

Meeting: COUNCIL

Portfolio Area: Members' Services

Date: 26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES – REPORT OF INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the report of the Independent Panel on Members' Allowances and in the light of that report approve the Scheme of Allowances for 2020/2021.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the report of the Independent Panel be noted and that findings form the basis of the formal Members' Allowances Scheme and the allowances paid the Mayor and Deputy Mayor.
- 2.2 That in accordance with the comments of the Panel regarding payment of carers' allowances, the scheme be extended to accept payments to relatives who do not live in the same household as the Councillor. In all circumstances receipts must be submitted.
- 2.3 That in the light of the report of the Independent Panel the draft formal Scheme shown at Appendix B to this report be approved for 2020/2021.
- 2.4 That following the recommendation from the Independent Panel allowances be increased in line with future staff pay wards covered by the terms and conditions of the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) once known and as recommended by the Panel. This indexation to apply until 2024 subject to any further Independent Panel reports.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In accordance with the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 before an authority makes or amends a scheme that authority shall have regard to the recommendations made to it by an independent remuneration panel.
- 3.2 The Council's Independent Remuneration Panel currently comprises –

- Marian Hurle BEd, DMS, Former CEO Stevenage Citizens Advice Bureau
- Nicholas Moss OBE JP, Independent Adviser on North Hertfordshire District Council
- Bill Welch ACIS, Former Corporate Director, Stevenage Borough Council

3.3 The last full review of the Stevenage Members' Allowances Scheme by an Independent Panel was reported to Council in February 2016.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 The report of the Panel is attached at Appendix A and the proposed Members' Allowance Scheme can be seen at Appendix B.
- 4.2 The Panel concluded that the remuneration for basic allowances and SRAs continues to be appropriate. It was also recommended that the allowances should continue to be linked to any pay awards applicable to NJC staff.
- 4.3 The Panel recognised that the Council is fulfilling its obligations under the regulations that an SRA should be paid to at least one Member not in a controlling group.
- 4.4 Section 8 b) i) of the report addresses the level of Special Responsibility Allowance paid to the Chair of the Licensing Committee. The Panel have concluded that with effect from 1 April 2020 the level of Special Responsibility Allowance be reduced to £4,382 p.a.
- 4.5 The Panel also considered the role of Minority Group Leader(s) and has recommended that this position should attract a Special Responsibility Allowance £1,500 p.a. (see section 8 a) b) ii) of the report).
- 4.6 A further area of explored by the Panel was allowances that may be claimed for child care and other dependents (Section 8 b) vii) of the report refers). The Panel considered that having these allowances available could help reduce barriers to potential candidates seeking election as a Councillor. The proposed levels of these allowances are –
- Child Care up to a maximum of £11.00 per hour
 - Dependent Care up to a maximum of £25.00 per hour

The Panel noted the current prohibition on payments to relatives and have expressed the view that the Council may wish to reconsider this restriction and perhaps contemplate limiting any restriction to carers living in the same household as the person(s) requiring care. Receipts would still need to be provided.

- 4.8 Reference is made in the report of the Independent Panel to assistance provided to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. It should be noted that these 'allowances' are not included in the formal Members' Allowances Scheme.
- 4.9 In accordance with the regulations, on receipt of the Panel's report the Council has ensured that copies are available for inspection by members of the public at Daneshill House and has placed a public notice in a local newspaper stating that such a recommendations from the Panel have been received; describing the main features of the Panel's recommendations and the recommended amounts for each allowance; stating that copies of the report are available for inspection; and specifying the address of the principal office at which copies are made available.
- 4.10 It is for Council to consider the report of the Panel and agree a Scheme.

5. IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 Funding for the proposed Scheme has been included within the 2020/21 Budget to be considered elsewhere on the agenda for this Council meeting.

5.2 Legal Implications

- 5.2.1 The provisions of the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 have directed the convening of the Independent Panel; its consideration, report and recommendations; and the process of publicising the recommendations
- 5.2.2 In making or revising the Scheme, the Council must have regard to the Panel's report but is not strictly obliged to follow its recommendations, although it would be advisable to have good reasons for not doing so.

APPENDICES

- Appendix A – Report of Independent Remuneration Panel
- Appendix B – Proposed Scheme for 2020/2021

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003