

Report of

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

3 December 2024

Leigh Webb  
Head of Governance  
Civic Centre 3,  
Huddersfield, HD1 2TG  
01484 221000

## **1 Panel Membership**

The Members of the Independent Review Panel are as follows:

Ian Brown (Chair)  
Lynn Knowles  
Fiona Weston

## **2 Terms of Reference**

The Panel's Terms of Reference are:

- (a) To advise the 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) The Council retains its power to remove a discredited Panel Member.
- (e) The Panel can appoint its Chair from amongst its Members.

## **3 Constitutional Issues**

### **(a) Term of Office**

It was agreed that the current Panel membership be retained and that all relevant terms of office be renewed until December 2025.

### **(b) Election of Chair of Independent Review Panel**

Ian Brown was elected Chair of the Independent Review Panel.

## **4 Members' Allowances Independent Review Panel Report**

The report of the Members' Allowances Independent Review Panel, including the Members' Allowances Independent Review Panel's recommendations for the 2025/26 Members' Allowances Schemes can be found at Appendix A.

Report produced on behalf of the Members' Allowances Independent Review Panel by Leigh Webb, Head of Governance, 3 December 2024.

# **MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES INDEPENDENT REVIEW PANEL(MAIRP) REPORT**

**3 December 2024**

## **Background**

In approving the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2024/25 at a meeting of Council on 16 October 2024, it was recommended that the MAIRP be reconvened and asked to consider the following:

- (i) For the 2025/26 Scheme, consider a review of the Role Profiles and SRAs paid to members of Fostering Panel, Adoption Panel and Chair of Corporate Governance and Audit Committee.
- (ii) For the 2025/26 Scheme, consider a review of the political group bandings within the Members' Allowances Scheme.

## **Members Allowances Independent Review Panel Meeting**

The MAIRP met on 3 December to consider the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2025/26 and in addition, received representations from the following Officers and Councillors in relation to:

### **Chair of Corporate Governance and Audit Committee**

Samantha Lawton – Service Director Legal and Commissioning

Martin Dearnley – Head of Risk

Councillor John Taylor – Chair of Corporate Governance and Audit Committee

Councillor James Homewood – Member of Corporate Governance and Audit Committee and previous Chair

### **Political Group Bandings**

Councillor John Taylor – Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group

Councillor Carole Pattison – Leader of the Council and Leader of the Labour Group

Councillor John Lawson – Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

Councillor Andrew Cooper – Leader of the Green Group

### **Fostering Panel**

Anna Gledhill – Head of Sufficiency

Councillor Donna Bellamy – Fostering Panel Member

### **Adoption Panel**

Christine Bennett – Head of Assessment & Intervention & Disabled Children's Service

Councillor Richard Smith – previous Adoption Panel Member

## **Evidence**

The MAIRP considered the following:

### **Chair of Corporate Governance and Audit Committee**

The Panel received submissions in relation to the remit of the Committee and the role of the Chair. An understanding and knowledge of financial matters, audit processes and treasury management policy are key elements to ensure the committee is chaired effectively. The role of the Chair is critical to ensure that the Committee offers challenge and oversight in respect of internal and external audit arrangements of the Council.

The Committee meet approximately six times a year and looks at both internal and external audit reports. Reports are also received in relation to Treasury Management reports, Health & Safety, Emergency Planning, Customer Complaints and the Council's Corporate Risk Register. The Committee also looks at the governance of the Authority including the Constitution, Delegations, Members Allowances and the Annual Governance Statement.

The Committee can, and do, challenge the Head of Audit and his team and ask officers to attend the Committee to question them in relation to Internal Audit report findings and hold them accountable for any actions that have not been complied with. The Committee has introduced a tracker system to track actions (which have been RAG rated) in order to monitor recommendations and actions. The Chair confirms the agenda for the Committee and works to ensure that items are scheduled in an efficient and timely manner. The current Chair has implemented an informal session prior to the Committee meeting taking place to update on the progress of actions contained within the tracker.

The Panel acknowledges that there needs to be a breadth of knowledge and understanding across all Council departments. Whilst recognising that there can be overlap, it is important to distinguish between the Council's audit function and scrutiny function. The role of the Committee is to seek assurance that the council's financial reporting, internal controls, governance, and risk management are effective and can be relied upon by councillors and residents. It was noted that the role of the Committee had become increasingly important in light of the recent financial challenges faced by the Council.

The Chair also attends Yorkshire and Humber regional meetings.

The Panel recognises the importance of the role of Chair of Corporate Governance and Audit Committee and after considering the representations made at the meeting recommends that the Special Responsibility Allowance should be increased to Band C1.

### **Political Group Bandings**

The Panel heard from Group Leaders or their representative about Political Group Bandings and the Special Responsibility Allowances paid.

One Group suggested that rather than having different bandings a fixed rate be paid for the role with an additional amount of allowance paid for each Councillor within the group. The rationale for this suggestion was to avoid a cliff edge if a

group lost members ensuring that any payments reflected the actual numbers within Groups.

During discussion of the issues of bandings, all other groups felt that the current bandings and SRAs were fit for purpose, fair and provided provision for small groups whilst recognising there had been a period of group fluidity. It was welcomed that any increase in allowances is now linked to the same percentage awarded to Officers.

Having heard the representations and noting the current political composition of the Council, the Panel finds that the current banding system is a robust and effective way of reflecting group size and recommends that the bandings and SRAs be left unaltered at the present time.

### **Fostering Panel**

The Panel received representations in relation to the role of a Fostering Panel Member, who have an independent role on the Fostering Panel.

The Panels usually meet approximately 3 times per month with each Fostering Panel lasting a full day. Prior to attendance, Members have a vast amount of case notes to read, with a full day's reading for each Fostering Panel. The Panel were made aware that one current member of the Fostering Panel has recently sat on 5 Panels in a month hearing four or five cases at each Panel.

It was explained that as part of the role each Panel member makes notes/suggests questions which are typed into Sharepoint for the Chair to review and are assigned questions to ask at the Panel.

The Fostering Panel will hear different types of cases, including kinship carers, reviews, resignation, non-family related cases and will then make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who makes the final decision.

The Panel recognised the amount of reading time required for each Panel along with the sensitivity and importance of the role and the volume of Panel meeting held and recommends increasing the Special Responsibility Allowance to Band D1.

### **Adoption Panel**

The Panel received representations in relation to the role of and Adoption Panel Member, who have an independent role on the Adoption Panel.

The Adoption Panel meets approximately every six weeks and the Panel assess people who want to adopt and whether they should be matched with a particular child.

It was reported that some cases are more complex than others and probing questions need to be asked. Adoption Panel Members have to read case notes before meetings, which can take half a day of reading for anything from two to six cases per Panel.

The Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who makes the final decision.

The Panel recognised the amount of reading time required for each Panel along with the sensitivity and importance of the role and recommends increasing the Special Responsibility Allowance to Band E.

The Panel would like to express its thanks to everyone who attended the meeting and contributed through their submissions.

### **Recommendations**

- (i) To continue to apply (when known) the same percentage pay award awarded to officers to the Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowances.
- (ii) The Special Responsibility Allowance paid to Chair of Corporate Governance and Audit Committee be increased from Band E (currently £3,115 per annum) to Band C1 (currently £7,790 per annum).
- (iii) The Special Responsibility Allowance paid to Fostering Panel Members be increased from Band E1 (currently £1,556 per annum) to Band D1 (currently £4,675 per annum).
- (iv) The Special Responsibility Allowance paid to Adoption Panel Members be increased from Band E1 (currently £1,556 per annum) to Band E (currently £3,115 per annum).