

**THE SEVENTH REVIEW OF THE MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME**  
**FULL COUNCIL – 23 OCTOBER 2013**

**332. AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 26 SEPTEMBER 2013**

The Chairman, Councillor Mrs Oakley, presented the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 26 September 2013.

Councillor Mrs Oakley referred Members to the first of a series of recommendations at Minute 273 (The Independent Remuneration Panel's Seventh Review of the Member's Allowances Scheme) and she welcomed members of the Independent Remuneration Panel to the meeting.

Councillor Mrs Oakley on behalf of the Council stated that she wanted to firstly thank the Panel for the time and work that it had dedicated to what had been a complex and time consuming review. Councillor Mrs Oakley confirmed that this had not been without frustration and she referred to the difficulties that the Panel had encountered in terms of the disappointing responses and lack of engagement received from Members. This had been in relation to the questionnaire issued and the opportunities that had been extended to Members to meet with the Panel.

Councillor Mrs Oakley then referred Members to the various recommendations and asked if the recommendations numbered (1), (2) (12) and (13), representing the most change, could be proposed, seconded and debated on separately. This principle was put forward by the Chairman and agreed by the Council.

Councillor Mrs Oakley then formally proposed recommendation (1) which was that the Panel's Option 2 for an increase in the Basic Allowance be accepted. This was to increase the Basic Allowance from £4,920 to £5,143 a year from savings achieved in Special Responsibility Allowances and some of the reduction in IT Allowance (recommendation 13 if approved). Councillor Mrs Oakley then formally proposed recommendation (2) which was that the Basic Allowance continued to be index linked to the annual staff settlement, as agreed in the last review in 2009, and this be a subject for further examination in the next review based on a comparison with other Councils. Both of these recommendations were then seconded by Councillor Clayden.

In debating these recommendations, discussion focused on the IT allowance that was paid to Councillors which was currently £340 per annum. Although it was recommendation (13) that proposed this be reduced to £240 per annum, it was some Members' view that this was very relevant to the debate on recommendation (1). A Member expressed concern over recommendation (13) to reduce this allowance. This was because all Councillors were experiencing the need to purchase more paper to meet the demands of their roles. It was also stated that hardware costs were also increasing and so the proposal to reduce the IT allowance was inappropriate. Councillor Bence stated that with these arguments in mind he proposed to make an amendment to recommendation (1) to read "that Option 1 be accepted as put forward by the Independent Panel to increase the Basic Allowance to £5,055 and the IT Allowance remain unchanged until a funding source can be

identified; and agreement be given to set up a Member IT Working Group to review improved IT provision and identify the funding sources for such provision.” This amendment was seconded by Councillor Edwards.

Various views were expressed from those debating this amendment. Firstly, those speaking against it stated that Option 2 was the most workable and viable and reflected the views that Members had expressed at the Members’ Seminar held to discuss the outcomes of the Panel’s work. Others argued that the recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) had been through a thorough process using evidence gathered and the views that had been expressed by those Members interviewed. These Members stated that the recommendations had been fully debated by the Audit & Governance Committee who had congratulated the Panel on submitting carefully worked out and balanced recommendations. Other Members expressed their views that the price of IT had fallen considerably over the last few years and that it was much easier to procure supplies at a reduced price over the internet and that these prices were continuing to fall. With this in mind it was perfectly reasonable to cut the IT allowance and from the savings achieved from this and some Special Responsibility Allowances to increase the Basic Allowance. On these grounds some Councillors confirmed that they would be voting against the amendment on these grounds.

Those speaking for the amendment stated that the formation of a Member IT Working Group would provide Members with an opportunity to looking properly at the use of IT and that such a review was long overdue and was needed as soon as possible.

Following further discussion, the amendment was then put to the vote and it was declared CARRIED.

Councillor Mrs Oakley then referred Members to the substantive recommendations (1) and (2) and in doing so the IRP received thanks from the Leader of the Labour Group who confirmed that his Group would be voting against any recommendation to increase the Basic Allowance as it was not the right time economically to be increasing any allowances.

Councillor Oppler, as Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, also thanked the Panel for its work. He explained the reasons why he supported the increase in the Basic Allowance which he felt was fair and reasonable and as no increase in allowances had been made since 2009. Councillor Oppler referred to the vast majority of work that was undertaken by Members and that although it was accepted that 30% was given on a voluntary basis, it was still appropriate for the proposed increase to take place.

Other Councillors spoke in support for the Basic Allowance to be continued to be index linked to the annual staff settlement which this year had been 1%.

The Council then

RESOLVED – That

- (1) Option 1 be accepted as put forward by the Independent Panel to increase the Basic Allowance to £5,055 and the IT Allowance remain unchanged until a funding source can be identified; and agreement be given to set up a Member IT Working Group to review improved IT provision and identify the funding sources for such provision; (Paragraph 6.11);
- (2) the Basic Allowance continues to be index linked to the annual staff pay settlement, as agreed in the last review in 2009, and this be a subject for further examination in the next review based on a comparison with other Councils. (Paragraph 6.13);

Councillor Mrs Oakley then formally proposed recommendations (3) to (11) which were seconded by Councillor Clayden.

The Council

RESOLVED – That

- (3) the Special Responsibility Allowance payable to the Chairman of the Council and the Vice-Chairman of the Council remains unchanged at £8,320 and £2,745. (Paragraph 7.2);
- (4) the Special Responsibility Allowance payable to the Leader of the Council remains unchanged at £14,196 and there be no change to the Special Responsibility Allowance payable to the Deputy Leader of the Council at £10,400. (Paragraph 7.3);
- (5) the Special Responsibility Allowance payable to Cabinet Members remains unchanged at £8,320. (Paragraph 7.4);
- (6) the Special Responsibility Allowance payable to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Development Control Committee remains unchanged at £6,000 and £1,980 and that the Special Responsibility Allowance payable to Members of the Development Control Committee remains unchanged at £750. (Paragraph 7.6);
- (7) the Special Responsibility Allowance payable to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Licensing and Enforcement/Licensing Committee be decreased from £5,550 to £4,000 and £1,832 to £1,200. The Special Responsibility Allowance payable to Members of the Licensing and Enforcement/Licensing Committee remains unchanged at £250. (Paragraph 7.7);
- (8) the Special Responsibility Allowance payable to the Chairman of the Standards Committee remains unchanged at £1,500 and the meeting allowance for Independent Persons of the Committee remains unchanged at £50 per meeting. (Paragraph 7.8);

- (9) the Special Responsibility Allowance payable to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Audit & Governance Committee remains unchanged at £3,750 and £1,238. (Paragraph 7.9);
- (10) the Special Responsibility payable to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Overview Select Committee remains unchanged on the basis of the previous level for Scrutiny Chairman and Vice-Chairman at £4,870 and £1,607. (Paragraph 7.11);
- (11) the Special Responsibility Allowance paid to Appeals Panel Members should remain at £50 per half day meeting. (Paragraph 7.12);

Councillor Mrs Oakley then referred Members to recommendation (12) which proposed that the Special Responsibility Allowance paid to the Leader of the opposition be increased from £3,917 to £5,000. Councillor Mrs Oakley outlined that this recommendation recognised the need to accept the important role of the Opposition within the Council. Councillor Mrs Oakley then proposed this recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Clayden.

Discussion on this item presented a range of views with the main concern expressed that the increased proposed represented a 27% increase in allowance for just one Council Member. Councillor Bence confirmed that he disagreed with this recommendation and would therefore be proposing an amendment to read “the Special Responsibility Allowance paid to the Leader of the Opposition be increased by the same percentage granted to the Leader of the Council”. This amendment was seconded by Councillor Edwards.

Those speaking against this amendment felt that it made a mockery of the review undertaken by the IRP especially as the recommendation did not change the overall Members’ Allowances total budget which would remain the same. The importance of having effective opposition was again emphasised and that this was the principle behind this recommendation. Some Members felt that the amendment would in effect strangle the work of the opposition within the Council. Members were also reminded of the outcome of the last review dating back to 2009 where amendments had been made to the then Panel’s recommendations on the Special Responsibility Allowance to be paid to the Opposition. It was felt that recommendation (13) attempted to correct this change and to reflect the increased workload of the Leader of the Opposition.

Members speaking in support of the amendment outlined that it was not a personal attack on the person in post but the role in general. These Members confirmed their view that the amendment reflected a fair level of payment.

Following further discussion, voting on the amendment then took place and it was declared CARRIED.

Councillor Mrs Oakley then returned to the substantive recommendation (12) and the Council

## RESOLVED

- (12) the Special Responsibility Allowance paid to the Leader of the Opposition be increased by the same percentage granted to the Leader of the Council

Councillor Mrs Oakley then referred Members to the remaining recommendations (13 to 20). She reminded Members that as recommendation (13) to reduce the IT allowance had not been supported this would remain unchanged. Councillor Mrs Oakley therefore proposed the remaining recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Clayden.

The Council

## RESOLVED – That

- (13) the IT Allowance remains unchanged at £340 per annum; (Paragraph 8.0);
- (14) the meeting allowance paid to Co-opted Members, Independent Persons and Witnesses to Committees and Panels remains unchanged at £50 per meeting attended. (Paragraph 9.0);
- (15) the Carers Allowance of £10 per hour remains unchanged. (Paragraph 10.0);
- (16) the arrangements for the Parish Basic Allowance, based on this being 10% of the District Council Members' Basic Allowance, remain unchanged. (Paragraph 11.0);
- (17) special responsibility one-off payments continues to be paid on an outline basis of £50 per half day for one-off intensive projects, subject to the decision to pay payments being delegated to the Chief Executive of the Council on the advice of the Head of Democratic Services. (Paragraph 12.0);
- (18) the arrangements for travel and subsistence expenses remain unchanged. (Paragraph 13.0);
- (19) the arrangements for pensions for Members remain unchanged. (Paragraph 14); and
- (20) the new allowances scheme to come into effect from 1 November 2013.

Councillors Mrs Oakley stated that there was a need to propose an additional recommendation (21) to read "that the Head of Legal and Administration be given authority to make any consequential changes to the Council's Constitution. This would avoid the need for any further changes to be considered by the Constitutional

Review Task and Finish Working Party. Councillor Mrs Oakley then proposed this additional recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Clayden.

The Council

RESOLVED

- (21) that authority be given to the Head of Legal and Administration to make any consequential changes to the Council's Constitution.