



REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL APPOINTED TO REVIEW THE ALLOWANCES PAID TO COUNCILLORS OF READING BOROUGH COUNCIL FOR 2025/26

FOR SUBMISSION TO COUNCIL ON 28
JANUARY 2025

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:

- Lady Audrey Durant – member with experience of the local voluntary sector
- Sally Swift - member with experience of the local media
- Jeanette Skeats – member with experience of local politics
- 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)
- Jemma Durkan (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'. 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 and was reviewed in November 2022 after the expiry of its initial four-year term. The scheme was renewed for a further four years from April 2023.

Since the change in approach in 2019, the BA and SRAs have continued to be increased in line with the LGPS and allowances to cover the cost of looking after dependants have risen in line with the 'Real Living Wage' as recommended by the Panel.

Recommendations

The Panel met via Microsoft Teams on 8 October 2024, in person on 12 November 2024 and 10 December 2024, and via Teams on 18 December 2024.

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

- The previous Councillors' Allowances Scheme report, which had been considered by Council on 30 January 2024 and extract from the Minutes of that meeting (Minute 38 refers).
- The Monitoring Officer's statement to Council at its Annual Meeting 22 May 2024.
- South-East Employers Members' Allowances Survey.

Following a request from the Monitoring Officer, the Panel met with Group Leaders and Green Group members to discuss the Allowance Scheme and specifically the role of councillors, their responsibilities and the work involved as a member of a committee. The Monitoring Officer's reason for this referral had been to seek the Panel's view on an underrepresentation of some political groups on certain key committees. Following these discussions the Panel considered the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) for the Leader, Opposition Leader, Deputy Leader, Lead Councillors, Chairs and Vice-Chairs and concluded that the SRAs reflected the level of responsibility and work involved in those roles. However, the Panel noted that there was an expectation that Leaders of all political groups should be members of Policy Committee, being the main decision making, policy and spending committee of the Council, as part of their Leadership role and associated SRA. The Panel was aware that there was currently no requirement for Group Leaders to be members of Policy Committee. Therefore, the Council could consider whether it wished to specify membership of Policy Committee as a responsibility expected of Group Leaders in the Council's Constitution.

The Panel discussed the current scheme and considered that the existing four-year scheme, which had been introduced in 2023/24 until March 2027, was still 'fit-for-purpose' and should continue predominantly in its current form until March 2027. This would mean that BA and SRAs would continue to increase in line with the LGPS. The Panel noted that as per the previous year the LGPS for this year had included a lump sum settlement, which had been applied to all grades. The Council had increased Councillors' Allowances by 2.5% in 2024/25, which was in line with the increase to other relevant allowances within the scheme. The Panel endorsed this as being an appropriate increase in accordance with the Local Government Pay Settlement for 2024/25. The Panel agreed that in the event there was a lump sum pay award in future years, it would meet to consider potential options for increasing Councillors' allowances. It was noted that the LGPS had not been agreed for 1 April 2025.