



REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL APPOINTED TO REVIEW THE ALLOWANCES PAID TO COUNCILLORS OF READING BOROUGH COUNCIL FOR 2021/2022

FOR SUBMISSION TO COUNCIL ON 23 MARCH 2021

Background

The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 provide for the payment of Allowances to Members of the Council in connection with their work as Councillors. Before the Council can make or amend a scheme of allowances, it should consider the recommendations made in relation to it by an Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP).

The Council, on 13 November 2001, set up an Independent Remuneration Panel to review annually the Council's scheme for Councillor's Allowances. The Local Government (Local Authority Members in England) Regulation 2003, stated that Independent Remuneration Panels established by local authorities should make recommendations for a scheme of allowances to include:

- The amount of basic allowance (BA) to be paid to all Councillors;
- The duties in respect of which Councillors should receive a special responsibility allowance (SRA), and the amount of such an allowance.
- Allowances for the care of children or dependants.

The Independent Remuneration Panel

The Remuneration Panel's current membership is as follows:

- Francis Connolly - member with experience of the local voluntary sector and local business
- Lady Audrey Durant - member with experience of the local voluntary sector
- Linda Fort - member with experience of the local media
- Mick Pollek - member with experience of the local trade union movement

The Panel was supported by the following council officers:

- Michael Popham (Democratic Services Manager)
- Jenny Hazell (Committee Services)

Background

In 2019/20 the Panel undertook a full review of the scheme. As part of that review, the Panel recommended that the BA and the SRAs should be increased at the beginning of each new

financial year in accordance with the Local Government Pay Settlement (LGPS). It also recommended that the carers allowance, which is available to councillors to cover the cost of looking after dependants, whilst they are undertaking approved duties on behalf of the Council, should be increased in line with the 'Real Living Wage' to £9.30. The review was reported to Council on 25 June 2019 when it accepted that recommendation. The new scheme came into effect on 1 October 2019.

In 2020 the BA and SRAs were increased in line with the LGPS.

Terms of Reference for the Review

In Autumn 2020 the Panel was asked to consider offering payment of a Tier 4 SRA, or payment commensurate with just below Tier 4, to councillors who were members of the following Committees/Panels: Licensing Applications Committee(s), Planning Applications Committee and Fostering/Adoption/ Parenting Panel. This was in recognition of the additional and time-consuming work that was required by councillors who were members of these Committees/Panels.

The Panel met via Microsoft Teams on 25 November 2020. Councillor Brock and Councillor Page also attended the meeting and provided further information on the above meetings to assist the Panel's deliberations.

The Panel was provided with the following information in advance of the meeting:

- A copy of the Council's current Members' Allowance Scheme
- South East Employers Members' Allowances Survey 2019-2020
- The remuneration of Councillors in London 2018 - report of the independent panel
- A spreadsheet showing the allowances payable to each Reading Borough Councillor for 2019-20

The Panel then had an initial discussion about the proposal. It noted the difficulties in getting a wider pool of councillors to serve on committees such as Licensing, Fostering/Adoption/ Parenting Panel. It was also informed that the paperwork for meetings such as the Licensing Committee and the Fostering Panel was high, necessitating further time to read the material in advance of the meeting. The Panel agreed to seek further information to assist in reaching its final recommendations, including information about the work commitment of these committees and a comparison with other committees.

The Panel met again via Microsoft Teams on 16 December 2020. In advance of the meeting the Panel was provided with a report entitled 'Meeting statistics'. The report listed the number of Planning Applications Committee meetings, Licensing Applications Sub-Committee meetings (1, 2 and 3) and Parenting Panel during the period 1 April 2019 to 30 November 2020, the duration of each of the meetings, the number of reports to each meeting and the total number of pages for the reports. The same data was available for Policy Committee and Traffic Management Sub-Committee.

The report also provided some information on the Adoption Panel - which is currently run by a regional adoption agency called Adopt Thames Valley, in partnership with seven local authorities, including Reading. The Panel was advised that there is currently no Reading councillor representative on this Panel.

Finally, the report provided some information about the Fostering Panel, which had been provided by Councillor Deborah Edwards, current Council representative on the Panel. Councillor Edwards attended the meeting on 16 December 2020 and provided further

information about the work involved on the Fostering Panel. The Panel was informed that the Fostering Panel meetings are scheduled regularly throughout the year with an average attendance of around three meetings every month. The meetings cover either new cases or review of fostering arrangements with up to 3 or 4 cases per meeting. The reports (some 500 pages for a new case) need to be read in advance of the meeting. Councillor Edwards described the training she is required to undertake on a regular basis, and the time commitment involved, as a member of the Fostering Panel. She also answered questions put to her by the Panel about the work of the Licensing Committees, including the extent of the paperwork that needs to be read in advance of the meeting. She then left the meeting.

The Panel considered that the information before it indicated that there was a great deal of time and effort required the Councillor representative on the Fostering Panel in carrying out their statutory duty. In the Panel's view, the time spent reading, preparing for the meeting and the ongoing commitment for regular training is such that a Tier 4 SRA should be paid. The Panel therefore recommends that a Tier 4 SRA should be paid to the Council's representative (currently one) on the Fostering Panel. It also recommends that consideration be given to the Council nominating another representative on the Fostering Panel so that the workload can be shared between two Councillors.

The Panel considered carefully the request for a Tier 4 SRA payment or a payment commensurate with just below Tier 4, to councillors who are members of Licensing Applications Committee(s), Planning Applications Committee and Parenting Panel. The Panel took into account the average length of the meetings held between 1 April 2019 to 30 November 2020, the nature of the meetings, the total number of pages of reports per meeting and the differing responsibilities for councillors attending these meetings. The Panel bore in mind that some of the Licensing Committees are held in the day. While the Panel acknowledged that the work undertaken by these Committees are important, sometimes involving deliberating on matters late into the evening, it did not consider these duties to be sufficiently demanding in terms of time commitment such as to warrant the payment of an SRA. The Panel, in comparing the total number of pages of report per meeting of these committees with that of other committees such as Policy Committee and Traffic Management Sub-Committee, considered that the workload did not appear to be excessive and would fall within the normal expectation of a Councillor's duty, acting in the public interest. Further, while acknowledging the difficulties in securing councillors' attendance at licensing meetings, the Panel did not consider that payment of an SRA should be used to act as an incentive for Councillors to attend the meeting

The Panel did suggest that the possibility of appointing an additional vice-chair to the Licensing Applications Committee, as they had recommended as part of the comprehensive review of allowances in 2019, could be reconsidered by the Council.

The Panel noted that there is currently no Council representative on the Adoption Panel and therefore did not make any recommendations regarding payment of an SRA for this activity.