

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL ON MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES for 2007/08

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In accordance with statutory requirements the Independent Remuneration Panel was appointed by the Council in 2001 to consider and make recommendations on Members' Allowances. The Panel has agreed that it wishes to continue to review and make recommendations on an annual basis. The Council has a duty to have regard to the recommendations made to it by the Panel before it agrees any amendments to the Council's Scheme of Members' Allowances.
- 1.2 The Panel held a series of meetings during November 2006 to early January 2007 to undertake the review of allowances for the 2007/08 financial year. During our review we were supplied with comparative information as to the level of allowances paid by a number of authorities including district councils within the County and other councils within the Audit Commission 'family' group. We also met collectively with the Councillor R. Hollingworth, Leader of the Council and representatives from opposition groups (Councillors Mrs. S. J. Baxter and M. H. Gill). Unfortunately, Councillor P. M. McDonald was unable to attend. We would like to take this opportunity to formally thank these Members for their time and contributions.

2. Developments since the Panel's last review

- 2.1 The Panel has noted that the Council continues to be in Voluntary Engagement with the Government. We were disappointed to be informed that the target date for emergence from Voluntary Engagement has slipped from March 2007 to December 2007, but we are assured that this is largely due to external factors. We recognise the drive and commitment to improving the Council and we noted that the Council's Recovery Plan has been replaced by an Improvement Plan a copy of which, together with a recent update, has been circulated to each Panel member.
- 2.2 The Panel has been mindful that the past year has seen the implementation of changes to the Council's Committee Structure made to improve the scrutiny process and performance management within the authority. This has included the creation of the new Audit, Performance Management and Scrutiny Steering Boards. We have noted that the Council at its Annual Meeting in May 2006 reinstated the position of Leader of the Opposition. We have also received a copy of documentation setting out the "Job Roles" of various positions held by councillors.
- 2.3 The Panel has accordingly taken the opportunity provided by these changes and developments to review the levels of Special Responsibility Allowance payable for different positions.

3. Underlying Principles

- 3.1 The Panel wishes to re-affirm its view that people who seek Council office do so out of a sense of public service and not principally for the remuneration that may be available. However, the Panel also believes that the time and effort put in by elected Members should be recognised and rewarded.
- 3.2 The Panel recognises that local government has changed significantly in recent years, requiring different ways of working. Councillors are now expected to be more professional in their approach, are expected to undergo training and development to achieve competencies in various skills and to keep abreast of the issues and changes affecting local government.
- 3.3 The Panel recognises that the Council's commitment to improving its performance in order to emerge from Voluntary Engagement, continues to have a significant impact on the time, effort and workload of Members who have taken on certain positions of responsibility and with this in mind we feel it is appropriate and justified to reward the effort and endeavour of those Members.
- 3.4 The Panel acknowledges that, historically, in comparison with a number of similar authorities, the level of allowances paid by the Council was relatively low. Our reviews of allowances for 2006/07 and 2007/08 have sought to redress the imbalance.

4. Basic Allowance

- 4.1 Basic Allowance is intended to recognise the time commitment of all councillors, including calls on their time such as meetings with officers, constituents, political group meetings, etc.
- 4.2 In previous reviews we have taken into account the level of increase agreed for Council staff. We are, however, aware that as no national agreement has yet been reached for staff for 2007/08 this precludes us from taking the same approach this year.
- 4.3 Having taken into account the various factors outlined in sections 2. and 3. above, together with the comments we received from councillors during our consultation meeting, we feel that the annual Basic Allowance payable to all Members should be increased by £100 to £3,450.
- 4.4 We are aware that during 2006/07, some councillors have chosen not to receive the full amount of Basic Allowance to which they are entitled. We recognise that this is a matter for individual councillors.

5. Special Responsibility Allowances

- 5.1 The Panel sought clarification on a number of matters with regard to Special Responsibility Allowances during its consultation with councillor representatives.

- 5.2 The Panel has also been mindful of the Government Guidance on the payment of Special Responsibility Allowances which states that such allowances may be paid only to those Members who have significant additional responsibilities, over and above the generally accepted duties of a councillor.
- 5.3 The Panel feels that the weight of responsibility and time commitment placed on the Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Members is particularly significant given the Council's extraordinary and demanding situation. We therefore feel that their efforts and endeavour should be rewarded by an increased level of Special Responsibility Allowance. Bearing in mind the respective increases which were agreed for these positions for 2006/07, we recommend that for 2007/08 these increases should be: £500 for the Leader (to £9,750), £250 for the Deputy Leader (to £6,250) and £1,000 for other Members of the Cabinet (to £4,500).
- 5.4 At present the Special Responsibility Allowance of the Chairman of the Planning Committee is equally weighted with the level of Allowance payable to the Chairmen of the Scrutiny Steering Board, Performance Management Board and Audit Board. We have taken into consideration comments received during our consultation with councillor representatives which drew attention to the significant weight of responsibility and the time-consuming and demanding nature of the role of the Chairman of the Planning Committee. We therefore recommend that the Special Responsibility Allowance for this position be increased by £500 to £3,250.
- 5.5 We feel that the roles of the Chairmen of the three Boards should continue to be equally weighted. However, we also wish to recognise their efforts and time commitment in developing and embedding the roles of these new Boards and recommend that the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairmen of these Boards be increased by £250 to £3,000.
- 5.6 The Panel is aware that the Standards Committee has an increasingly important role to play in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors. We recommend that the level of Special Responsibility Allowance payable to the Chairman of this Committee should be increased by £250 to £2,000.
- 5.7 The Panel understands that the workload of the main Licensing Committee has reduced due to increased delegation to officers and the role of the Licensing Sub-Committee. This had led to a number of meetings being cancelled due to lack of business. Accordingly we recommend that the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairman of the Licensing Committee should be payable per meeting rather than a flat rate per annum. Similarly, we recommend that the Chairman of the Licensing Sub-Committee should also receive a Special Responsibility Allowance per meeting of £100.
- 5.8 The Panel is aware that Scrutiny Task Groups are set up on a "task and finish" to scrutinise selected service areas, etc. We recommend that Chairmen of these Task Groups should continue to be entitled to receive a one-off Special Responsibility Allowance of £200 payable on completion of the task.

- 5.9 The Panel recognises that meetings of the Appeals, Electoral Matters and Appointments Committees are held as and when required. We recommend that Special Responsibility Allowances for the Chairmen of these Committees should be continue to be payable at the rate of £100 per meeting.
- 5.10 As previously mentioned, the Panel is aware that for 2006/07 the Council has reinstated the position of Leader of the Opposition. Whilst the holder of this position is entitled to receive a Special Responsibility Allowance, the Leaders of other opposition groups are not. Having considered the matter further and taken into account comments made during the consultation meeting with councillor representatives, the Panel feels that the Leaders of other opposition groups should be rewarded for the time and effort in fulfilling their role. We therefore recommend that the official Leader of the Opposition should receive a flat rate payment of £500, together with an additional payment of £125 per group member; and that Leaders of other opposition groups should receive a payment of £125 per group member. In the event that the Council does not formally appoint a Leader of the Opposition during 2007/08 we recommend that the sum of £500 be shared equally between all Leaders of opposition groups.

6. Travelling and Subsistence Allowances

- 6.1 In the light of comments made during the consultation meeting with councillor representatives, the Panel has reviewed the question of which duties should qualify as “approved duties” for the payment of travelling allowances. After taking due regard of the Members’ Allowances Regulations on this matter, the changes we wish to recommend to the “approved duties” are set out in bold italics in Appendix “1”.
- 6.2 We wish to take this opportunity to suggest that those councillors wishing to claim travelling allowances should take steps to familiarise themselves with the duties which qualify as “approved duties”.
- 6.3 The Panel feel that the current levels of subsistence allowances payable under the Council’s Scheme of Allowances are adequate and should remain at their present levels.

7. Recommendations

The Panel unanimously recommends for 2007/08:

- (1) That the Basic Allowance payable to every Member of the Council be increased by £100 to £3,450.
- (2) That the following Special Responsibility Allowances be payable (the current level of Allowances are shown for ease of comparison):

Position	Current SRA	Recommended SRA for 2007/08
Leader of the Council	£9,250	£9,750
Deputy Leader	£6,000	£6,250
Other Cabinet Members	£3,500	£4,500
Chairman of Planning Committee	£2,750	£3,250
Chairman of Audit Board	£2,750	£3,000
Chairman of Performance Management Board	£2,750	£3,000
Chairman of Scrutiny Steering Board	£2,750	£3,000
Chairman of Standards Committee	£1750	£2,000
Chairman of Licensing Committee	£1750	£100 per meeting
Chairman of Licensing Sub-Committee	£0	£100 per meeting
Chairmen of Task Groups	£200 (to be payable on completion of task)	£200 (to be payable on completion of task)
Chairman of Appeals Committee	£100 per meeting	£100 per meeting
Chairman of Electoral Matters Committee	£100 per meeting	£100 per meeting
Chairman of Appointments Committee	£100 per meeting	£100 per meeting
Leader of the Opposition	£125 x total number of opposition members	£500* plus £125 x number of members of their group
Leaders of other opposition groups	£0	£125 x number of members of their group * In the event that there is no formal Leader of the Opposition, this sum to be divided equally between all Leaders of opposition groups

- (3) That changes be made to the list of “approved duties” for the payment of travelling allowances as shown in bold italics in Appendix “1”;
- (4) That no change be made to subsistence allowances.

Independent Remuneration Panel
10th January 2007

Mr. J. Browne

Mr. A. Finn

Mr. P. Sandhu

Mr. J. Topping

Mr. M Weaver

APPROVED DUTIES

1. ***Attendance at*** meetings of the Council or any of its committees or sub-committees ***as a member of that body, observer, invited attendee or to address such a body***
2. ***Attendance at*** meetings of the Executive Cabinet or any of its committees or sub-committees ***as a member of that body, observer, invited attendee or to address such a body***
3. Meetings of Working Groups or Panels established by the authority, any of its committees or sub-committees ***or by the Leader of the Council*** provided that members of at least two political groups have been invited to attend
4. ***Any duty undertaken by the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Council in that role or by the Leader of the Council in that role***
5. ***Attendance by Portfolio Holders, Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen at preparation or briefing meetings for formally convened meetings of the Council***
6. Meetings of area ***or neighbourhood*** committees or forums
7. Other Bodies to which the authority makes appointments or nominations, or any committee or sub-committee of such a body
8. Meetings of any association of authorities of which the Council is a member
9. Site visits, provided these are in connection with the discharge of the functions of the authority or any of its committees or sub-committees
10. Joint meetings with other local authorities, conferences, seminars, presentations, training or induction sessions, provided these are in connection with the discharge of the functions of the authority or of any of its committees or sub-committees.
11. Focus Groups or other informal meetings held in relation to the recovery of the Council, external inspections or otherwise in connection with the functions of the Council or any of its committees or sub-committees, ***where the initiative for attendance is taken by or on behalf of a chief officer.***
12. Any other special duties which the Council may wish to approve from time to time, provided these are in connection with the discharge of the functions of the authority or any of its committees or sub-committees

Note: Members may not claim allowances from more than one body in respect of any duty.