

Agenda Item No:

**Report To: EXECUTIVE
COUNCIL**



**Date: 4TH FEBRUARY 2010
18TH FEBRUARY 2010**

**Report Title: Members Allowances – Recommendations from the
Members' Allowances Independent Remuneration Panel**

Report Author: Senior Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer – on
behalf of the Chairman of the Members' Allowances
Independent Remuneration Panel

Summary:	The Members Allowances Independent Remuneration Panel met on the 18 th January to review the Travel & Subsistence Allowance payable to Members with particular reference to the list of "approved duties" for claiming such allowances. The Panel also considered a representation from a member of the public regarding allowances currently paid to the Leader of the Council. The Panel's full report is attached. To summarise, the Panel recommended that the scope of "approved duties" be widened to include the ability for Members to claim travel costs for attendance at Parish/Town Council or Community Forum meetings in their wards where the journey is a ten mile round trip or more. It is also recommended that allowances paid to the Leader of the Council be maintained at their current level.
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Key Decision: NO

Affected Wards: N/A

Recommendations: **The Executive is asked to consider the Members' Allowances Independent Remuneration Panel's report and recommend to the Council that the Panel's recommendations are implemented from the 1st April 2010. The Council's Scheme of Members' Allowances will need to be updated to reflect the Panel's recommendations.**

Policy Overview: When making changes to the Scheme of Allowances, the Council should take the views of the Independent Remuneration Panel into consideration. Notice that the Council had received a report from the Independent Panel, and the outcomes, will be advertised in the local paper in accordance with the regulations.

Financial Implications: Should the Council agree the Panel's recommendations, it is likely that there would be increased expenditure on Members Travel & Subsistence although this is expected to be

contained within budget (as outlined in paragraph 7)

Risk Assessment N/A

Other Material Implications: None at this stage

Background Papers: Paperwork submitted to Members Allowances Independent Remuneration Panel meeting on the 18th January 2010

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Members Allowances – Recommendations from the Members' Allowances Independent Remuneration Panel

Introduction

1. The Members Allowances Independent Remuneration Panel met on the 18th January to review the Travel & Subsistence Allowance payable to Members with particular reference to the list of “approved duties” for claiming such allowances. The Panel also considered a representation from a member of the public regarding allowances currently paid to the Leader of the Council. The Panel is chaired by Mr Christopher Page, and the other members are Mrs Judy Blount and Mr Mike Eede. At the Panel's previous meeting in November 2008 it was agreed that another meeting should be convened to review the list of “approved duties” for claiming Travel & Subsistence Allowance because representations had been made by some Members that Members in larger rural Wards should perhaps be able to claim travelling costs for certain additional duties such as attendance at Parish Council meetings in their wards. There was discussion about the potential disparity between costs incurred by such a Member but it was recognised that The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 did not allow for a differing level of Basic Allowance to be paid on such terms. A future review of the scope of approved duties under the Travel & Subsistence Scheme was therefore seen as a more logical way of addressing this issue.
2. The Panel considered a number of background documents by way of information including: - the Terms of Reference of the Panel; an explanatory paper which included the current position in terms of “approved duties”, what other Local Authorities did and the views of Members who had responded to a survey; a copy of the current Members Allowances Scheme; and the Local Government (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. The Panel also discussed matters with advice from the Council's Head of Legal & Democratic Services and Senior Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer, interviewed three Members (including two of the five Group Leaders) and received the written comments of one of the other Group Leaders who was unable to attend the meeting.
3. The Panel's recommendations are set out within this report. Part 6 of the Constitution (Members Allowances Scheme) will have to be updated to reflect any amendments agreed by the full Council.

Approved Duties for Claiming Travel & Subsistence Allowances

4. The Panel considered the current position whereby Members were able to claim Travel & Subsistence in respect of their travel to and from meetings covered by the list of “approved duties” in Part 6 of the Council's Constitution, and for meetings with Officers in respect of matters relevant to their Committees etc. or external organisations/bodies, subject to such meetings having been pre-arranged and not relating specifically to a Member's Ward business or work. Travel and Subsistence Allowances were not paid to Members attending a Parish or Town Council meeting in the Ward which they represented or to Ward Members attending to give their views at Planning

Committee or Licensing Committee meetings. After much discussion the Panel recommended that the scope of “approved duties” be widened to include attendance at official meetings of a full Parish/Town Council or Community Forum within their ward or meetings of any such Parish Council/Community Forum Planning Sub-Committee, but only if the Member has a round trip of ten miles or more in order to attend. This is in recognition of the potential significant costs of attending numerous Parish Council meetings, particularly in a large ward and the importance attached to a Borough Council Ward Member attending such meetings.

5. The Panel agreed that the scope of “approved duties” should not be widened any further to include other Sub-Committees of Parish/Town Councils and Community Forums or wider ward business. These, along with Parish/Town Council and Community Forum meetings within less than a ten mile round trip should continue to be regarded as covered by the Member’s Basic Allowance.

Allowances Paid to the Leader of the Council

6. The Panel considered a representation received from a member of the public following the statutory publication in the local press of the advert detailing Members Allowances paid in 2008/09. It asked the Panel to consider reducing the amount payable to the Leader of the Council bearing in mind the current economic circumstances. It was noted that any change to the Leader’s Allowance would also require a re-adjustment of all payments as this allowance was the foundation of the scheme and all other Special Responsibility Allowances followed as a percentage of this. The papers included comparative data of the Basic and Leader’s Allowances at other Kent Districts and the Panel considered that the level paid at Ashford was not unreasonable for the workload and responsibility involved, especially as a Growth Area, and was by no means out of kilter with Kent colleagues (it was actually one of the lowest). The Panel also noted that they had only reviewed the level of Basic and Special Responsibility Allowance in November 2008 when the current levels had been seen as reasonable. It was therefore recommended that the Leader of the Council’s Special Responsibility Allowance be unamended.

Budget Implications

7. The financial impact of adopting the recommendation above in relation to travel allowances is obviously impossible to quantify exactly as the number of meetings attended and then actually claimed for is not known. The current amount set aside in the Council’s 2009/10 budget for Members Travel & Subsistence is £14,400 and this is scheduled to rise with inflation to £14,620 in 2010/11. Actual spend against this budget in 2008/09 was £11,976 so there is some scope for increased expenditure within budget. The extra amount claimed as a result of adopting the Panel’s recommendation will be monitored but it is not anticipated that the budget will be significantly not exceeded.

Summary of Recommendations

8. (a) **The scope of “approved duties” as contained in the Council’s Members Allowances Scheme be widened to include attendance at official meetings of a full Parish/Town Council or Community**

Forum within the Member's ward or meetings of its Planning (Sub) –Committee only, but only if the Member has a round trip of ten miles or more in order to attend.

- (b) The current allowance paid to the Leader of the Council be re-affirmed.**

Portfolio Holder's Views

9. The Leader of the Council was interviewed at the Panel meeting and his views on the report will be given at the Executive meeting.

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