel. Failure to register a disclosable pecuniary interest is a criminal offence.

The general principles on gifts and hospitality are also set out in the [Expenses, Benefits and Travel policy](#).

3.9 Health/vaccinations

Please remember to take account of any vaccinations/medications you may require prior to travelling. The following NHS site has more information on what may be required:

<http://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/1072.aspx?CategoryID=67>

In addition if travelling in Europe free basic health assistance can be provided by producing a European Health Insurance Card. Please ensure that you obtain this card either on line www.ehic.org or at the Post Office).

The EHIC is normally valid for three to five years and covers any medical treatment that becomes necessary whilst overseas due to illness or an accident. The card gives access to state-provided medical treatment only, and you will be treated on the same basis as an 'insured' person living in the country you are visiting. Remember, this might not cover all the things you would expect to get free of charge from the NHS in the UK. You may have to make a contribution to the cost of your care. Please note that this is not a substitute for travel insurance so you will need to ensure that you also have appropriate insurance cover.

3.10 Insurance

Members undertaking Bristol City Council business abroad can be covered by the Council's insurance policy. Individuals traveling must send a copy of the 'International travel and accommodation approval form' to insurance@bristol.gov.uk see 3.6 above.

Prior to travel individuals must contact the Risk and Insurance team at least 72 hrs prior to travel to confirm cover and receive a summary of cover for their trip. Contact: insurance@bristol.gov.uk

If you have to travel at short notice email insurance@bristol.gov.uk along with all documentation as above and call the team on 0117 9223212 as soon as possible.

Travel insurance can also be bought for delegates who are not Bristol City Council Officers, but part of an international delegation visit (for example young people taking part in an international youth exchange organised by the Council). In such circumstances, at least two weeks' notice must be given to Insurance Services in order that the necessary arrangements can be made.

There are occasions where the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advise against travel to certain areas, please note the travel insurance of the council does not provide insurance cover for any areas where the FCO are advising against travel. PLEASE NOTE: this applies in the case of travel during the COVID19 pandemic. Please check FCO advice and if travel is deemed essential, discuss with the Monitoring Officer and the insurance team. In addition, if visiting a financially sanctioned territory at least 7 days' notice is required in respect of travel on these occasions please contact insurance@bristol.gov.uk for advice.

In the event of a cancellation please notify claims@bristol.gov.uk with supporting cancellation document as soon as is possible to enable a claim to be made on behalf of BCC.

3.11 ICT and Communications

The traveller must ensure that their Council mobile phone has international roaming activated before they leave the UK. Members should email the request to ICT Service at least 5 working days before travel. The email should include the traveller's name, their mobile number and the duration for which

they require international roaming as well as any security passwords needed if any items are lost or stolen as follows.

All Lost or stolen ICT equipment should be immediately report to the Council ICT Service Desk on 0117 922 3456 or ICTservice@bristol.gov.uk and to the Police for insurance purposes.

For all lost or stolen mobile phones, please also contact Vodafone immediately on 03333 043333 or, from another Council handset, dial 191.

You should also review the [ICT information Security guidance](#) before travelling.

3.12 Useful out of hours emergency contact details:

UK International & Commonwealth Office Consular Assistance Team: + 44 20 7008 1500 (24 hours a day). Or also see this link: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-deal-with-a-crisis-overseas#how-we-can-help-in-a-crisis>

3.13 Next of Kin information

The traveller must leave their next of kin and emergency contact information with their Group/Support office or aligned service team before travelling. The Office/relevant team should also have a copy of the itinerary and travel arrangements in case of emergencies.

The Office/relevant team should agree a daily check in for the traveller or if the Lone Worker Monitoring Scheme is required: See http://intranet.bcc.lan/ccm/cms-service/stream/asset/?asset_id=7527041

3.14 Child safety

Please note that there are guidelines in place on Child Safety, which will need to be applied before young people and children leave for an international visit. Please note also the comments on insurance, above.

Contact: Fiona Tudge, Safeguarding Manager Fiona.tudge@bristol.gov.uk tel. 0117 352 1116

3.15 Etiquette

Members representing Bristol City Council on such visits should be aware that they carry with them a responsibility for the reputation of the city. How well etiquette, customs and protocol of the relevant country are followed affects the impression that the host authority/organisation gets of Bristol and the confidence and comfort of the delegates themselves.

Advice is available on the following websites:

Country etiquette guides: LGA European and International Unit <http://www.local.gov.uk/european-and-international> and <https://www.gov.uk/international-travel-advice>

You can also contact the Council's international service for advice: international@bristol.gov.uk

4 PUBLIC REPORTING AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS AND OTHER FOLLOW UP

- 4.1 ABS will collate international and national travel information for BCC for monitoring and FOI purposes. After all relevant approvals a copy of the International Travel Approval Form, with final costs and arrangements set out should be sent to ABS and copied to the International Service where it can be

filed for monitoring purposes and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. Members are advised to retain a copy of this form for their records. These procedures apply to all work related international travel even those incurring no cost to Bristol City Council (e.g. EU projects or cost covered by an external partner).

4.2 **Public reporting and FOIs**

The Council will publish a monthly table with core international travel information. It will include the names of Members and Officers third tier and above (TP1/Service Manager level). It will include the positions of all Officers.

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Council is required to deal with requests for information on a case by case basis. In some cases FOI requests may ask for names to be disclosed and, as this constitutes personal data, this would need to be considered in accordance with ICO guidance (including taking account of any safety/security issues).

- 4.3 **Outcomes:** On return, the Member travelling is required to complete a Travel Outcomes Form (see international travel policy and tools on intranet). This should be shared with the International Service within 7 days for monitoring/reporting purposes and to promote further cooperation. The Member travelling should also report back to relevant teams and Members within BCC. Information on outcomes and follow-up will be recorded and used for FOIs.