

Report Of The

**Kirklees Council
Members'
Allowances Independent
Review Panel**

20th November 2008

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1. Panel Membership

The members of the Independent Review Panel are as follows:

Andrew Taylor (Chair)
Ian Brown
Lynn Knowles
Chris West
Fiona Weston

Apologies : Stephen Thornton

Meetings of the panel were held on Friday 3rd October 2008 and Thursday 20th November 2008.

The following officers attended the panel meetings:

Carl Whistlecraft, Assistant Head of Policy and Governance Service
Vanda White, Members Allowances Administrator
Lindsay Foody, Service Administration Manager, Policy & Governance Service
Adrian Johnson, Governance Officer, Policy & Governance Service

2. Terms of Reference

The Panel's terms of reference are:

- a. To advise council on what would be the appropriate level of remuneration for councillors having regard to the:
 - Roles councillors are expected to fulfil.
 - Varying roles of different councillors.
 - Practice elsewhere and other local authorities.
- b. To consider schemes of Members' Allowances for Town and Parish Councils as and when required.
- c. To make recommendations and provide advice to the council on any other issues referred to the Panel by regulation or by the council.
- d. Council retains its power to remove a discredited Panel member.
- e. The Panel can appoint its Chair from amongst its members.

The last meeting of the previous session of the Panel took place on the 22nd January 2008, and its subsequent recommendations were considered by Full Council. At the meeting in January, the Allowances Panel agreed that in light of the evidence they had received along with a number of other factors, it would be timely to undertake a root and branch review of the Allowances

Scheme. It was agreed that the findings of such a review should form the basis of future discussions and recommendations at meetings of the Panel in October and November 2008.

3. Review of The Allowances Scheme

In order to enable the Allowances Panel to undertake a full review of the scheme, detailed research was undertaken over a three month period which involved :

- Desktop research including detailed consideration of the work of the Panel and its report findings over the last nine years. This was used as context for the research paper.
- A full review and revision of the current role profiles and accompanying skills and knowledge framework.
- The provisionally revised role profiles were used as a basis for detailed consideration in interviews with over 30 Councillors many of whom currently hold, and have held, a wide range of roles within the scheme.
- Information from the national context with regards to Councillors' Allowances, including the policy agenda of the current government and the main opposition parties.
- Written evidence from Councillors who were unable to take part in the formal interview process.

The detailed findings of the research were captured in a research paper which was considered by the Panel at their meeting on the 3rd October 2008. The outcomes of these deliberations were used as a basis for further discussions with a cross-section of councillors. Councillor workshops took place at the meeting of the panel on the 20th November 2008. The findings of the Panel and consequent recommendations arising from this process comprise the remainder of this report.

4. Panel Findings and Recommendations

a. The underpinning principles of the allowances scheme.

In light of the evidence received, the Panel believes that the current allowances scheme and the banding structure within it generally works effectively and is fit for purpose. In light of this, the Panel are not minded to recommend any changes to the fundamental architecture of the scheme or the principles on which its development has been based. Another key building block of the allowances scheme (the role profiles and associated skills and knowledge framework) is still recognised as a successful and effective part of the scheme.

During the course of the two meetings, a number of amendments were made to the range of role profiles in light of councillors' comments relating to specific roles.

The Panel has taken on board these comments and recommends that the revised role profiles are agreed and adopted.

b. The Basic Allowance for the Ward Role.

Given that the role of ward councillor has always been the foundation of the scheme, the Panel undertook detailed research and investigation to better understand the ways in which the role had developed since the inception of the scheme over nine years ago. Some of the key findings of that research are:

- That the profile of the role has increased over the last nine years, as have the expectations that local people rightly have of their councillors.
- The role has become more complex because there is now a much greater focus on cross-service and cross-agency working with a range of partners including health, police, transport etc.
- Greater use and reliance on information and communication technologies in communication has raised expectations and increased the volume of case work. The development of Local Area Committees, devolved budgets and the localities agenda are all examples of new and additional challenges for ward councillors.

The Panel recognised that whilst there are clearly allowances issues to be addressed within the context of the above, they felt it also important to draw to the council's attention the need to ensure that effective support arrangements are put in place to ensure that ward councillors can effectively discharge their roles and responsibilities.

The Panel recommends that the council should give some thought to ways in which it could more effectively support the ward role including:

- **The provision of more effective ward and locality based intelligence.**
- **Greater exploration of the ways in which ward based support can be provided, acknowledging that all wards and all ward councillors are different.**
- **Develop more effective links with employers to ensure that councillors in employment are better supported, as are their employers.**

The Panel acknowledged the developing ward role as part of the allowances scheme and

Recommends that from the 1st April 2009 an increase of 2.4% be attached to the basic allowance taking it from £12,272 to £12,566 per year.

c. Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) and Roles

As part of its review, the Panel considered in detail every role within the current allowances scheme that attracted a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA). This involved detailed consideration of the relevant role profiles along with interviews, written evidence and discussion with a range of current SRA. The Panel considered the following issues:

- The extent to which there are too many SRAs within the current scheme.
- The extent to which current positions of special responsibility are placed within the correct bands within the scheme.
- The potential disparity within the scheme between the ward role and the number of SRAs.
- The feasibility of taking the cabinet role out of the scheme in the same way that that of Leader and Deputy Leader of the council has been.

The Panel also considered a number of new roles that were proposed after their last meeting and also considered in detail the current and future plans for Chairs of Local Area Committees within the context of the developing localities agenda.

The Panel felt that change to the scheme should focus on the ward role (see recommendation b above). Furthermore, given that a number of positions of special responsibility were still unclear with regards to their future development (particularly Chairs of Local Area Committees), the Panel was minded to avoid making any significant changes with regards to the banding and allowances within the current scheme.

The Panel therefore recommends no increase in the rate of Special Responsibility Allowances from the 1st April 2009, and that Special Responsibility Allowances remain at the same levels as those set out in the 2008/2009 Members Allowances Scheme.

As part of their consideration of Special Responsibility Allowances the Panel recommends:

- (i) That the role of Chair of Corporate Governance and Audit**

Committee (and associated role profile) attract an allowance payable at band E, £2,454 per year.

- (ii) That the role of a member of the Adoption Panel attracts an allowance at band E1, £1,227 per year.**
- (iii) That the role of a member of the Fostering Panel attracts an allowance payable at band E1, £1,227 per year.**
- (iv) That the role of Independent Chair of the Standards Committee (who are not elected members) attracts an increase in allowance from £2,515 to band C1, £6,138 per year.**
- (v) That Independent Members of Standards Committee receive an allowance of £114 for a meeting lasting over 4 hours or £65 for a meeting lasting less than 4 hours.**

(NOTE: all of the SRAs detailed at (i) – (v) above to be payable with effect from 1 April 2009)

- (vi) That the current arrangements with regards to the abatement of allowances should continue.**

d. Travel and Subsistence

The Panel recommends that travel and subsistence allowances be paid at the national officer rate for duties outside the borough.

e. Dependants' Carers' Allowance

The Panel recommends no increase in the rate of dependants' carers' allowance from the 1st April 2009, and that this allowance remains at the same level as set out in the 2008/2009 Scheme.

5. Date of Next Meeting

The Panel will hold its next meeting on 1st October 2009.