

Report to Member Remuneration Panel

Date of meeting: 30 October 2017

Subject: Members' Allowances Scheme – Annual Review 2018/19

Democratic Services Officer: S. Tautz (01992) 564180

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That the Panel consider the issues set out in this report and agree any recommendations to be made to the Council in connection with the review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2018/19; and**
- (2) That the Panel agree arrangements for the presentation of its report and recommendations with regard to the review of the Members' Allowances Scheme to the Council, at its meeting to be held on 21 December 2017.**

Report:

1. (Director of Governance) As the Panel will be aware, it traditionally commences the annual review of Epping Forest District Council's Members' Allowances Scheme each September, in order to ensure that any recommendations for revision to elements of the Scheme can be considered alongside the preparation of the authority's budget for the following financial year. The current Members' Allowances Scheme, for the 2017/18 municipal year, was adopted by the Council at its meeting on 15 December 2016 and is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

Members' Allowances Scheme

2. In considering the recommendations of the Panel in December 2016, the Council agreed that no change be made to the payment of the full amount of Basic Allowance of £4,300.00 per member per annum to be included in the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2017/18. An increase in Basic Allowance was introduced from 2016/17 in line with the recommendations of the Panel over a number of years, that the authority should implement 100% of the amount of Basic Allowance for each member, rather than the level of 80% previously applied. To date, one member has continued to request that their payment of Basic Allowance remain at the lower level applied by the Council up to the end of the 2015/16 municipal year.
3. As the Panel will be aware, the Council agreed in December 2015 that, from the 2016/17 municipal year, consideration of the amount of Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) applied to the positions of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council be added to the responsibilities of the Remuneration Panel. Whilst no recommendations in this regard were made for 2017/18, the level of such SRA should therefore be considered as part of the Panel's review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2018/19. This element of the Scheme is covered later in this report.
4. As part of the review process for 2018/19, a general invitation has been extended to all elected members on behalf of the Panel, to express any suggestions or concerns with regard to the current operation of the Members' Allowances Scheme. Representations as a result of such invitation have been received from one member (Councillor G.

Chambers) and are attached as Appendix 2. The issues raised in Councillor Chambers' submission are addressed in the following paragraphs of this report, together with the comments of the Director of Governance.

5. The Democratic Services Manager will report to the meeting in connection with any other matters submitted for consideration by the Panel, subsequent to the publication of this agenda.

(a) Independent Members

6. Councillor Chambers has suggested that independent members of the Council's Standards Committee spend a lot of time talking to officers and that the level of SRA currently applied to such members (£250.00pa) should be brought into line with the allowance currently applied to independent members of the Audit and Governance Committee (£500.00pa). Councillor Chambers has also proposed that the allowance applied to members of the Remuneration Panel also be increased to £500.00pa.

In response to this suggestion, the Director of Governance would advise the Panel that the Audit and Governance Committee is scheduled to meet on five occasions during the current municipal year. In comparison, the Standards Committee is currently convened to meet only when there is business to be transacted and has so far met once in the current year, as many standards matters are now handled by the Monitoring Officer. The Remuneration Panel considered the appropriate level of remuneration for the Chairman of the Standards Committee in 2016 and SRA is currently applied on a 'per-meeting' basis (rather than quarterly). The Remuneration Panel itself generally only meets on up to two occasions each year.

(b) Special Responsibility Allowance – Vice-Chairmen of Committees

7. Councillor Chambers has suggested that SRA should be applied to the position of Vice-Chairman, particularly where such members have had to chair a meeting. Councillor Chambers has proposed that this could either be a standard payment or be taken from the allowance for the relevant Chairman when the Vice-Chairman chairs a meeting.

In response to this suggestion, the Director of Governance would remind the Panel that SRA is currently only paid to those Councillors who hold the special responsibilities identified in the Members' Allowances Scheme and is designed to reflect the additional responsibilities of these office holders. The general application of SRA to the Vice-Chairmen of Committees would have implications for the Council's budget for members' allowances. The payment of SRA according to whether the Chairman or Vice-Chairmen actually chaired a particular meeting is clearly possible, although this arrangement would require additional time on the part of officers to process the payment of SRA. In accordance with the application of SRA on other 'per-meeting' arrangements, payment would be made at year-end, rather than on a quarterly basis.

(c) Area Plans Sub-Committees

8. Councillor Chambers has suggested that the SRA applied to the position of Chairman of the Area Plans Sub-Committees should be reviewed, as these can be long and difficult meetings to chair each month.

In response to this suggestion, the Director of Governance would advise the Panel that each of the three Area Plans Sub-Committees currently meet on 12-13 occasions during the municipal year. Although no analysis has been made of the average length of such meetings, from recent experience it has been necessary to bring forward the start time of some meetings to ensure the efficient transaction of business. SRA is currently only paid to those Councillors who hold the special responsibilities identified in the Members' Allowances Scheme and is designed to reflect the additional responsibilities of these office holders, rather than the frequency or duration of

meetings. Any increase in the application of SRA would need to be consistent with other similar additional responsibilities and would have implications for the Council's budget for members' allowances.

(d) Travelling and Subsistence

9. Councillor Chambers has suggested that the process for claiming the reimbursement of travel (car mileage) costs incurred on the Council's business should be reviewed, as he considers this to be a time consuming process. Councillor Chambers has also suggested that the current process for claiming the reimbursement of public transport costs incurred on the business of the authority, should be reviewed, particularly as he considers that the use of 'contactless' methods of payment on the London Underground do not provide evidence of travel and encourage the use of public transport.
10. Councillor Chambers has additionally suggested that the current system for the payment of travel costs should be abandoned and be replaced with a one-off annual average travel allowance linked to actual attendance at meetings, which would generate savings in officer time for the administration of claims.

In response to these suggestions, the Director of Governance would advise that the Council's administrative processes for the reimbursement of travel costs incurred by members are outside the scope of the responsibilities of the Panel.

The use of 'contactless' methods of payment on the London Underground can provide evidence of travel that satisfy the Council's requirements for the validation of claims, when debit/credit cards and 'Oyster' cards are registered for use on services provided by Transport for London. The introduction of an annual average travel allowance linked to actual attendance at meetings would vary according to the number of approved duties attended by each member. Such arrangement would require additional time on the part of officers to process the payment of claims, payment for which would need to be made at year-end, rather than on a quarterly basis.

11. The Panel is requested to consider the representations made by Councillor Chambers.

Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Council - Special Responsibility Allowance

12. As members will recall, the current Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council attended its meeting in July 2017 to assist the Panel to gain an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of these positions, alongside a number of serving past-Chairmen who were able to contribute first-hand experience with regard to the application of SRA.
13. At its last meeting, the Panel requested that the following information be made available to support its review of the level of SRA currently applied to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council:

(a) General information regarding the type and number of events and functions typically attended or supported by the Chairman and/or Vice-Chairman of the Council during a municipal year

Taken over the last ten years, the Chairman of the Council has accepted between 120 and 145 invitations each year (some more and some less). These 'community' engagements are in addition to civic duties such as chairmanship of meetings of the Council (at least seven meetings each year) and the Local Councils Liaison Committee (two meetings each year).

(b) The ‘information pack’ produced for the Chairman for each municipal year

This is attached (Appendix 3) and is intended to clarify the role of the Chairman of the Council as First Citizen of the District.

(c) The views of those serving past-Chairmen of the Council that were unable to attend the meeting, with regard to the current level of Special Responsibility Allowance for the positions of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council

In order to ensure that the Panel captured the views of members in a consistent manner, a short questionnaire was prepared to highlight the issues identified at its last meeting. The questionnaire responses of serving past-Chairmen of the Council are attached (Appendix 4).

14. The Panel is requested to consider the level of SRA to be applied to the positions of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council for 2018/19.

Benchmarking

15. As a result of the implementation of the full amount of Basic Allowance from the commencement of the 2016/17 municipal year, no further benchmarking has been undertaken in respect of the comparable levels of Basic Allowance and SRA amongst other district local authorities. The results of the benchmarking exercise undertaken in September 2015 have been updated to reflect the increase in the level of Basic Allowance and are attached as Appendix 5 to this report for the information of the Panel.

Travelling and Subsistence (Mileage Claims)

16. It has come to light over the course of the last year, that at least one member of the Council does not drive and that their spouse usually drives them to and from the Civic Offices to attend meetings or for other approved duties etc.
17. There is currently no specific provision within the Members’ Allowances Scheme that covers this issue and the Scheme doesn’t state that a member has to have driven themselves to a meeting or other duty in order for a claim to be considered valid. A pragmatic approach has therefore been taken to the reimbursement of mileage claims from the member concerned and these have been honoured, particularly as any claim for taxi travel would be likely to be at a greater cost to the Council.
18. To ensure consistency in the consideration of claims, it is suggested that the following addition be made to Section 5 (Travelling and Subsistence) of the Members’ Allowances Scheme, to be numbered paragraph 5.4:

‘Claims for the payment of business and/or home to office mileage may be made by members that have been driven to the approved duty giving rise to the claim, other than by way of taxi or other form of public transport, subject to the Council’s usual checks and controls and the provision of appropriate VAT receipts’.

19. The Panel is asked to consider this matter.

Recommendations

20. The Panel is requested to consider the issues set out in this report and to agree the general matters to be subject of its recommendations to the Council in connection with the review of the Members’ Allowances Scheme for 2018/19.

21. It is intended that the report of the Panel will be made to the Council at its meeting on 21 December 2017. The Panel is also therefore requested to agree which of its membership will present the report to the Council.