

Report to Remuneration Panel

Date of meeting: 31 October 2019

Subject: Members' Allowances Scheme – Annual Review 2020/21

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 2020/21; 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 17 December 2019.**

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 2019/20 municipal year, was adopted by the Council at its meeting on 20 December 2018 and is attached as an appendix to this report.

Members' Allowances Scheme

2. In considering the recommendations of the Panel in December 2018, 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.
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 2019/20, the level of such SRA should therefore be considered as part of the Panel's review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2020/21.
4. As part of the review process for 2020/21, a general invitation was extended to all members of the Council on behalf of the Panel, to express any suggestions or concerns about the current operation of the Members' Allowances Scheme. At the time of the preparation of this report, no representations arising from such invitation have been received from members, although 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 the agenda for this meeting.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Restructure

5. At its meeting on 29 November 2018, the Panel was advised that the Council would shortly be considering options for the review of the existing framework of its overview and scrutiny select committees. At that time, the Panel considered that any reduction in the number of select committees would have the effect of generating savings to the current budget provision for members' allowances and could present opportunities to progress the application of the full level of SRA previously agreed by the Council. The Panel therefore requested that it be kept apprised of the Council's intentions with regard to any restructure proposals that directly affected the application of SRA for specific member roles and responsibilities reflected in the Members' Allowances Scheme.
6. The Panel is advised that, with effect from the commencement of the 2019/20 municipal year, the Council adopted a structure of three new overview and scrutiny select committees, replacing the former structure of four select committees. The new select committees are:

Stronger Communities Select Committee;
Stronger Council Select Committee; and
Stronger Place Select Committee.
7. The current Members' Allowances Scheme provides 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 has therefore generated a saving to the current budget provision for members' allowances.

Other Matters

8. Although no suggestions or concerns about the current operation of the Members' Allowances Scheme have been received from members, the following issue for consideration by the Panel has been identified by officers during the current municipal year, which is addressed in the following paragraphs of this report.

(a) Subsistence Expenses - Conferences

9. The Members' Allowances Scheme currently provides 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.
10. In a recent situation concerning the potential attendance at a conference event by a co-opted independent member of the Audit and Governance Committee, it was unfortunately not possible to secure confirmation of the members' attendance as an approved duty in accordance with the requirements of the Members' Allowances Scheme and the opportunity for attendance at the conference event was unfortunately lost.
11. As, in such circumstances, it is not always possible (due to the scheduling of meetings) to secure confirmation of an approved duty from the Council, the Cabinet, or the appropriate committee, it is suggested 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.
12. Whilst such approach can be made to the Leader or Deputy Leader of the Council, this is considered to be a somewhat onerous alternative and it is 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.

Benchmarking

13. At its meeting on 29 November 2018, the Panel requested that a comprehensive benchmarking exercise amongst comparable local authorities be undertaken as part of the Panel's review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 200/21, in order to assess whether an inflationary increase in the level of Basic Allowance should be considered;
14. The results of such benchmarking exercise are currently being prepared and will be circulated at the meeting of the Panel.

Recommendations

15. 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 2020/21.
16. It is intended that the report of the Panel will be made to the Council at its meeting on 17 December 2019. The Panel is also therefore requested to agree which of its membership will present the report to the Council.