

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Member Remuneration Panel **Date:** 31 October 2019

Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices,
High Street, Epping **Time:** 6.30 - 7.05 pm

Members Present: T Finn, D Jackman

Apologies: S Lye

Officers Present: S Tautz (Democratic Services Manager)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Democratic Services Manager reminded members that there was no appointed chairman of the Panel, as the appointment of a chairman was agreed at each meeting.

RESOLVED:

That T. Finn be elected as Chairman of the Panel for the duration of the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests in any item on the agenda for the meeting were declared by members of the Panel, pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Panel noted its current terms of reference.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 29 November 2018 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

5. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME - ANNUAL REVIEW 2020/21

The Democratic Services Manager reminded the Panel that the annual review of the Members' Allowances Scheme commenced in September each year, in order to ensure that any recommendations for revision to elements of the Scheme could be considered by the time that the Council's budget was approved for the following financial year.

Members noted that, to commence the review process for 2020/21, a general

invitation had been extended to all elected and co-opted members of the Council on behalf of the Panel, to express any suggestions or concerns with regard to the current operation of the allowances scheme. The Democratic Services Manager reported that no representations had been received as a result of such invitation.

Basic Allowance

The Panel was reminded that, at its meeting on 15 December 2016, the Council had agreed the implementation of 100% of the amount of Basic Allowance for each member with effect from the commencement of the 2016/17 municipal year, in line with the recommendations of the Panel over a number of years.

The Democratic Services Manager reported that, in considering the recommendations of the Panel in December 2016, the Council had also 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, following an increase in the implementation rate of the Basic Allowance from 2016/17 in line with the recommendations of the Panel that the authority should implement 100% of the amount of Basic Allowance for each member, rather than the level of 80% previously applied.

The Panel considered the findings of an updated benchmarking exercise undertaken amongst comparable local authorities as part of its review of the Members' Allowances Scheme, in order to assess whether an inflationary increase in the level of Basic Allowance, linked to recent local government pay awards, should be considered. However, whilst noting that the Council was currently almost the lowest of the comparator authorities in terms of Basic Allowance, the Panel did not consider it necessary to recommend any changes to the application of Basic Allowance for 2020/21. However, members' considered that it would be appropriate to continue to revisit the application of Basic Allowance as part of the annual review of the Members' Allowances Scheme, notwithstanding that the implementation of any increase would be a matter for the Council to determine and that there remained a continued need for restraint in the setting of the authority's annual budget.

Special Responsibility Allowance

The Panel did not consider that it was necessary to make any changes to the Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) applied to various member positions for 2019/20, as there had been no change in such responsibilities since the review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for the current year. However, the Panel wished to encourage the Council to increase the implementation level of the relevant allowances identified in the Members' Allowances Scheme, in order to achieve the full amount of each allowance as soon as possible.

The Panel was advised that, with effect from the commencement of the 2019/20 municipal year, the Council had adopted a structure of three new overview and scrutiny select committees, replacing the former structure of four select committees. The Democratic Services Manager reported that, as the Members' Allowances Scheme currently provided that an annual SRA of £2,150.00 be applied to the positions of the chairmen of the select committees, the reduction of the overview and scrutiny framework to the three new select committees had therefore generated a saving to the ongoing budget provision for members' allowances.

The Panel requested that it continue to be kept apprised of the Council's intentions with regard to any restructure proposals that directly affected the application of SRA for the specific member roles and responsibilities reflected in the Members'

Allowances Scheme.

The Panel was advised that, although no suggestions or concerns about the current operation of the Members' Allowances Scheme had been received from members, an issue relating to the reimbursement of subsistence expenses for member attendance at conferences etc. had been identified by officers during the current municipal year, which required consideration by the Panel.

The Panel was reminded that the Members' Allowances Scheme provided for the reimbursement of subsistence expenses in relation to member attendance at conferences etc., subject to the prior approval of the conference etc. as an 'approved duty' by the Council, the Cabinet, an appropriate committee, or the Leader or Deputy Leader of the Council in all cases. The Democratic Services Manager reported that, in a recent situation concerning the potential attendance at a conference by a co-opted member of the Audit and Governance Committee, it had not been possible to secure confirmation of such attendance as an approved duty in accordance with the requirements of the Members' Allowances Scheme and the opportunity for attendance at the event had unfortunately been lost. The Panel was advised that, in such circumstances, it was not always possible to secure confirmation of an approved duty from the Council, the Cabinet, or the appropriate committee, and that it might be sensible for the determination of an event as an approved duty to also be able to be made by the chairman of the appropriate committee. The Democratic Services Manager indicated that, whilst such approach could be made to the Leader or Deputy Leader of the Council, this was considered to be a somewhat onerous alternative and suggested that the addition of the chairman of the appropriate committee as an additional level of approval for the determination of conference-related approved duties would be sensible for the effective management of relevant business activity.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the following recommendations be made to the Council at its meeting on 17 December 2019, in connection with the review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2020/21:

Basic Allowance

- (a) That, for the 2020/21 municipal year, no change be made to the level of Basic Allowance of £4,300.00 per member per annum, currently included in the Council's Members' Allowances Scheme;

Special Responsibility Allowance

- (b) That for the 2020/21 municipal year, no change be made to the application or implementation of the Special Responsibility Allowances currently included in the Members' Allowances Scheme;
- (c) That the Council be encouraged to increase the implementation level of Special Responsibility Allowance applied to the responsibilities identified in the Members' Allowances Scheme, in order to achieve the full amount of each allowance as soon as possible;

Revised Scheme and Guidance

- (d) That the addition of the chairman of the appropriate committee as an additional level of approval for the determination of approved duties for the reimbursement of subsistence expenses in relation to member attendance at conferences etc., be agreed;
 - (e) That, subject to the above recommendations and other administrative matters set out in the report considered by the Panel, the Members' Allowances Scheme and Guidance for 2020/21 be adopted and implemented with effect from 25 May 2020;
 - (f) That the Statement of Implementation of the Special Responsibility Allowances set out in the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2020/21, be agreed;
- (2) That the Council be requested to continue to keep the Panel apprised of any future restructure proposals that directly affect the application of Special Responsibility Allowance for the specific member roles and responsibilities currently reflected in the Members' Allowances Scheme; and
- (3) That the report of the Panel be presented to the Council by one of its membership to be determined.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Democratic Services Manager reported that there were no additional items of business for consideration at the meeting.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Panel was advised that it was not currently necessary to make arrangements for a further meeting to be held during the municipal year.

CHAIRMAN