



**Report to Council**

**Date: 27 February 2008**

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**Subject: Members' Allowances**

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**1. Purpose of the Report**

To invite members to consider a Scheme of Members' Allowances for the year 2008/09.

**2. Background**

Members are required to have regard to the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel before making a charge to the Members' Scheme of Allowances.

The report of the Panel is attached at **Appendix 1**.

**Recommendation**

That Members consider the recommendations of the Remuneration Panel and make a Scheme of Allowances for the year commencing 1 April 2008.

## REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Remuneration Panel met following the Borough Council election in May 2007 to consider various issues arising from the new structure of the Council following the election. Those matters have been considered by the Council and incorporated into the Scheme of Allowances.
- 1.2 The Panel is aware that there are proposals for the work of the Council's Standards Committee to be expanded to deal more directly with complaints made against members and of the emerging "place shaping" agenda which will put elected members firmly in the role of community advocate and champion.
- 1.3 The Members' Allowances Scheme makes provision for the payment of an dependent carers' allowance to members, however, it does not include any guidance as to payment. The Panel proposes to make recommendations in this regard.

### 2. Process

- 2.1 All members of the Council have been invited to make observations or proposals to the Panel. We have been advised of four responses to that invitation. As in previous consultation processes we have assumed that members who have not responded are broadly content with the Scheme.
- 2.2 The Panel has considered evidence of allowances paid to other District Councils within the East Midlands and particularly within the County.  
  
Further information was also available showing the national average allowances paid to members of Shire District councils.
- 2.3 Structural changes to the Council following the election have been dealt with.

### 3. Proposals

- 3.1 The Panel noted that the basic allowance paid to members of the Council was in the middle range of allowances paid within the County.
- 3.2 Those members of the Council who responded to the Panel on the issue of the basic allowance did not make the point that it was too low. Some concerns were raised that the estimate of time required to be an effective member of the Council was too low, however, no suggestions were received as to a different estimate. Similarly, questions were

raised about the public service discount, particularly as some members are also involved in other voluntary roles in their respective communities.

- 3.3 The public service discount and the time required of an elected member to carry out their council and ward duties does not appear to the Panel to have undergone any significant change since our last report. It is clear, however, that the neighbourhoods agenda that the Council is to embark upon may have a considerable impact on these elements of the calculation that go towards the basic allowance. It is, however, unclear at the present time what that impact will be. In addition, we received a request that the basic allowance reflect how much time and effort a non-executive member of the Council puts into their role. This issue has been raised with the Panel previously and it is clear that every member must receive the same basic allowance regardless of their attendance and willingness to contribute to the work of the Council. If this issue is to be addressed, then the solution must come from the parties themselves.
- 3.4 The Panel also received representations concerning the imbalance between those members with rural wards and those with urban wards in terms of the time and expense of attending meetings of groups and constituents. Again, this is something the Panel cannot address through the mechanism of the basic allowance. The Council might wish to consider dealing with this in another way.
- 3.5 Having considered the relative amount of the Basic Allowance and the representations made, the Panel does not consider that any adjustment to the base level of the Allowance is required.
- 3.6 The Basic Allowance should, however, keep pace with wage inflation and again, for the reasons we have previously rehearsed, the Panel is recommending that the allowances be increased in line with the staff pay award.

### **Recommendation 1**

That the Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowance and Co-Optees' Allowance be increased by the percentage awarded to staff pay for 2008/09 from 1 April 2008 (rounded).

- 3.7 The members of the Licensing Act Committee are paid an allowance of £250 per annum to recognise the fact that they are asked to serve on Licensing Panels convened to consider ad hoc applications for a licence or a review of an existing licence. The allowance was retained for a year following the transfer of licensing powers to the Council to gauge the amount of ongoing work required. The licensing panels met for six hearings during 2007. These Panels have a varying membership depending on the availability of members of the Committee for a particular hearing date. Inevitably, some members are less available than others, however, the Panel consider it to be

appropriate to retain the allowance to recognise the additional workload. It is for the party business managers to consider whether their appointees to the Committee can play a full part in its work.

- 3.8 The question was raised with the Panel in the course of consultation as to whether it was proper to pay an allowance to the Licensing Act Committee Members but not to the Planning Panel members who similarly attend additional meetings at the Council. The Remuneration Panel draws a distinction here, between duties where members sit to adjudicate on licensing matters and take decisions for which they are accountable and, members who attend meetings such as the Planning Panel, to act as a sounding board but where the decision is delegated to an officer. It appears appropriate to the Panel, therefore, that this difference is recognised.

### **Recommendation 2**

That the Special Responsibility Allowance paid to Members of the Licensing Act Committee be retained for the year 2008/09.

- 3.09 The Standards Committee is comprised of three elected members and four independent members and is chaired by an independent member.
- 3.10 The Panel is aware that from April 2008, it is intended that Regulations will be brought into force passing to the Standards Committee responsibility for the investigation, hearing and adjudication of complaints against elected members of the Borough Council and those Parish Councils within the Borough. The current allowance paid to the independent members of the Standards Committee is the co-optees' allowance of £504 per annum.
- 3.11 There are four programmed meetings of the Standards Committee each year and, in addition, there may be further requirements for training. It is not clear at this time whether the changes will result in significantly increased workload for the members of this Committee since this will depend on the level of complaints received by the Council. It is clear, however, that there will be a necessity for additional training for the members of the Committee of at least a further day or two. The Panel feel that this additional time commitment for the independent members should be recognised in an uplift to the co-optees' allowance. The Panel propose to review the work of the Committee in its next report.
- 3.12 The Chair of the Standards Committee does not receive any Special Responsibility Allowance. The Panel consider that given the considerable additional duties to be given to the Committee, this should be recognised by the Council.

### **Recommendation 3**

- (i) that the co-optees' base allowance be increased to £600 per annum from 1 April 2008;
- (ii) that the Chair of the Standards Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1,200 per annum from 1 April 2008.

3.13 The Council's Scheme of Allowances provides for the payment of a Dependent Carers' Allowance. The Panel considers this to be an appropriate way in which the Council can encourage those people who have caring responsibilities to stand for election and be able to take a full part in the work of the Council which of necessity is sometimes carried out at times which are not necessarily convenient for members with those responsibilities.

3.14 The Scheme is, however, silent as to the details of payments to be made. The Panel consider that the Scheme should include details of what payments may be made and, to whom, so that members may be clear as to what is payable.

3.15 The Panel have considered similar schemes in coming to their recommendation.

### **Recommendation 4**

That the Scheme of Members' Allowances be amended to provide:

- (i) that the Dependent Carers' Allowance should not be paid to a member claiming reimbursement of payment to someone in that member's household;
- (ii) that reimbursement of actual costs incurred be paid to the member claiming subject to a maximum of £7.50 per hour.

3.16 The Panel received no further submissions, or proposals, with regard to any other allowances and, therefore, does not propose to make any further recommendations in that regard.