

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL TO ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL – NOVEMBER 2010

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 require that each Council must establish and maintain an Independent Remuneration Panel to make recommendations about the level of basic allowance for all Members, the level of special responsibility allowances and to whom they should be paid, and on whether dependants' carers' allowance and travel and subsistence allowances should be paid and the levels of these allowances. The Panel also can consider whether any allowances should be pensionable and/or subject to an annual inflationary increase.
- 1.2 The Council has to have regard to the advice of the Independent Remuneration Panel except in the instance of pensionable allowances where the view of the Panel is binding if it does not recommend their implementation. The Panel has not recommended that any allowances should be pensionable.
- 1.3 In April 2008 the Council moved to a stronger leadership model of governance with the Leader appointed for a period of 4 years, supported by an Executive of 7 portfolio holders with delegated decision-making authority, and the Panel convened to consider the impact of this new structure in June 2008. The Panel carried out an annual review in November 2008 and October/November 2009.
- 1.4 The same Independent Remuneration Panel is also required to consider the remuneration schemes for Parish/Town Councils.

2 DISTRICT COUNCIL REVIEW

- 2.1 For its 2010 review the Panel took into consideration comparative information about allowances in District Councils in Essex.
- 2.2 The Panel noted that basic and special responsibility allowances had not been increased in the past two years. The Panel also noted that the Council continued to perform well; it had retained an overall score of 3 under the new framework for the Use of Resources assessment, which was a significant achievement. The Council had also been awarded the South East Charter for Elected Member Development.
- 2.3 In August District Council Members had been asked for views on any matters relating to allowances that they would want the Panel to consider during the course of its work, bearing in mind the current economic climate. The Panel had received no comments from Members in this respect.

2.4 Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances

The Panel felt that the cabinet system, implemented in the 2008/09 Municipal Year, was likely to have had time to bed in. There appeared to be nothing new that would potentially place a greater burden on Portfolio Holders or the Leader and allowances were not out of alignment with other Essex authorities. No new working practices had been introduced that needed to be recognised, which would indicate that there was no requirement for an increase in allowances. A lack of an increase could be seen as a reduction in inflationary terms.

The Panel had regard to the Government's announcement of an indicative 7% reduction in local authority spending. Recognising that the Council would no doubt need to take account of the austere economic climate and the impact of the Government's comprehensive spending review within this year's budget considerations, the Panel agreed that it would be appropriate to communicate to Group Leaders the view that the option of a reduction in the level of allowances be included in these considerations.

Recommendation: That there be no increase in basic or special responsibility allowances for 2011/12.

2.5 Childcare and Carer's Allowances

The Panel felt that the provision of these allowances meant that people were not discouraged from becoming Councillors because of financial constraints. In view of this, and the relatively low take up of these allowances, it was felt that they should be retained at the existing rates.

2.6 Travelling Expenses

In terms of the mileage allowance for use of the Member's vehicle, the Panel felt that the level of travelling expenses should be unchanged but, given that it is relatively generous, a caveat should be introduced providing that mileage allowance will only be paid in cases where use of public transport is not conveniently available, where public transport would cost more than the mileage allowance and/or where excessive travelling time would be involved.

Recommendation: That there be no change to travelling expenses for 2011/12, subject to a caveat providing that mileage allowance will only be paid in cases where use of public transport is not conveniently available, where public transport would cost more than the mileage allowance and/or where excessive travelling time would be involved.

2.7 Subsistence/Meals on Trains Allowances

The Panel noted that these allowances were linked to the rates payable to officers and reflected national arrangements. The Panel felt that no change should be recommended.

Recommendation: That there be no change to the subsistence/meals on trains allowances for 2011/12.

3 PARISH/TOWN COUNCILS REVIEW

- 3.1 The Panel undertook a separate review of the Parish/Town Council remuneration framework. The application of this framework will be matter for individual decision by each Parish/Town Council, with a recommended maximum for each Council.
- 3.2 Detail of the Parish/Town Councils Remuneration Review is set out in a separate report.

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November 2010