

Report to Remuneration Panel

Date of meeting: 29 November 2018

Subject: Members' Allowances Scheme – Annual Review 2019/20

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 its review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2019/20;**
- (2) **That the award of Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairman of the Staff Appeals Panel be removed from the Members' Allowances Scheme from the 2019/20 municipal year; and**
- (3) **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 20 December 2018.**

Report:

1. As the Panel will be aware, it undertakes a review of Epping Forest District Council's Members' Allowances Scheme each year, 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 2018/19 municipal year, was adopted by the Council at its meeting on 21 December 2017 and is attached as an appendix to a previous item on this agenda.

Members' Allowances Scheme

2. In considering the recommendations of the Panel in December 2017, 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 2018/19. An increase in Basic Allowance was introduced from 2016/17 in line with the recommendations of the Panel over several years, that the authority should implement 100% of the amount of Basic Allowance for each member, rather than the level of 80% previously applied. For 2018/19, 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 2018/19, the level of such SRA should therefore be considered as part of the Panel's review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2019/20. This element of the Scheme is covered later in this report.
4. As part of the review process for 2019/20, a general invitation was extended to all elected members on behalf of the Panel, to express any suggestions or concerns about the current operation of the Members' Allowances Scheme. Representations arising from such invitation have been received from one member (Councillor R. Brookes) and

are attached as Appendix 1 to this report. The issues raised in Councillor Brookes' submission are addressed in the following paragraphs of this report, together with the comments of the Service Director (Governance and Member Services).

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) Group Leaders

6. Councillor Brookes has suggested that Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) should be made to the leaders of the constituted political groups on the Council, to recognise the time commitment required of Group Leaders. In support of her submission, Councillor Brookes has suggested that two particular Group Leaders (Councillor J. M. Whitehouse (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) and Councillor C. P. Pond (Leader of the Loughton Residents Association Group)) have given a lot of extra time on panels and local plan workshops etc. and rarely miss meetings. Councillor Brookes considers that such commitment should be acknowledged by way of the award of annual SRA.

In response to this suggestion, the Service Director (Governance and Member Services would advise the Panel that Group Leader appointments are made by the constituted political groups and not by the Council and that Group Leaders have no formal role or responsibility within the authority. Formal meetings of Group Leaders, as a consultative body, were held during the period in which the Council had no overall political control, but are not currently held. The Group Leaders and Deputy Group Leaders are members of the Appointments Panel, which makes recommendations to the Council each year on nominations for appointment to committees etc. from the political groups and non-affiliated members and can claim normal travelling expenses for attendance at meetings of the panel, which are normally held on a maximum of two occasions in each municipal year.

It should be noted that some local authorities do award annual SRA to Group Leaders or the leaders of minority political groups. The results of the benchmarking exercise undertaken in September 2015 have been updated to reflect the annual SRA for Group Leaders (where awarded) and is attached as Appendix 2 to this report for the information of the Panel. In some instances, those authorities that award SRA to Group Leaders, appear to do so on the basis of the application of SRA to a single 'opposition' Group Leader, rather than the leader of each political group. Additionally, some authorities Only apply SRA to Group Leaders who do not form part of the administration.

The current political composition of Epping Forest District Council is as follows:

Conservative Group: 39 members;

Loughton Residents Association Group: 13 members;

Green Party Group: 2 members;

Liberal Democrat Group: 2 members; and

Independent councillors not affiliated to a political group: 2 members.

The Panel has previously agreed (June 2011) that no steps be taken to introduce a supplement to the Basic Allowance to be paid to Councillors attending a specified number of meetings, in view of the difficulty involved in drawing up a workable scheme that can be monitored efficiently.

(b) Special Responsibility Allowance - Staff Appeals Panel

7. At its meeting in September 2018, the Council adopted a new Staff Appeals Procedure Policy, which has resulted in the cessation of the operation of the Staff Appeals Panel.

8. The Members' Allowances Scheme currently provides for the award of Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) of £110.00 to be made to the Chairman of the Staff Appeals Panel for every meeting held during each municipal year. As a result of the cessation of the operation of the Staff Appeals Panel, such SRA should be removed from the Members' Allowances Scheme from 2019/20.

Benchmarking

9. Following the implementation of the full amount of Basic Allowance from 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 (other than in respect of the proposed SRA for Group Leaders) has been undertaken. If the Panel wishes the benchmarking exercise to be fully updated, this can be considered at a future meeting.
10. The results of the benchmarking exercise undertaken in September 2015 are attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

Recommendations

11. 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 2019/20.
12. It is intended that the report of the Panel will be made to the Council at its meeting on 20 December 2018. The Panel is also therefore requested to agree which of its membership will present the report to the Council.