

APPENDIX A

REVIEW OF THE SCHEME OF COUNCILLORS' ALLOWANCES FOR STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

THE REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

AUGUST 2007

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL ON COUNCILLORS' ALLOWANCES

1.0 Summary of Recommendations

The following is a summary of the specific recommendations made by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) convened by Stevenage Borough Council to review the current Members' Allowances Scheme and advise the Council on a revised scheme.

It is recommended:

- 1) That a new Scheme of Members' Allowances be established with effect from 1st November 2007.
- 2) That in summary the recommended level of allowances proposed for this new Scheme is as follows:

Basic Allowance - all Councillors	£6766	
Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) to be added to the basic figure:		
		(% of Leader Post)
Scale I - Leader of the Council	£16,915	
Scale II - Executive Members		
plus Chair of Scrutiny Overview	£9,303	(55%)
plus Chair of Planning & Development		
plus Chair of Licensing		
Scale III - Chairs of Scrutiny Topic Panels	£7,611	(45%)
plus Chair of Audit Committee		
Scale IV - Chairs of Area Committees	£5,920	(35%)
Scale V - SBC "Lead" Member (Chair/Vice Chair)		
Highways Joint Member Panel	£4,228	(25%)

Note: only one Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) should be payable to any individual Councillor at any one time. Any member also may, by notice in writing given to the Borough Solicitor, elect to forego any part of his/her entitlement to any allowance under this new scheme.

- 3) That the Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances payable under the

provisions of the current and new Schemes be index linked to the NJC national salary awards for local government staff for a maximum period of four years, with effect from 1st April 2007.

- 4) That as it is clear that the Chairs of Scrutiny Topic Groups have been operational from the beginning of the Municipal Year, the Scale III (£7611) SRA recognised for these posts in the new Scheme be backdated to 24th May 2007.
- 5) That a co-optees' allowance continue to be incorporated within the new scheme of allowances such that in the case of the independent chairman it be set at £1,500 p.a. and for the other independent members at £1,150 p.a.
- 6) That all elected councillors should continue to be entitled to pensions under Section 7 of the Superannuation Act 1972 and the basic & special responsibility allowances (SRAs) should be used as the basis for calculating the "career average" pay.
- 7) That provision continues to be made for members who are responsible for providing care for children or dependant relatives to qualify for a Dependant Carers' Allowance to assist them with the financial cost of paying for care whilst they are attending approved duties:
 - # the claims for allowance shall be supported by receipts from the carer, specifying the expenditure incurred, with payments to relatives not being admissible
 - # the allowance be provided to repay the actual cost of care incurred, up to the following maximum levels:

Childcare	-	£6	per hour
Dependant Care	-	£10	per hour

Subject to a maximum of 20 hrs per month.
- 8) That the same rate of travel, mileage and subsistence allowances payable to the Officers for approved duties should be applicable to Members including cycle mileage, car sharing and conference arrangements.
- 9) That the new allowances' scheme should permit the Council to withhold all of a Councillor's allowance should that person be suspended for misconduct, or to require the Councillor to repay the Council such part of any allowance as has already been paid in respect of any period during which the person is suspended.
- 10) That the question of a reduction in the number of SRAs should be addressed

over the period of the new Scheme, such that by the end of the period the 50% guidance figure is not exceeded.

- 11) That the link between performance, accountability & transparency and the new Scheme of Allowances be clearly established and seen as a key part of the approach to enhance public attitudes towards local democracy; and
- 12) That the Council undertakes to develop and put in place an integrated Member Development Programme of appraisal, training and support to Develop the effectiveness of Members in their council and community responsibilities.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 The Members' Allowances Scheme for Stevenage Borough Council is due for review, four years having elapsed since the last full review was undertaken in 2003. There

have been some structural changes within the Council's political management organisation and the recently appointed Independent Remuneration Panel, in its initial update report last June (2006), recommended that a review be undertaken to study the detail of the current arrangements in some depth and make suggested amendments for a revised scheme looking to the future.

- 2.2 The Panel was convened in June 2007 under the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations SI 2003 No.1021 to make recommendations to the Council on a new Scheme of Members' Allowances.
- 2.3 These Regulations, which arise out of the relevant provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, make it an obligation on all local authorities to maintain an advisory Independent Remuneration Panel to review and provide advice on Members' Allowances. Councils are required to convene a Panel and seek its advice before making any changes or amendments to their Members' Allowances Scheme and are required to 'pay regard' to the Panel's recommendations before setting a new or amended scheme.
- 2.4 The following Report sets out the conclusions and recommendations arising from a detailed review of the current Members' Allowances Scheme, conducted during July and August 2007, and commends them to the Borough Council for their consideration.

3.0 Panel Membership and Terms of Reference

- 3.1 Appointed in April 2006 to undertake an update report for 2006/2007 the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) was reconvened in June 2007 and consisted of:
 - The Rev'd Michael Banks MA, retired parish priest and former Chief Executive of Stevenage Borough Council (Chair)
 - Mr. Fintan Donohue BA(Hons)Law MPhil, Principal and Chief Executive of North Hertfordshire College, Stevenage
 - Mr. Ian White MSc CBE, previously Director of Social Services, Hertfordshire County Council and formerly Chair of Beds. & Herts Strategic Health Authority.
- 3.2 The Panel was given specific terms of reference - namely :

“to re-examine the structure of the present scheme; to revisit the rationale and approach; to test the robustness of previous conclusions; and to take account of changes to the Council's management process, with a view to producing a revised scheme.”
- 3.3 In providing such advice, the Panel should have regard to:
 - the roles which councillors will be expected to fulfil in the future and the differing roles and responsibilities of particular councillors at the present time

- ς the current Council Management and local administration arrangements via the Leader/Cabinet model
- ς the statutory framework of the remuneration of councillors and the scope which the Council has to establish and vary its own arrangements
- ς the previous recommendations and decisions taken by the Council in respect of the previous reviews.

4.0 Process of the Review

4.1 The Panel has met on three occasions during July and August 2007:

- to be briefed on the particular requirements of this review exercise
- to study the information pack materials provided as background information - including the three reports of the Council's previous IRP made in October 2001, November 2003 and June 2004
- to interview Council Members and Officers with particular roles and responsibilities viz:
 - Cllr. S. Taylor (Leader of the Council),
 - Cllr. R. Parker (Leader of the Opposition & County Councillor)
 - Cllr. M. Downing (Chair of a Scrutiny Topic Group &
County Councillor)
 - Mr. H. Lewis (Head of E-Government & Business Systems)
- to be updated about the operational effectiveness of the Council's constitution, political structures and decision-making mechanisms
- to evaluate the returns from the Questionnaire circulated to all Members as part of the review exercise
- to arrive at conclusions prior to formulating recommendations and agreeing the contents of the Panel's report to be made to the Council.

4.2 Special mention should be made of the support and helpful assistance that was provided to the Panel by Jackie Cansick, SBC's Constitutional Services Manager who arranged the meetings and acting as the "Panel's Friend", provided specific additional material speedily on request.

4.3 The following key background documents and items of information were considered by the Panel in reaching its conclusions and recommendations:

- The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) Regulations 2003
Statutory Instrument 2003 No. 1021

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- Current SBC Members' Allowances Scheme 2007/2008
 - Report to the IRP on the Estimated Costs of Members' ICT August 2007
 - SBC's Political Management Structure and Background Report on Constitutional Issues May 2007
 - Details of the Council's Executive/ Committee Memberships May 2007
 - The Council's Corporate Performance Plan 2007/2008: Delivering Value for Money
 - Comparative information from certain County, District & Unitary Authorities
 - LGA 2006 Members' Allowances Survey – Summary of Findings
 - Strong and Prosperous Communities – The Local Government White Paper October 2006
 - The Role of Councillors – Report of an Inquiry by the All Party Parliamentary Local Government Group June 2007.

5.0 Background Context

- 5.1 ***Modernisation and Localism*** – Since 1997 Central Government has been pursuing an agenda of local government modernisation designed to tackle some of the fundamental public service, governance and accountability concerns facing local authorities and the wider public sector. 'Modernisation' and 'localism' have become the two watchwords for the Government's vision of the future of local government.

Reforms have been driven by a series of Green and White Papers, and the Local Government Acts of 1999, 2000 and 2003. These reforms have included the establishment of performance management arrangements via a 'Best Value' regime, options for new constitutional arrangements and the introduction of Comprehensive Performance Assessments by the Audit Commission for all councils. In addition, these new reforms have increasingly involved working in partnerships with other agencies and authorities – delivering priorities and outcomes via Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and more recently, Local Area Agreements (LAAs)

- 5.2 ***Stevenage's Response and Performance*** – A number of local authorities have responded effectively and strongly to the emerging reform agenda. The Panel noted that Stevenage, in particular, had embraced these challenges and building on its new town heritage had remained consistent with its mission – "Council and community working together to improve quality of life". New internal and external governance arrangements have become established ways of working within the Borough Council and illustrate the active and ambitious character of its Members and Officers.

The Panel learnt that in the past year the Audit Commission had assessed how well the Council used its resources and whether it was providing value for money services to the community. This was part of a national assessment carried out using a prescribed methodology and scoring system. The Council achieved an overall Level 3, defined by the Audit Commission as 'consistently above minimum requirements – performing well.' This places the Council within the second highest category and an improvement on the previous year.

- 5.3 ***Local democracy and remuneration for elected members*** – At this point the Panel reminded itself of the importance of local democracy in helping to bind communities together to improve public services and the quality of life in our neighbourhoods. The recent Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' (2006) acknowledged the radical improvements made in public services is due in no small measure to the hard work and commitment of local government.

It is clear that today's Councillors will have increasing demands on their time and expertise as champions for their local community – speaking out and resolving issues affecting their local area. Fewer and fewer employers are now willing or able to allow employees time off to fulfil these civic duties. Nor is it reasonable to expect them to do so.

A comprehensive scheme of local authority allowances that is realistic and reasonable is an integral part of local government. Appropriate remuneration for these duties can enhance the status of councillors and encourage a new generation of local citizens to stand for election and serve their communities in this way. Thus it will be possible for a wider sector of society to be represented within local government – a positive development for democracy.

- 5.4 ***Guiding Principles of this Review*** - With this in mind, and in reaching its conclusions and recommendations the Panel was aware of the guiding principles that had been adopted and shaped previous review exercises – viz. that the scheme of allowances should:

- conform with legislative requirements and be cognizant of published guidance
- preserve a recognition that the work of a local councillor has an element of voluntary service – and this ethos is worth maintaining
- recognize the demands placed on Councillors by their differing roles and responsibilities within the Council and fairly and equitably compensating them – as far as appropriate – for the time and effort they devote or can reasonably be expected to devote to their work as a member of the Council.
- be affordable, efficient & effective to administer as well as easy to explain, understand and justify in terms of public perception
- encourage members from a cross-section of the electorate to be attracted to this important work – removing, as far as possible, potential barriers to entry.

However, in the course of its deliberations the Panel felt strongly that **additionally** the Scheme should:

- be more transparent and accountable regarding the expectation and level of performance required from those in receipt of allowances – by means of clearly defined job profiles for different roles
- recognize that all Councillors, as part of their core responsibilities, will be involved in community leadership, attending committees, task groups, and other meetings and that this general contribution to the overall effective operations of the Council is recognised in the basic allowance.

6 Details of Findings & Recommendations

- 6.1 **Preamble** – From the evidence it received it was clear to the Panel that the current Scheme is a generous one. Comparative figures from a variety of sources suggest that the allowances paid under the auspices of the current Scheme are among the highest of the top quartile of district councils throughout England & Wales (See examples in Appendix A). Clearly, there are particular reasons for this and with high levels of expectation about delivered performance, the Panel would expect the Council's Scheme to remain firmly within the upper quartile.

The previous Panel had been mindful of the special characteristics and features of a 'third generation' New Town and to some extent anticipated the increasing expectations on all elected members from both the electorate and other stakeholders within the emerging 'modernised' local government model. It also took the view that the level of allowances should provide remuneration for the roles undertaken and not merely be a form of 'compensation' for time expended. The result of annual indexation for inflation on these earlier and pioneeringly higher starting levels is bound to have had a significant impact on comparative data surveys of other district councils.

This Panel felt that its task was not simply to arrive at a set of figures for Members' Allowances based on previous Schemes. Rather it aimed to make recommendations that were based on a logical concept that was transparent, simple and readily understood by Members and the public. As such, the members of the Panel have been keen to explore expectations and ways of working amongst Members of the Borough Council so that their recommendations go with the grain of that working and are appropriate for Stevenage.

- 6.2 **Arriving at the Basic Allowance** – the Panel noted the Statutory Guidance that it must pay regard to before it arrived at recommendations for the Basic Allowance. The Statutory Guidance (July 2003, para. 67) states:

“Having established what local Councillors do, and the hours which are devoted to these tasks the local authorities will need to take a view on the rate at which, and the number of hours for which, Councillors ought to be remunerated.”

Consequently, The Panel felt it was under an obligation to arrive at answers for the following three variables

- What time is necessary to fulfil the role of the frontline Councillor?
- What amount of time should be viewed as given as public service, known as the public service discount (PSD)?
- At what rate should the remunerated hours be paid?

Evidence from the Member Questionnaire returns suggest that the previous Panel's assessment of the amount of time council members could reasonably expect to put into 'non executive' activities - i.e. 48 hours per month – was about right and remained unchanged.

Some while ago the Local Government Association (LGA) recommended that a third of the time a councillor is expected to put into their normal representational or 'non executive' role should not be remunerated but seen as a Public Service Discount. The Panel noted that along with Stevenage this level had become the norm with most authorities and saw no reason to change this.

As to the rate of remuneration, the Panel considered the range of competencies required for Frontline Councillors - e.g.

Community Leadership; Regulating and Monitoring; Scrutiny and Challenge; Communication Skills; Working in Partnership; Political Understanding; Equalities and Diversity; Community Advocacy; Mediation & Conflict Resolution; and Fostering Effective Relationships etc

and compared these with the core competencies required by Lead Officers and Service Managers (PO salary grades) - e.g.

Political Understanding; Motivation; Leading Teams; Working in Teams; Creating & Managing Change; Managing Self & Time; Problem Solving; Strategic Awareness; Performance Management; Risk Management; and Health & Safety etc.

(from Chester-le-Street District Council's Member Competency Framework 2006)

The obvious links between the two sets of competencies helped the Panel to appreciate the original rationale and soundness of relating the rate of remuneration for the Basic Allowance to the Principal Officer (PO) grade – at the minimum scale point. As further verification this was then cross referenced with the LGA current daily rate of £133.80 per day and demonstrated that the current level of remuneration is appropriate and therefore no change is proposed.

However, the level of Basic Allowance recommended within the new Scheme does show a reduction of £300 p.a. in respect of the ICT element. The former Panel had been asked to consider the question of replacing the previous arrangements for Members' ICT provision by means of an additional sum to be added to the Basic Allowance. This was considered in June 2004 and a sum of £750 p.a. was agreed to enable Members to make their own arrangements.

Since that time the costs on which the original calculation was based have reduced significantly. The market place provides much cheaper equipment packages and the bundling of broadband & telephony rentals suggest that this figure is no longer valid. With this in mind and following an interview with SBC's Head of E-Government & Business Systems, the Panel proposes that this figure should be reduced to £450 p.a.

– with the net result that a new Basic Allowance of £6766 p.a. for all council members should be introduced with the new Scheme.

- 6.3 ***Special Responsibility Allowances*** – the Panel was less convinced with the previously adopted methodology for calculating the levels of SRA awarded to particular posts – i.e. basically linking them to other levels within the Principal Officer salary range. For unlike the frontline councillor role there seemed to be fewer common ‘responsibility’ or competency characteristics, less comparative data about workloads or time commitments and no real cross referencing possibilities with other statistical information.

There was no evidence that other local authorities had adopted this approach to SRAs and in fact, Birmingham City Council’s recent IRP report states unequivocally its view that such payments: “should not be related to local authority pay scales or jobs so as to maintain the distinction between the roles of elected members and officers.” (April 2007 p.16)

The Statutory Guidance from the 2003 Regulations (para.76) provides an alternative approach:

“Having determined which duties should be acknowledged as significant additional responsibilities, the local authority will need to consider the levels of special responsibility allowance which are attached to each post. A good starting point in determining special responsibility allowance may be to agree the allowance which should be attached to the most time consuming post on the Council (this maybe the elected Mayor or Leader) and pro rata downwards for the other roles, which it has been agreed ought to receive an extra allowance. One way of calculating special responsibility allowances may be to take an agreed level of basic allowance and recommend a multiple of this allowance as an appropriate special responsibility allowance for ...the Leader.”

This ‘Factor Approach’ has been adopted as a norm by many local authorities and was considered by the Panel to be entirely appropriate in Stevenage and therefore adopted it to establish SRA levels within the new Scheme.

In reviewing allowances paid elsewhere as indicated by an Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA) survey, the Panel noted that as a general rule the reported average SRA paid to Leaders is consistently a multiple factor of the Basic Allowance ranging from approximately 2.5 to 3.5 depending on the type of authority.

The Panel was in no doubt as to the onerous responsibilities of the Council Leader particularly as an increasing national and regional dimension is apparent in the ‘partnership approach’ to local service provision. The Leader of the Council was commendably modest in her evidence to the Panel and made no request for change to the Leader’s SRA.

However, noting the Leader’s current SRA - £16,390 and the comparative IDeA survey data, the Panel decided that to set a benchmark for SRA levels across the

Council, the Scale I Post: Leader of the Council should attract an allowance equal to 2.5 times the current basic allowance - viz. £16,915.

Furthermore, after careful consideration of individual levels of special responsibility and associated workloads as set out in the Council's Constitutional Issues Report relating to the Political Management Structure of the Council (Report item 7: Annual Council Meeting 23rd May 2007 refers), the Panel established the range and rates of SRA allowance that should form part of the structure of the new Scheme. Account was also taken of the new Scrutiny arrangements and the increasing status of Area Committees in arriving at the recommendations summarised below:

Basic Allowance - all Councillors		£6766
SRA to be added to the basic figure		
Scale I - Leader of the Council	(% of Leader Post)	£16,915
Scale II - Executive Members		
plus Chair of Scrutiny Overview	(55%)	£9,303
plus Chair of Planning & Development		
plus Chair of Licensing		
Scale III - Chairs of Scrutiny Topic Panels	(45%)	£7,611
plus Chair of Audit Committee		
Scale IV - Chairs of Area Committees	(35%)	£5,920
Scale V - SBC "Lead" Member (Chair/Vice Chair)		
Highways Joint Member Panel	(25%)	£4,228

Note: only one Special Responsibility Allowance should be payable to any individual Councillor at any one time. Any member also may, by notice in writing given to the Borough Solicitor, elect to forego any part of his/her entitlement to any allowance under this new scheme.

Indexation: The Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances payable under the provisions of the current and new Schemes, to be index linked to the NJC national salary awards for local government staff for a maximum period of four years with effect from 1st April 2007.

Special note re. Scrutiny Topic Group Chairs – It is clear that the Scrutiny Topic Group Chairs have been operational from the beginning of the Municipal Year, but as there were no longer "Panels", given the revised arrangements for the performance of Scrutiny duties, these responsibilities were not recognised in the current 2007/2008 Scheme. Accordingly, it is recommended that the Scale III (£7,611) SRA recognised for these posts in the new Scheme be backdated to 24th May 2007.

- 6.4 **Co-optees' Allowance** – the Panel recognised the important role undertaken by the Co-optees within the Standards and Audit Committees

It therefore recommends that:

a co-optees' allowance continue to be incorporated within the new scheme of allowances such that in the case of an independent chairman it be set at £1,500 p.a. and for the other independent members at £1,150 p.a.

- 6.5 **Pensions** - the Regulations continue to make it possible for the Council to make provision within a new scheme for allowances to be pensionable as part of the local government pension scheme (LGPS). The Panel considered this matter in relation to the proposed new Scheme and saw no reason to reverse the earlier decision and therefore recommends that:

all elected councillors should continue to be entitled to pensions under Section 7 of the Superannuation Act 1972 and the basic & special responsibility allowances (SRAs) should be used as the basis for calculating the "career average" pay.

- 6.6 **Dependants' Carers' Allowances** – the Local Government Act 2000 gave the right to local authorities to pay a Dependant and Child Care Allowance to eligible members while on approved council duties. The Panel recognized that this allowance was explicitly designed to enable a wider range of candidates to stand for, and remain on the Council. The Panel also understood that it has become common practice for local authorities to make this allowance available to members with caring responsibilities - as a way to encourage people who would otherwise find it difficult to become Council members.

It is therefore recommended in the new scheme that:

- # provision continues to be made for members who are responsible for providing care for children or dependant relatives to qualify for a Dependant Carers' Allowance to assist them with the financial cost of paying for care whilst they are attending approved duties
- # the claims for allowance shall be supported by receipts from the carer, specifying the expenditure incurred, with payments to relatives not being admissible
- # the allowance be provided to repay the actual cost of care incurred, up to the following maximum levels:

Childcare - £6 per hour
 Dependant Care - £10 per hour
 Subject to a maximum of 20 hrs per month.

- 6.7 **Travel & Subsistence** – the Panel is required to make recommendations as to the approved duties for which travelling and subsistence allowances are payable. The Regulations set out the categories of duties that may be included in a scheme and the Panel considered that all these categories are relevant and should properly be included in the Council's new scheme of allowances.

With regard to the amount of such allowances the Panel recommends that:

the same rate of travel, mileage and subsistence allowances payable to the Officers for approved duties should be applicable to Members including cycle mileage, car sharing and conference arrangements.

The adoption of this recommendation removes the need for the Panel to continually review these rates as they are updated nationally at periodic intervals.

- 6.8 **Submission of Claims** – Claims for Dependant Carers' Allowance and Travel & Subsistence Allowance should be made within two months of being incurred.

7 Concluding Observations

- 7.1 **Continuing high level of SRAs** – Past review exercises have drawn attention to the high level of SRAs included within the current Council Members' Allowances Scheme. Even with the reduction of 3 SRA posts as a result of the new Scrutiny Review arrangements, the current position is that 64% of Council Members receive special responsibility allowances.

Whilst the Regulations do not limit the number of special responsibility allowances within any local authority, the Guidance notes on Members' Allowances state that, in normal circumstances, it would not expect the number of Councillors receiving special responsibility allowances to exceed more than 50% of the Council membership.

Clearly, different Councils have different constitutional and political management arrangements and to a greater or lesser extent the actual constitutional structure adopted will determine the number of SRAs. The Panel is not unsympathetic to Stevenage's extensive policy and operational workload as a 'third generation' new town in Hertfordshire facing a step change in its profile and character. Yet SRAs, by definition, are *special* and the Panel stresses again the importance of the principle of limiting, as a matter of good practice, the proportion of Councillors entitled to SRAs.

Strictly speaking, it is not for the Panel to determine or comment on the Council's Management structure, but in reflecting on this issue thought that the recent streamlining of the Council's Senior Management Board (SMB) could be mirrored by a smaller Executive. This could be achieved by grouping or combining responsibility for certain of the portfolio areas. An additional advantage would be forthcoming as it would free up senior Council Members to provide support and their experience & expertise in other areas of the Council's activity

Also, subsequent experience of the operation of the new Scrutiny arrangements might result in further SRA reduction and the Lead Member position on the SBC/HCC Highways Joint Member Panel could be considered as a "career enhancement" opportunity rather than one that receives a special responsibility allowance.

It is therefore recommended that:

The question of a reduction in the number of SRAs should be addressed over the period of the new Scheme, such that by the end of the period the 50% guidance figure is not exceeded.

- 7.2 **Performance, Accountability & Transparency** – The last major review of the Members' Allowances Scheme in November 2003 considered the question of accountability and the exercise of control of the allowances awarded in order to avoid any potential risk of abuse. Various options were discussed including the publication of Members' attendance records at council meetings, annual reports, role profiles, self & peer review activity and even an electorate contract.

It was recommended that: “in acknowledging the call for greater accountability in both the public and private sectors, the Council actively promotes the phased introduction of a system of assessing and developing the effectiveness of members and those undertaking roles of special responsibility”

Notwithstanding the opportunities already available within SBC's 21st Century Programme, to date it does seem that progress has been rather slow and the Panel is anxious to see the principle of performance, accountability and transparency firmly linked as an integral part of the new Scheme within a broader Member Development Programme.

It is clear that the changing context of local government has implications for all members. Some of these challenges are:

- The complexity and uncertainty of elected member roles and their many different arenas;
- different circumstances for different groups of elected members;
- political, economic, social, technological and organisational change and restructuring

The Council has set high standards in the past. It has readily adopted its community responsibilities and works very closely with other statutory authorities, community organisations and industry & commerce to provide a consistent level of high quality services. The Panel was impressed to learn of the findings of a residents' survey, conducted by MORI in 2005:

“85% of residents were satisfied with Stevenage as a place to live in, and 68% of residents were satisfied with the way the Borough Council runs the town”.

The pressure on elected members to maintain and improve performance whilst fulfilling their democratic mandate as community leaders and advocates is considerable and points to the need to better develop the skills and roles of Members through targeted training, support and improved communication both within the organisation and the community.

In its background study the Panel came across examples from other authorities which included performance, accountability and transparency initiatives such as:

- ς Publishing attendance records – with provision for valid absences
- ς Member Statements of Activities – via individual Councillor web pages
- ς Member Role Profiles – making explicit respective roles, duties & responsibilities and competencies expected from Members and Posts

- ς Compact with the Electorate – making explicit the link between allowances received and tasks & duties undertaken
- ς Member Appraisals - Objectives - Mentoring - Peer Reviews
- ς Personal Development Planning (PDPs) – helping Members to update knowledge and acquire new skills
- ς Instituting a Member Development Policy/Programme – comprehensive programme to provide elements for individual PDPs (See example: Leeds City Council in Appendix B and also refer to Medway Council's Member Development Strategy 2007-2011).

Given the scale of the allowances it is felt that there should be greater transparency in the achievements of individual Councillors, Cabinet members, Committee and Sub Committees by publishing, at least, work plans and basic metrics (set by the meeting of Full Council) This transparency should enable Councillors' constituents to view their effectiveness in office.

The Panel therefore recommends that:

the link between performance, accountability & transparency and the new Scheme of Allowances be clearly established and seen as a key part of the approach to enhance public attitudes to local democracy; and

the Council undertakes to develop and put in place an integrated Member Development Programme of appraisal, training and support to increase the effectiveness of Members in their council and community responsibilities.

8 A final word....

In completing its task the Panel recognises and pays tribute to the value of work which Councillors undertake on behalf of the people of Stevenage. Mindful of the sensitivities involved with the setting of remuneration levels, it trusts that Members will welcome and value the logic of the methodology of the new Scheme albeit that there has been some reduction in the size of some of the responsibility allowances.

The Panel was heartened by the responses to the Member Questionnaire regarding a question about the Allowances Scheme. This response was typical of many other similar comments:

“Members’ allowances did not attract me in becoming a Councillor and I doubt if people are attracted to the position of Councillor with financial gain in mind”.

We confirm that the foregoing views are those of the members of the Independent Remuneration Panel and that this Report concludes the assignment allotted to us. We endorse and commend these recommendations to the Borough Council for its consideration.

Michael Banks

Fintan Donohoe

Ian White CBE

August 2007