
Governance Committee: Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel

Background and context

- 1** Councillors are able to receive allowances and expenses in recognition of the time they invest and for any additional responsibilities they carry.
- 2** The Member Allowances Regulations 2003 require all local authorities to have a Members' Allowance Scheme published as part of their Constitution. They also require an authority to maintain an Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) which should review its scheme from time to time and make recommendations to the local authority about it. An IRP must do so around every four years.
- 3** The current County Council scheme was approved in 2017 following a full review of roles and responsibilities of members.

Proposal details

- 4** The IRP has carried out a review of member allowances during 2020. It did not undertake a full evaluation of all roles as this took place in 2017. It interviewed a number of members in different roles and noted several areas for review – particularly the payments to senior advisers and advisers to cabinet members and to minority group leaders.
- 5** It also considered the impact of virtual working on members and decision-making process and the environmental impact of this.
- 6** The Panel's report, **set out at Appendix 1**, contains recommendations (a) to (s). **Appendix 2** sets out the impact of the recommendations on the current Members' Allowances Scheme.
- 7** The Committee was supportive of the recommendations made in relation to the use of virtual technology for meetings and action to encourage more sustainable travel (paragraphs 15 to 21). The Committee agreed that future informal meetings should usually be held virtually and that, when safe to do so, formal meetings should, if held physically, be hybrid, enabling remote attendance, to reduce the need for travel.
- 8** The Panel makes recommendations in relation to the roles of advisers to cabinet members (paragraphs 35 to 44) and mechanisms for ensuring that the appointments are more thoroughly tested to support the allowance. The Committee supports these proposed changes.
- 9** The Panel makes recommendations to change the allowance scheme for minority group leaders to bring it close to those adopted in comparator councils. It proposes an allowance of between £5,000 and £14,500, depending on the size of the group. The Committee, by majority, considered this to be appropriate and in line with other SRAs and also with comparator authorities. The starting point of £5,000 would be above that of an adviser to a cabinet member and the highest level of £14,500 would be between a Committee Chairman and a Cabinet Member. Cllr M Jones and Cllr Walsh did not support this. While they supported the simpler stepped approach, they argued that the starting point for the allowance should be higher.

Consultation, engagement and advice

10 The IRP has consulted the Chairman and group leaders on its draft recommendations. A range of members in different roles were also interviewed as part of the review by the Panel.

Finance

11 The proposals, if implemented, would be met within the current Member Allowances budget of £1.2m per annum. The Panel recommends that there should be no increase to any allowance from May 2021. Using the current number of members in each role, these recommended allowances result in an overall saving of £12,733 (1.0%).

Recommended

That the Independent Remuneration Panel's report and recommendations, as set out at Appendix 1, be approved.

Janet Duncton

Chairman of the Governance Committee

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Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel
- Appendix 2 – Impact of recommendations on the Members' Allowances Scheme

Background papers

None