

Swindon Borough Council Independent Remuneration Panel

Review of Councillors' Allowances for 2020/2021

1. Background

- 1.1. The Swindon Independent Remuneration Panel on Councillors' Allowances was originally established in 2001.
- 1.2. The Independent Remuneration Panel operates under the provisions of the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. These Regulations require that all councils should set up independent panels, and take account of their advice, before changing their Councillors' Allowances Scheme.
- 1.3. The Council's Standards Committee oversees the composition and appointments procedure associated with the establishment and maintenance of the Independent Remuneration Panel.
- 1.4. The Panel's recommendations on Councillors' Allowances for 2020/2021 are attached at Annex A. The Panel makes recommendations to Swindon Council's Cabinet, which in turn may make recommendations to the full Council.

2. Membership

- 2.1. The membership of the Panel is as follows:

Mr Keith Strickland (Chair)	Lay Member
Mr David Body	Lay Member
Mr Ram Thiagarajah	Lay Member
Mr John Dernie	Business Sector Representative
Mr Gus Strang	Education Sector Representative
Ms Michelle Howard	Voluntary / Community Sector Representative

- 2.2. Mrs Vicki Yull, Committee and Member Services, acted as the support officer to the Panel in its work.

3. The Conduct of the Review

Reasons for the Review

- 3.1. The last extensive review of Councillors' Allowances took place in 2016/2017. Council adopted the recommendations of the Panel which were, in summary: to implement a two year phased increase to the Basic Allowance; to index link the Basic Allowance to any percentage increase in the Local Government Pay Settlement ending in 2021; to introduce a system of Basic Allowance multiplication to calculate the levels of Special Responsibility Allowances; that

all Committee Chair posts attract the same Special Responsibility Allowance amount; to terminate the Special Responsibility Allowance paid to members of the Licensing Committee, and; to introduce a Special Responsibility Allowance for the position of Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board. These were implemented from May 2017.

- 3.2. Following this, the Panel recommended no changes to the levels of Councillors' Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowances for 2018/2019, and a small amendment to the Subsistence Allowances with the removal of the Tea Allowance and an increase to the Evening Meal Allowance. For 2019/2020, the Panel recommended no changes to the levels of Councillors' Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowances, and Travel, Subsistence and Dependent Care Allowances.
- 3.3. The Panel advised Council at its meeting on 12th July 2018 of its intention to undertake a more comprehensive review of Councillors' allowances to inform its recommendations to the Council for 2020/2021.

Scope of the Review

- 3.4. The Panel considered the following issues as part of its review:
 - 3.4.1. The level of Basic Allowance payable to all Councillors.
 - 3.4.2. The number, type and level of Special Responsibility Allowances.
 - 3.4.3. The payment of co-opted members Allowances / Special Responsibility Allowances.
 - 3.4.4. The scope and level of travelling, subsistence and dependant care allowances.
 - 3.4.5. The current index linking of Councillor Allowances to the percentage increases in pay awarded to local authority staff ending in May 2021.

Research

- 3.5. The Panel undertook a programme of research to inform its review. The research included:
 - 3.5.1. *Benchmarking*
 - The Panel considered the Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowances paid by other authorities that could be considered to be part of the same 'Family Group' as Swindon Borough Council. These can be found in Annex B.

3.5.2. Interviews

- The Panel invited the Leader of the Council, the Deputy Leader and the Chief Executive for interview to answer the Panel's questions regarding their views on:
 - The Vision for Swindon, with particular focus on how Councillors' roles and responsibilities may be affected as a result of its refresh.
 - Government plans for the devolution of decision-making to local government and any potential impact on Swindon Borough Council.
 - The current levels of Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowances.
- The Panel agreed the categories of Councillors whom they felt would provide a broad spectrum of thoughts and views. The Panel were particularly interested in meeting with Councillors who held posts which attract Special Responsibility Allowances, but also considered factors such as age, gender, length of service on the Council and employment status when determining whom to invite.
- The Panel held the interviews across 27th and 28th February 2019, and sought views on issues such as:
 - The time commitment involved in being a Councillor, particularly in the light of the creation of urban parishes.
 - The appropriateness of the current level of the Basic Allowance.
 - The appropriateness of the current levels of the Special Responsibility Allowances.
 - The appropriateness of the posts currently attracting a Special Responsibility Allowance.
 - Other allowances, such as travel.
 - The accountability of Councillors receiving allowances, and whether it is possible to measure the performance and effectiveness of a Councillor.

3.5.3. Survey

- The Panel considered the results from a survey that was distributed to Councillors seeking their views on the allowances paid at Swindon Borough Council, and other matters relating to their time spent on Councillor duties.
- A copy of the survey results is attached at Annex C.

3.5.4. General research

- Data and information were also collected on the operation of the current Councillors' Allowances Scheme, including details of the 1% increase in the 2017/2018 Municipal Year, the 2% increase in the 2018/2019 Municipal Year, and the 2% increase in the

2019/2020 Municipal Year, all index linked to Local Government Officer Pay Settlements.

- 3.6. The Panel wishes to record its appreciation to those Councillors who completed the survey and to those Councillors who agreed to be interviewed by the Panel. The information gained from these exercises was very helpful to the formulation of the Panel's recommendations. The Panel, however, also wished to express its disappointment at the low number of acceptances amongst the cohort of councillors who were invited for interview.

4. Findings and Recommendations

- 4.1. The Panel's recommendations for Councillors' allowances for 2020/2021 are set out in Annex A to this report.

Basic Allowance

- 4.2. There is a requirement placed upon Local Authorities to make provision for a Basic Allowance which must be paid at the same rate for all Councillors.
- 4.3. The Panel is recommending no change to the level of Basic Allowance for the 2020/2021 Municipal Year given: the work already undertaken in recent years by this Panel to establish the reasonableness of the Basic Allowance and the Council's position in relation to the 'family group' authorities; the index link of percentage increases in the Basic Allowance to any percentage increases in the Local Government Officers Pay Settlement ending in 2021, and; the potential workload reduction for councillors arising from the devolution of Council services to the Parish and Town Councils across Swindon.

Special Responsibility Allowances

- 4.4. The Panel considered the Regulations governing Special Responsibility Allowances and the categories of responsibilities which might call for an allowance. The Panel restated its view that the emphasis should be on the levels of responsibility of a role rather than the volume of work that might be associated with a role, or the time of day that role is undertaken.
- 4.5. The Panel, having received and considered information on the responsibilities of the Deputy Leader, and having taken into account comments made by individual Councillors when interviewed, determined that it was minded to recommend that the Special Responsibility Allowance allocated to the position be increased to a Basic Allowance Multiplier of 1.85. This is to better reflect the duties and responsibilities of the role, and increase the separation between this role and that of a Cabinet Member. It will also ensure that the allowance is more in line with the mean / median paid in comparable authorities.
- 4.6. The Panel has previously recommended that, in the interests of parity and consistency, the Special Responsibility Allowance paid to members of the Licensing Committee be removed. The Panel revisited this decision and

determined that no new evidence had been provided to support a change in its position. The Panel therefore determined not to recommend the re-introduction of a Special Responsibility Allowance paid to members of the Licensing Committee.

- 4.7. The Panel felt that, on the whole, the Special Responsibility Allowances paid by Swindon Borough Council were reasonable, and comparable to the Allowances paid by authorities in the family grouping, and recommended no changes to them other than the increase to the Allowance for the role of Deputy Leader.
- 4.8. Assessing the amount and level of additional or special responsibility for a particular post or role is not an exact science. The Panel makes no claim that the multipliers used by the Panel in its proposals are based on a precise calculation of the additional responsibilities of the posts to which they relate. However, the Panel thinks that the resulting differentials are fair.
- 4.9. The Panel reaffirmed its support for the Council paying just the single, highest rate payable to a Councillor holding more than one post that attracts a Special Responsibility Allowance.
- 4.10. The Panel also wished to express its agreement with the guidance provided by the Government which sets an expectation that the proportion of Councillors receiving a Special Responsibility Allowance should not exceed 50% of the total number of Councillors i.e. 28 councillors in Swindon. The current number of councillors currently receiving a Special Responsibility Allowance at the Council is 23.

Travel, Subsistence and Dependant Care Allowances

- 4.11. The Panel, having considered the current travel, subsistence and dependant care allowances as set out in the Councillors' Allowances Scheme, and having taken into account comments made by Councillors when interviewed, or submitted in written form through the Survey, determined that it was minded to recommend the following:
 - 4.11.1. *Travel Allowance*
 - That the current rates of 45p per mile for car travel, 16.5p per mile for motorcycle travel, and 30p per mile for pedal cycle travel be reaffirmed, and that increases in mileage rates should remain linked specifically to increases in the Inland Revenue rates.
 - 4.11.2. *Subsistence Allowance*
 - That the current arrangements for Subsistence Allowances, as set out in the Scheme of Councillors' Allowances in the Constitution, remain unchanged.
 - 4.11.3. *Dependant Care Allowance*

- That the rate currently set at £7.70 per hour or the national minimum wage (whichever is greater) is too low. To encourage more candidates with caring responsibilities to stand as councillors, the Panel is minded to recommend an increase in this Allowance up to £20 per hour (maximum limit).

5. Financial Summary

- 5.1. The Panel's recommendations, if approved, would require an allocation in 2020/2021 of £487,464 (£8,552 x 57) and an allocation of £221,497 for Special Responsibility Allowances. This is an increase of £855 against the 2019/2020 amounts.
- 5.2. Funding is also set aside for Mayoral Allowances and other Allowances (e.g. Travelling and Subsistence) as specified in the Scheme of Allowances. The Basic Allowance figure of £8,552 for 2019/2020 already includes a 2% increase in line with the percentage increase applied to officers pay in the National Pay Round. Any potential further percentage increases will have to be applied for 2020/2021 once known.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1. The Panel believes that it has arrived at a series of recommendations that reflect how Councillors should be remunerated, given their current roles and responsibilities.
- 6.2. The Panel considers it important to reflect that the allowances paid at Swindon Borough Council are now more in line with the mean / median figures of Allowances paid at comparable authorities and it would wish to see that position continue. The Panel is motivated by not wishing to see allowances for Swindon Borough Council fall to such a level that they become a disincentive for citizens who may be considering standing for election and fail to retain talented people once they are elected.
- 6.3. The Panel acknowledges that any increases proposed by it has to be balanced against the financial pressures being faced by the Council. The Panel, however, believes its recommendations to be justified and appropriate given the workload and responsibilities associated with being a Councillor and serving local citizens.

7. Annexes

Annex A	Recommendations for 2020-2021
Annex B	Comparison of Family Group Special Responsibility Allowances
Annex C	Results from Councillor Survey December 2018