

Report of Head of Legal and Democratic

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To: COUNCIL

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Councillors' allowances scheme

Recommendations

That Council:

1. considers the recommendations of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel;
2. authorises the head of legal and democratic to finalise a councillors' allowances scheme based on the decision in 1 and to make any consequential amendments to the constitution;
3. agrees that the revised scheme should apply from 1 April 2022;
4. agrees whether any special responsibility allowances should be backdated to April 2021.

Purpose of Report

1. To consider the report and the recommendations of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel (the panel) on a revised councillors' allowances scheme and to agree a scheme of allowances to run from 1 April 2022.

Background

2. The Local Government Act 2000 and Local Government (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 require the council to make a scheme of allowances payable to members and to make payments only in accordance with the adopted scheme. An Independent Remuneration Panel must be established to review the councillors' allowances scheme and who will make recommendations on the level of allowances to be paid. Council is responsible for setting the scheme of

allowances and it must have regard to, but is not bound by, the panel's recommendations. The IRP has previously considered allowances and prepared a report dated December 2020.

3. At its meeting on 10 February 2021 Council considered the report of the IRP and resolved to:
 1. thank the Independent Remuneration Panel for its work and its report;
 2. retain for the financial year 2021/22 the existing councillors' allowances scheme agreed by Council at its meeting on 17 May 2017 subject to
 - a. the continuation of an increase in basic and special responsibility allowances from 1 April 2021 at the same rate as that applied to staff salaries;
 - b. the inclusion of a special responsibility allowance for the Chair of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee at the same rate as the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee backdated to 1 April 2020;
 3. defer consideration of the Independent Remuneration Panel's other recommendations until later in 2021 but ahead of the budget setting process for 2022/23.

Panel report

4. The recommendations of the panel, which met three times during November 2020, are set out in the attached report at appendix 1. The report details the reasons and rationale for the recommendations made by the panel.
5. Since the publication of the report the IRP was requested to review the recommendations in respect of the SRA for the Chair of the Joint Audit and Governance Committee and the Leader of the Main Opposition Group. In respect of the Chair of the Joint Audit and Governance Committee SRA, the IRP agreed to place the role in the same tier as that of the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee and Chair of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee. The role fulfils a key regulatory function and requires an independent attitude and the ability to challenge officers and Cabinet if required. There is a requirement for a broad understanding of financial matters, risk control and management framework, corporate governance issues in dealing with internal and external audit reports, statement of accounts and annual governance processes. In addition, the role fulfils a key external regulatory function.
6. In respect of the SRA for the Leader of the Main Opposition Group, the IRP recommends that the SRA should be increased from 10% to 25% of the Leader of the council SRA, in the same tier as the SRA for the Chair of the council, to reflect that the position fulfils an important time-consuming role providing challenge to the administration and fulfils a position enshrined in the 2003 Regs. The IRP further agreed that the SRA should only be payable if the group comprised at least 8 councillors (20% of the total membership).

7. The recommended allowances are summarised in the table below:

	CURRENT ALLOWANCES £	RECOMMENDATIONS £	RATIONALE & METHODOLOGY
Basic Allowance	5,186	£5,585	2017 formula
Leader of The Council	20,741	22,340	4 x Basic Allowance
Deputy Leader	Was 70% of Leader- 14,519	13,404	60% of Leader
Cabinet Members	10,369	11,170	50% of Leader
Chair of Planning Committee	6,223	6,702	30% of Leader
Chair of Council	5,186	5,585	25% of Leader
Vice Chair of Planning Committee	3,111	3,351	50% of Chair of Planning Committee
Chair of Scrutiny Committee	3,111	3,351	15% of Leader
Chair of Climate Emergency Advisory Committee	3,111	3,351	15% of Leader
Leader of Main Opposition Group	2,074	5,585¹	25% of Leader
Vice Chair of Scrutiny Committee	No allowance	No allowance	No change
Vice Chair of Council	1,557	1,676	30% of Chair of Council
Chair of General Licensing Committee	2,074	1,676	7.5% of Leader
Chair of Audit and Governance Committee	1,557	3,351	15% of Leader
Chair of the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee	1,557	1,676	7.5% of Leader

¹ Payable if the Political Group has at least 20% of the total Council Members (South Oxfordshire District Council 7 group members, Vale of White Horse District Council 8 members).

8. The IRP recommends the continuation of provisions in the current allowances scheme for the payment of a travel allowance to co-opted members and independent persons, travel and subsistence for councillors and dependants' carers' allowance (paragraph 4.3 to 4.5 of the panel report).
9. The IRP recommends the introduction of parental leave to support councillors who require parental leave for maternity, paternity or adoption leave (paragraph 4.6 of the panel report).
10. Council is required to approve a councillors' allowance scheme to comply with The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. The options are:-
 - (i) to accept the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel
 - (ii) to reject all or some of the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel and agree alternative allowances if in any cases it does not consider them appropriate.

Financial Implications

11. Any increase in allowances will be the subject of an essential growth bid for the 2022/23 financial year. The 2022/23 base budget includes £193,192 for basic allowance and £124,543 for special responsibility allowances. Adoption of the IRP basic allowance recommendations will cost £212,230 and £139,068 for the special responsibility allowances resulting in an increased budget requirement of £33,563. It is not possible to quantify the financial implications of a parental leave policy, but these are likely to be small and would be met from underspends or the contingency budget.

Legal Implications

12. Any legal implications are set out in the body of the report. There is no legal requirement for the Council to adopt a parental leave policy.

Equality and diversity implications

13. The adoption of a parental leave policy may contribute to increasing the diversity of councillors and make public office more accessible.

Climate and Ecological Emergencies Implications

14. There are no direct climate and ecological implications arising from this report.

Conclusion

15. The Independent Remuneration Panel undertook a review of the councillors' allowances scheme in November 2020. Council considered the recommendations at its meeting on 10 February 2021 and agreed to defer consideration of the recommendations until later in the year, subject to the inclusion of a special

responsibility allowance for the chair of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee and the application of an annual increase to all allowances in accordance with the rate applied to staff salaries. Council is requested to consider the recommendations set out in the report and agree a scheme of allowances to run from 1 April 2022 and consider whether to back date the payment of any special responsibility allowance to 1 April 2021.

Background papers:

None