Abstract: This report advises the Committee of a request for payment of expenses to members of the Angus Local Access Forum.

1 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. agrees to the payment of expenses, for duties undertaken which are in addition to the regular meetings of the Forum as outlined in this report;

2. agrees to pay in retrospect any legitimate claims for travel expenses incurred by members of the Forum during the current financial year in accordance with the terms outlined in this report

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Land Reform (Scotland) Act placed a duty on the Council to establish a Local Access Forum. The Council agreed to this on 2 September 2004 (report No. 1012/04).

3 ANGUS LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

3.1 The Forum consists of a core group of 12 individuals representative of land managers, recreational interests and the community. In addition to this there are three representatives of other appropriate statutory bodies one of which is Angus Council.

3.2 The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 Part 1 – Access Rights, Chapter 5 Local Authority functions: access and other rights; section 25 (7) states:-

“The local authority may pay to members of the local access forum such expenses and allowances as the local authority determine.”

3.3 The Forum is now well established and members are taking on additional duties including attending seminars/training and site visits in connection with resolving access disputes. At the Forum meeting last year, the question of payment of travel expenses was raised and a request made that the Council consider meeting expenses incurred by the members of the Forum in connection with these additional duties. Unlike most other Forums throughout the country, members were not seeking travel expenses for attending the Forum meetings, approximately five per annum. Equally this would not apply to the statutory body representatives

3.4 It is intended that public transport will be used wherever possible and that car sharing will also be encouraged. It is proposed that members of the Forum would normally receive prior approval of the Forum before incurring expenses but this may not
always be possible particularly with a requirement to attend site visits with regard to access disputes, which may be at short notice.

3.5 Subject to Committee approval, operating guidance and appropriate documentation regarding travel and subsistence claims will be drawn up in conjunction with the Head of Finance and presented to the Forum for approval at the next appropriate meeting. It is envisaged that this will be based on Angus Council’s own procedures. No payment of travel and subsistence claims will be made until the Forum has formally adopted the operating guidance and procedures.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Information has been sought from other Local Access Forums and the rates paid found to be inconsistent, varying from 22p to 49.3p per mile. In view of this the Inland Revenue rate of 40p per mile is considered suitable for journeys both within Angus and outwith the area. This rate is the amount paid to those employed by the Council since 1 April 2005 and also to elected members.

4.2 Some members of the Forum incurred expenses in relation to those additional duties prior to the matter being raised at the Forum meeting. These comprised a return rail journey to Stirling by one member who represented the Forum at a day conference. The cost of this return journey was £17.00. Further members of the Forum attended two site visits in relation to access disputes, in accordance with the adopted procedures of the Forum. The total mileage incurred was approximately 100 miles, which at a rate of 40p per mile would result in travel costs of £40.00. It was this expenditure that caused the matter to be raised. In view of the fact that all 12 individual members are volunteers and are not seeking reimbursement of travel expenses associated with attending regular meetings, it is felt that it would be appropriate to agree to meet the expenses in retrospect. This is on condition that these journeys and the subsequent claims for reimbursement of expenses are in accordance with the operating guidance and procedures in 3.5 above.

4.3 The costs can be met from the Planning and Transport Division Revenue Budget, Access to the Countryside and it is envisaged that it would be in the region of a maximum of £1,000 - £2,000 per annum.

5 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

6 CONSULTATION

6.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services, Head of Finance and Head of Law & Administration have been consulted during the preparation of this report.

NOTE

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.

P&T/GEP/IAL
13 February 2007

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