

Stevenage Borough Council

Members' Allowances

Report of the Independent Panel

Further review of the Special Responsibility Allowance for Chairs of Development and Scrutiny Committees as recommended in the report of December 2011

August 2013

The Members' Allowances scheme for Stevenage Borough Council was last reviewed in 2011. The Panel recommended that the Special Responsibility Allowance for Chairs of Development and Scrutiny Committees should be subject to further review. For this purpose the Independent Panel was reconvened in July 2013 by the Chief Executive.

Membership of the Panel

- ❖ **Stephen Hollingsworth MA FRSA, Management Consultant and Trustee of North Herts Studio School Trust (Panel Chair)**
- ❖ **Nicholas Moss JP, independent person, North Hertfordshire District Council**
- ❖ **Bill Welch ACIS, Former Corporate Director, Stevenage Borough Council**

Terms of Reference

In our report of December 2011 we made the following recommendation with regard to Chairs of Development and Scrutiny Committees:

"On the basis of current responsibility and activity we believe that the appropriate allowance for the posts, as they have been presented to us in evidence, should be reduced to £4000.00. However given the current transitional nature of these roles and on the basis of the Leader's clearly stated aspirations for them we are minded to recommend a temporary reduction to £6000.00. To justify a different recommendation we will need to be clear that these aspirations have been met and we therefore propose a review of this allowance in around a year's time."

At the Annual Council Meeting in May 2013 and following a review of Scrutiny arrangements a new structure was agreed. This new structure is described in detail in section 4 of the Constitutional Issues Report considered at Annual Council on 22 May 2013.

The new structure is a significant change resulting in a reduction of 3 posts eligible for Special Responsibility Allowances. The Panel is pleased to note that this goes a considerable way towards implementing the recommendation in previous reports.

The Panel's task has been to evaluate and to make recommendations on payments within the existing scheme for the four new positions:-

Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Chair of Community Select Committee
Chair of Environment and Economy Select Committee
Chair of Housing Select Committee

Process of the Review

The Panel met on two occasions in July and August. We were provided with background papers and were briefed by Jackie Cansick, Constitutional Services Manager, in July when we decided that the organisation, with respect to these particular roles, had changed such that we should start from scratch and apply the full process that we had applied in 2011. This involved asking for job and role descriptions and giving the opportunity for the post holders to meet us to help gauge the level of personal responsibility, the time commitment and the impact for each of the roles. We also received written comments from Cllr. Parker.

We are grateful to those who wrote to us and to those who met us. Our thanks to Jackie Cansick and to Maureen Nicholson for their support.

We received a very clear statement from the Leader that she wanted the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Select Committees and their individual members to undertake effective scrutiny and review the work of Stevenage Borough Council free from interference and inappropriate pressure. We felt that this was an important statement in relation to the new arrangements which should encourage members and Chairs properly and vigorously to pursue their objectives. We took her statement into account in our consideration of the value of the relevant Chairs in the understandable absence since May of any substantial evidence of their work.

Recommendations

Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

This is a potentially significant post with responsibilities approaching those of an Executive Member. The Committee has three main functions, to scrutinise the Executive, to scrutinise Budget and Policy Framework matters going before Council and act as the Select Committee for the Resources portfolio. To be effective the Chair requires a broad and in-depth understanding of the Council. In addition The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny has statutory duties with regard to urgent business and private matters.

The Panel recommends a Special Responsibility Allowance of £8795.00*

Chairs of Select Committees

The three Select Committees have clearly defined boundaries and within these have potential to have a significant impact on the performance of the Council. When considered and compared with other significant roles the Panel recommends a Special Responsibility Allowance of £5000.00*

*The comparisons that we have made and these recommendations are made in accordance with the scheme recommended from 1st April 2012. They should be adjusted for any cost of living/general awards made since.

Recommended Members Allowances Scheme from April 2012 - Revised from May 2013

Basic allowance – all Councillors		£7,124
Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)		
Scale 1	Leader of the Council	£20,000
Scale 2	Executive Members	£9,795
	Chair of Planning and Development	
Scale 3	Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	£8,795
Scale 4	Chair of Licensing	£7,000
Scale 5	Chairs of Select Committees	£5,000
Scale 6	Chair of Audit	£4,000
	Leader of the Opposition	
Scale 7	Independent/co-opted Person(s)	£1,210