

REPORT OF: THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

TO: COUNCIL FORUM

ON: 27th June 2013

REVIEW OF THE MEMBERS ALLOWANCE SCHEME 2013/14

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To review the current Members Allowance Scheme in the light of changes made to the Constitution at the last meeting of Annual Council; the resolution to refresh the Independent Remuneration Panel; and for that Panel to make proposals for consideration by Council Forum on the Members Allowances scheme for 2013/14.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Current arrangements – no proposed changes to

1. The basic allowance of £5,392.80, other than the annual up-rating in line with any agreed NJC staff pay award as set out in the Constitution.
2. Mileage expenses arrangements.
3. Providing an IT equipment package (e.g. laptop and printer) refreshed in line with Council policy to cover equipment needs and meet the Council's data protection, information governance and security standards.
4. Providing IT consumables such as printer paper and ink cartridges via democratic services.
5. The broadband allowance of up to £17.99 per month.

Other allowances – recommended changes:

Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA)

Other Local Authority's' arrangements: A number of neighbouring authorities surveyed only pay one SRA to elected members, irrespective of how many responsibilities they may hold. This would mean that elected member A would only receive one payment (the highest), even though s/he holds three special responsibilities.

Recommendations:

1. Agree that only one SRA will be paid to elected members (where applicable) – during 2012/13 this would have achieved a saving of £9,150.

2. Audit Committee:
 - Agree to the removal of the SRA paid to the Chair and Vice Chair, saving £1,558
 - Agree that, from the 2013/14 municipal year onwards, one of the Lead Members for Resources takes the role of Chair of Audit Committee.

3. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee (renamed)
 - Note the renaming of the Committee and
 - The Chair payment of £2,599.20 and Vice Chair payment of £520.20 in line with SRA payments to other Scrutiny Committees.

4. Health and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee (renamed)
 - Note the renaming of the Committee and
 - The Chair payment of £2,599.20 and Vice Chair payment of £520.20 in line with SRA payments to other Scrutiny Committees.

5. Agree SRA's for political Group Leaders and deputies in accordance with the following principles:

Controlling Group	Leader and 2 x deputy leader
Main Opposition Group	Leader and if hold $\geq 20\%$ seats (i.e. 13 or more), 1 x deputy leader
Minor Opposition Group	Leader
Any other group	None

6. Agree to a maximum of 8 opposition spokespersons, reduced to 7 where there is an opposition deputy leader (who would also be the opposition spokesperson for one of the portfolios), to form the shadow board of 9 including the main opposition leader, saving £2,598

7. Agree that the relevant opposition spokespersons (Shadow Executive members) also fulfil the opposition spokesperson role for Planning and Highways and Licensing Committees, saving £1,352

Total estimated saving £14,658

Car parking

Current arrangements: All elected members are entitled to receive a free Mall parking permit to be used when travelling on Council purposes, however a number of members do request reimbursement for parking charges for street parking outside the Town Hall instead.

Recommendations:

1. Continue to provide a Mall parking permit.
2. No other reimbursement to members for any other parking charges within the Borough.
3. Parking charges will be reimbursed where incurred in respect of approved duties outside the Borough.

Mobile phones

Current arrangements: All Executive Board and Shadow Board members are entitled to an appropriate smart phone with secure e-mail supplied by the Council. All other elected members have the option of receiving a basic mobile handset. There were 16 members in 2011/12 who retained their own handsets and phone numbers, and they receive £14 per month towards their mobile phone bill. Where a Council phone is issued, the mobile phone bills are paid by the Council in full.

Recommendations:

1. Continue to provide a smart phone with secure e-mail to Executive and Shadow Board members and the option of a mobile phone handset for all other members.
2. Agree to a monthly cap on mobile phone bills, any costs in excess of the set limit will be claimed back from the following month's basic allowance payment. The monthly cap to be set at £25 for executive members* and £15 for Non-executive members.
3. Continue the payment of £14/month for those members choosing to use their own mobile phones.

**exceptional circumstances (approved in advance) may result in this monthly limit for calls and data usage costs being exceeded such as occasions when executive members are abroad and have requirements related to their roles for international calls and higher than usual data usage costs*

Subsistence

Current arrangements: Elected members are able to claim for any subsistence they have needed whilst completing duties on the approved duties list, subsistence may only be claimed when duties (on the approved list) last for longer than 4 hours (as stated on the claim form).

Recommendation

1. Amend the Scheme to state that subsistence expenses can only be claimed for approved duties outside of the authority's boundaries.

Administration and process

Recommendations

1. Officers in Democratic Services are reminded of the principles governing reimbursement of Members expenses and claims which appear to be ineligible should be returned to the Member for clarification or amendment and/or refused if necessary.
2. Any queries and/or disputes regarding reimbursement of expenses should be escalated to a senior officer to review.

3. BACKGROUND

At Annual Council on 9th May 2013 Members resolved that the Chief Executive advertise to refresh the Independent Remuneration Panel; that group leaders agree a series of improved allowances for submission to this Panel; and that the Panel provide Council with a report outlining their recommendations for the 2013/14 scheme as soon as possible.

4. REVIEW OF THE SCHEME

Each of the resolutions from Annual Council on 9th May 2013 has been actioned:

Following the recommendation made at Annual Council on the 9th May, adverts were placed to refresh the Panel. One new Panel member was recruited. Having received a briefing in advance from the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer on their roles, responsibilities, and an outline to legislation, the newly refreshed Panel met on Tuesday 18th June. The Panel was chaired by Ian Woolley, who with Mike Damms and Alan Cotton constituted the Panel quorum. The Panel met with the Chief Executive and the Scrutiny Manager.

In welcoming the new Panel, the Chair asked that although the Panel had been refreshed, that further efforts be made to broaden the representation and membership of the Panel for future meetings. The Panel were in agreement with this suggestion.

The Panel considered submissions from each of the Group Leaders which suggested revisions and improvements to the existing scheme for their consideration. Members of the panel also had an outline of the current Members Allowance entitlements at Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and some comparative information of neighbouring local authority arrangements.

5. FINDINGS OF THE PANEL

The Panel found that the current scheme should be amended in the light of the current financial climate and the associated changing priorities within the Council.

There was agreement by the Panel to support each of the proposed recommendations as comprehensively set out under point 2.

Using the report of the Leader of the Council as a template, the Panel carefully considered each of the proposed changes outlined in that report and balanced every proposal against the supporting opinions, counter proposals and comments raised by both the Leader of the Conservative Group and the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group.

There was considerable debate to try and ensure no other viable alternatives had been overlooked, i.e. halving second allowances and percentages thereof for multiple SRAs was discussed at some length, as was the potential to consider Appeal Panel payments to constitute part of the basic allowance and core duty, especially if the Appeal Panels do not meet, meet infrequently or Groups choose not to name Members.

The outcome of the meeting was that the Panel endorsed each of the recommendations outlined under point 2 on the basis of the guidance on Local Authority Allowances, noting the savings and value added the recommendations will make to public expenditure.

Members of the Independent Remuneration Panel:

Ian Woolley (Chair)

Mike Damms

Alan Cotton

27th June 2013

Background Papers:

- The current Members Allowance Scheme
- Meeting papers of the Independent Remuneration Panel held on 18th June 2013 including submissions from Leader of the Labour Group, Leader of the Conservative Group and Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group.

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