

Independent Remuneration Panel on Councillors' Allowances: Membership and Allowances

Standards Committee

Date: 6th November 2017

Author: Director of Law and Democratic Services

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 To seek the Standards Committee's approval of the appointment of a Lay Representative to serve on the Swindon Independent Remuneration Panel, and to update the Committee on the current membership of the Panel.
- 1.2 To review the current role profile and level of allowance paid to members of the Swindon Independent Remuneration Panel.
- 1.3 The operation of effective and transparent arrangements for the Swindon Independent Remuneration Panel supports the Council's commitment to good governance.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the appointment of Mr Ram Thiagarajah as a Lay Representative on the Swindon Independent Remuneration Panel for a further period of three years.
- 2.2 Note and endorse the membership of the Independent Remuneration Panel.
- 2.3 Review the current role profile of the Swindon Independent Remuneration Panel Member to determine if the profile is fit for purpose or requires updating.
- 2.4 Review the current level of allowance paid to the Swindon Independent Remuneration Panel members to determine if the level is appropriate.

3. Detail

Background

- 3.1 The Council established the Swindon Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) in late 2001.
- 3.2 The IRP 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.

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- 3.3 The IRP helps set the level of allowances that are paid to Borough Councillors each year. The IRP is also involved in setting the level of allowances that are paid to Parish and Town Councillors in Swindon.

Membership

- 3.4 The Standards Committee is responsible under Article 9 of the Council's Constitution for overseeing and approving the composition and appointments procedure associated with the establishment and maintenance of the IRP.
- 3.5 The IRP is made up of six members who are independent of the Council – one each is nominated by the Education, Business and Voluntary / Community Sectors, and there are three Lay Representatives appointed by the Standards Committee following public advertisement. The three members of the IRP appointed from stakeholder / partner organisations serve for a term of office of four years. The three Lay Representatives are appointed for a period of three years. There is no restriction on the re-appointment of members.
- 3.6 The current membership of the IRP is:

Member	Capacity	Term of Office	Expiry date
Mr Keith Strickland (Chair)	Lay Member	3 years	March 2020
Mr Ram Thiagarajah	Lay Member	3 years	October 2017
Mr David Body	Lay Member	3 years	October 2019
Mr John Dernie	Business Sector Representative	4 years	April 2018
Ms Wendy Hall MBE	Voluntary / Community Sector Representative	4 years	February 2018
Mr Gus Strang	Education Sector Representative	4 years	October 2019

Appointment of Lay Representative

- 3.7 Mr Ram Thiagarajah was appointed to the IRP in October 2014 for a period of three years. Mr Thiagarajah has been approached about his continuing to serve on the IRP and has agreed to do so, if it is the Committee's wish.

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- 3.8 In view of his experience and commitment, the Committee is asked to appoint Mr Thiagarajah as a Lay Representative to the IRP for a further three year period, ending in November 2020. The Committee is also asked to note and endorse the membership of the Swindon IRP going forward.

Panel Member – Role Profile

- 3.9 A Panel Member Role Definition (attached at Appendix 1) has been in place for some years to assist in the recruitment of panel members. It would be appropriate to review this and, to assist members, a copy of the relevant role profile was requested from the authorities within the former Audit Commissions 'family grouping' to which Swindon Borough Council belonged. Of those who responded, two had profiles in place (Medway Council and Plymouth City Council) and these are included in Appendix 1 for reference.
- 3.10 Members are asked to consider if the Swindon Panel Member Role Definition remains up-to-date and fit for purpose, or whether the current profile should be updated having regard to any comments from members.

Panel Member – Remuneration

- 3.11 Local authorities are able to pay allowances to IRP members, and the Standards Committee has the delegated responsibility to determine this matter.
- 3.12 When the IRP was originally established in 2001, the Standards Committee determined at that time that an annual allowance of £125 should be paid to each member. This was based on an estimated time commitment of 15 hours per year. Travel and subsistence allowances were also payable as for other co-opted members, as set out in the Council's Scheme of Allowances.
- 3.13 At its meeting on 31st January 2005, the Standards Committee was requested to review this payment since additional responsibilities had been placed on Panels as a result of the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 being introduced. The time commitment of panel members had proven to be more in the region of 18 hours per year for attendance at meetings plus preparation time. The Committee therefore agreed that the allowance should be increased to £200 per year, with travel and subsistence allowances remaining payable as for other co-opted members.
- 3.14 Given that the allowance payable to members of the IRP has not been amended since 2005, it is timely to seek members' views on this matter. A matrix showing the IRP information provided by the local authorities within the former Audit Commission 'family grouping' is attached at Appendix 2 to assist members in their consideration of this matter.

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- 3.15 The views of the Swindon IRP members have been sought on this matter. The panel members on the whole are supportive of this review due to the length of time which has elapsed since the current allowance amount was determined, though none of them have requested a change to the amount paid. It is also worth noting that an individual panel member can choose not to accept any allowance payment offered, should they so wish.
- 3.16 The Swindon IRP meets every year to undertake a review. The length of the review, and therefore the time commitment required from the panel members, is different each year depending on the circumstances considered at the time. For example, the IRP conducted a lengthy and in-depth review of allowances for the 2017/2018 year, with significant changes being put in place as a result of its recommendations. In view of this, a 'lighter touch' review was completed for the 2018/2019 year, with no significant changes being proposed by the Panel. At its meeting on 13th November 2017, the Panel will begin its review of the Scheme of Allowances for the 2019/2020 year. It is likely that the Panel will wish to conduct a more significant review to assess if there has been any impact from the changes implemented for 2017/2018.
- 3.17 Given the examples above which demonstrate how the workload varies from year to year, it is difficult to calculate an average annual amount of time commitment required from the panel members. Any allowance set needs to acknowledge this yearly variation, and members are asked to consider whether the current amount of £200 is adequate recompense or whether the amount needs to be amended.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Standards Committee could determine to not endorse the appointment of the suggested Lay Representative to the IRP.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 Members of the Independent Remuneration Panel are currently entitled to receive an allowance of £200 per year (if they choose to claim it). Any increases to this allowance would be found from within existing budgets.

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 this report are compatible with convention rights.

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

- 5.3 No other implications were identified in the preparation of this report.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has not been undertaken as the report does not make any recommendations or have implications that affect services.

Risk Management

- 5.5 No risk management implications were identified in the preparation of this report.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Role Profiles of Independent Remuneration Panel members.
- 8.2 Appendix 2 – Comparison of Independent Remuneration Panels within Swindon's 'family grouping' of local authorities.