

Date: 16 November 2011

Our ref: PU/IW/CL

Your ref:

The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP
Secretary of State for Communities and
Local Government
Department for Communities and
Local Government
Eland House
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Dear Secretary of State

Councillors' Remuneration

The Epping Forest District Council passed the following resolutions at its meeting on 1 November 2011:

"That this Council calls on the Government, through the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to amend the rules on Councillors remuneration in order that:

- (a) Potential candidates who are in receipt of State Benefits are able to seek election without placing those State Benefits at risk if elected; and
- (b) Remuneration is based on a combination of attendance and basic allowance."

This motion attracted cross-party support within the Council and some of the points made in debate are outlined below:

Benefits Entitlement

Councillors from different political parties made reference to past experience in relation to identifying suitable candidates for elections who subsequently had to withdraw because the effect of the allowances they would receive when in office and which would adversely affect their entitlement to benefit payments.

Members commented on the increasing difficulty of finding suitable candidates for elections and the number of uncontested elections which is already common among Parish Councils and could happen at District Council level also. Many members expressed the view that it is important that there are no financial barriers for someone who is otherwise well suited to being a candidate which prevents them from standing for election.

Members also commented that if financial considerations began to influence the candidates who stand for election, democracy will be the poorer.

Remuneration Schemes

Currently, the Council Remuneration Schemes may not include provision for payments to Councillors based on attendance at meetings. The debate drew attention to the fact that this had not always been the case and was a system which had been disbanded in the year 2000.

The debate emphasised that many members feel that the basic allowance is a useful means of recognising the time and effort members put into their constituency and other duties outside the context of formal meetings. Members were of the opinion that there is a clear expectation by local residents that the duties of a Councillor include those in the Council Chamber where decisions are actually made. The Council's view is that this role is better recognised through an attendance based system.

The motion is suggesting that there should be greater freedom for local authorities to include a combination of basic and attendance allowances in their remuneration schemes. The Council will continue to be advised by its local Remuneration Panel about how such a scheme should operate but Councillors were strongly of the view that many members attend meetings over and above those which they strictly have to attend and this commitment and contribution must be recognised.

To summarise therefore, the Council is seeking consideration to be given by the Government to the issue of benefit payments in respect of successful candidates for election and to more freedom for local authorities to introduce attendance allowances if this is the local preference.

The Council hopes that you can use your good offices to facilitate consideration of these issues.

Yours sincerely



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Assistant to the Chief Executive