

Councillors' Allowances 2018/19 – Recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel

Cabinet

Date: 14th June 2017

Author:	Leader of the Council and the Director of Law and Democratic Services
Wards:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 To consider recommendations arising from a meeting of the Independent Remuneration Panel on the level of Councillors' Allowances in Swindon for 2018/2019.
- 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 Consider the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel on Councillors' Allowances for 2018/2019, as set out in paragraph 3.14, and to refer these recommendations to the Council.
- 2.2 Authorise the Director of Law and Democratic Services to introduce a revised Councillors' Allowances Scheme for 2018/2019 based on the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel, as approved and adopted by the Council.

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 Panel undertook a detailed and comprehensive review of Councillors' Allowances in 2016 which resulted in its recommendations for 2017/2018 and future years. These were adopted in full by Council at its meeting on 14 July 2016 (Minute 31(1) of the Council).

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Vicki Yull, 01793 463603, vyull@swindon.gov.uk.

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- 3.3 The Panel's recommendations for Councillors' Allowances for 2017/2018 and future years, as adopted by Council, are summarised below. The full Councillors' Scheme of Allowances can be found in the Council's Constitution, available on the Swindon Borough Council website.
- a) That the level of Basic Allowance is raised to £8,220 (the median level of the Council's 'family grouping') and that this increase is phased in over a two year period, with the Basic Allowance being set at £8,090 for 2017/2018 and at £8,220 for 2018/2019.
 - b) To index link the Basic Allowance payable to all councillors to any percentage increase in the Local Government Pay Settlement for a period of four years commencing in 2017/2018.
 - c) That a system of Basic Allowance multiplication is introduced to calculate the levels of Special Responsibility Allowances, using the proposed Basic Allowance of £8,220. Any increases to be phased in over a two year period (in line with the proposals for the Basic Allowance), but any proposed decreases to take immediate effect.

Review of Councillors' Allowances for 2018/2019

- 3.4 At its meeting on 8 May 2017, the Panel noted that there are currently no significant changes proposed to the structure and role of councillors serving on the Cabinet and Council Committees, and that there has been no change in respect of the structure and responsibilities of the Standards or other regulatory Committees.
- 3.5 The Panel also sought the views of the Council's Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer, Monitoring Officer and the respective political groups on the levels of Councillors' Allowances for 2018/2019, and where representations were made these are set out in the report.

Basic Allowance

- 3.6 The Panel considered the appropriateness of the Basic Allowance in Swindon, giving regard to the phased increase for 2018/2019 already agreed, and the Council having adopted an index link for the Basic Allowance attached to the percentage increase in the Local Government Pay Settlement.
- 3.7 As no representations had been made on the level of Basic Allowance, and in view of the above points, the Panel were minded to not undertake a review of the level of Basic Allowance for 2018/2019.

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Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA)

- 3.8 The Panel considered a representation from the Chair of the Licensing Committee that the Panel consider whether those Licensing Committee members who sit on daytime panels should be entitled to an SRA. The representation accepted the most recent recommendation from the Panel, which was approved by Council, that simply serving on the Licensing Committee itself is not sufficient reason to justify extra payment. However, there was a concern expressed that there may be difficulties in securing sufficient members for the additional daytime panels.
- 3.9 The Panel considered excerpts from the Council's Constitution setting out the responsibilities and functions of the Licensing Committee, and revisited its original deliberations as to why this SRA should be removed. The Panel also noted that there are currently no proposals in place to amend the description or responsibilities of any of the other posts which currently attract SRAs.
- 3.10 The Panel were mindful that SRAs were by definition awarded on the basis of additional responsibility, not the time of day at which the responsibility is exercised. Accordingly, the Panel decided not to recommend any changes to the SRAs for 2018/2019. The Panel did agree to consider whether the removal of the SRA for members of the Licensing Committee has had an impact on attendance, as part of its review of allowances for the 2019/2020 Municipal Year.

Travel, Subsistence and Dependent Care Allowances

- 3.11 The Panel considered a representation from the Leader of the Council that the level of meal allowances in the Scheme are out of touch with typical prices, especially in London, and had requested that the Panel review the amounts.
- 3.12 The Panel considered a summary of subsistence allowances paid by other comparable authorities, and the Travel and Subsistence Policy for Swindon Borough Council officers, which had been circulated prior to the meeting for background information.
- 3.13 The Panel determined that it was not necessary to undertake a full review of Councillors Travel, Subsistence and Dependent Care Allowances at this time. The Panel did, however, agree that the current rate for the Evening Meal Allowance (£10.00) was unrealistic and merited an increase. This could be partly offset by the abolition of the Tea Allowance (£3.20) which the Panel was advised was infrequently claimed.

Recommendations

- 3.14 The Panel resolved that the Cabinet and Council be recommended that:
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3.14.1 The levels of Councillors' Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowances for 2018/2019, as agreed by Council at its meeting on 14 July 2016, remain unchanged.

3.14.2 That the Councillors' Allowance Scheme for 2018/2019 be amended to reflect the proposed removal of the Tea Allowance, currently set at £3.20.

3.14.3 That the Councillors' Allowance Scheme for 2018/2019 be amended to reflect the proposed increase to the Evening Meal Allowance from £10.00 to £15.20.

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 Councillors' Allowances and support for 2017/2018 is £690,700. From this, £461,130 is set aside for the payment of Councillors' Basic Allowances (£8,090 x 57) and the remainder is made available for Mayoral Allowances, Special Responsibility Allowances, and other Allowances (e.g. Travelling and Subsistence) as specified in the Scheme of Allowances. The impact of the changes proposed by these recommendations are minimal.

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

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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 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 None.

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

- 9.1 This is not a Key Decision.