

Councillors' Allowances 2020/21 – Recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel

Cabinet

Date: 5th June 2019

Author: Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 To consider recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel on the level of Councillors' Allowances in Swindon for 2020/2021.
- 1.2 The Council is required by the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 to consider the recommendations of its Independent Remuneration Panel when making decisions relating to its Scheme of Councillors' Allowances. It is not required to adopt all or any of the Panel's recommendations. Decisions on the Scheme of Councillors' Allowances require the approval of full Council.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the thorough and comprehensive review undertaken by the Independent Remuneration Panel, and thank the Panel Chair and members for their work.
- 2.2 Consider the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel on Councillors' Allowances for 2020/2021, as set out in paragraph 3.6, and to refer these recommendations to the Council.

If the recommendations are approved by Council

- 2.3 Authorise the Chief Legal Officer to introduce a revised Councillors' Allowances Scheme for 2020/2021, based on the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel.

3. Detail

Background

- 3.1 The Independent Remuneration Panel for Swindon Borough Council was established in late 2001. It is currently made up of six members independent of the Council. One each is nominated by the Education, Business and Voluntary / Community Sectors, while three members are appointed following public advertisement.
- 3.2 The last extensive review of Councillors' Allowances took place in 2016/2017. Council adopted the recommendations of the Panel in July 2016 (Council Minute

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31 (1) 2016/17 refers). Following this, the Panel has recommended no changes to the levels of Councillors' Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowances and only small amendments to the Subsistence Allowances (Council Minute 18 (1), 2017/18 refers).

- 3.3 The Panel advised Council at its meeting on 12 July 2018 of its intention to undertake a more comprehensive review of Councillors' Allowances to inform its recommendations to the Council for 2020/2021. The Panel's final report and recommendations to Council are attached at Appendix 1.

Review of Councillors' Allowances for 2020/2021

- 3.4 At its meeting on 4 October 2018, the Panel determined the scope of the review it wished to undertake, and the research and methodologies it wished to adopt and utilise. The review has involved:
- 3.4.1 *Benchmarking.* The Panel has considered the Basic Allowance (BA) and Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) paid by other authorities whom it could be considered were part of the same 'family group' as Swindon Borough Council.
 - 3.4.2 *Interviews.* The Panel has considered the Vision for Swindon which has been refreshed by Council. The Panel invited the Leader of the Council, the Deputy Leader and the Chief Executive for interview to answer the Panel's questions on the Vision and its associated Pledges, and how they believe it may affect Councillors' roles and responsibilities.
 - 3.4.3 The Panel has interviewed Councillors from all parties who hold a range of responsibilities, and in particular those who hold posts where the Panel was specifically interested in the responsibilities associated with those posts.
 - 3.4.4 *Survey.* The Panel considered the results of the survey distributed to Councillors seeking their thoughts and views on the allowances paid at Swindon Borough Council, and other questions regarding their time spent on councillor duties.
- 3.5 The Panel's recommendations for Councillors' Allowances for 2020/2021 are detailed in the Panel's report attached at Appendix 1. They are summarised below as:
- a) That the Basic Allowance amount remains unchanged from £8,552 for the 2020/2021 Municipal Year, noting that it will be amended to include any percentage increase arising from the result of the Local Government Pay Settlement for 2020/2021.

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- b) That the BA Multiplier used for calculating the SRA for the post of Deputy Leader of the Council be increased from 1.75 to 1.85 to reflect better the responsibilities of the role, and that all other SRAs should remain unchanged.
- c) To maintain the current arrangements for Travel Allowances and Subsistence Allowances as set out in the Scheme of Councillors' Allowances in the Constitution.
- d) That the level for Dependent Care Allowances be set as the actual fee per hour, per child / dependent relative, but not exceeding £20.00 per hour (an increase from £7.20 per hour) to reflect the current rates charged by carers.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 There are no alternative options proposed. The Cabinet can decide to support all the Panel's recommendations to the Council, or it can decide not to support the Panel's recommendations and to make its own recommendations to the Council.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 The total allocation for Basic Allowances will be £487,464 (£8,552 x 57) with funding also set aside for Mayoral Allowances, Special Responsibility Allowances, and other Allowances (e.g. Travelling and Subsistence) as specified in the Scheme of Allowances. The Basic Allowance will potentially increase in line with any percentage increase applied to officers pay in the National Pay Round.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 Legal and Human Rights considerations have been taken fully into account in compiling this report. It is considered that the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel are compatible with convention rights.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are no specific other implications arising from this report.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment has not been undertaken as the report concerns implementation of national regulations and does not make any recommendations that affect services or employment. The Independent Remuneration Panel

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considered potential impacts on equality groups as part of their deliberations, and their proposals on the level of allowances reflect their considerations.

Risk Management

- 5.5 There are no specific risk implications. Decisions on Councillors' Allowances are often controversial in media terms and thus decisions may have a reputational risk for the Council.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The author has consulted, where appropriate, with Corporate Directors, Directors, Heads of Service, other officers, and relevant partners on the purpose, content, and recommendations of the report

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel on Councillors' Allowances for 2020/2021.

9. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan

- 9.1 This is not a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan for March 2019.