

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

1 Introduction

The Independent Remuneration Panel was established in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2001 and is required to produce reports as to the remuneration of Members.

2 Composition of the Panel

The Panel is made up of the following membership:-

Steve Allen
Professor Ray Hudson
Helen Patterson
Canon K Woodhouse

3 Background

On 6 February 2006 the Panel met to consider three issues:-

- (i) To consider the increase in the Basic/Special Responsibility Allowance for 2006/7;
- (ii) review the level of allowances payable to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Licensing Committee and the Chairs of the Licensing Sub-Committee;
- (iii) consider a proposed amendment to the Members Allowances Scheme in accordance with a recommendation of the Council's Internal Audit Section following their audit of Members allowances.

4 Findings and Conclusions

(i) Basic Allowance/Special Responsibility Allowance 2006/7

Our Report dated 17 September, 2003 states that the allowances are to be increased by the RPI Index for October each year until 2008. However, in line with that Report we are required to meet annually in February to consider any changes to the Council's structures which would warrant either the basic allowance or special responsibility allowance levels to be re-evaluated.

The Panel was advised by the Head of Democratic Services and Administration that there have been no changes to the Council's political structures in the period since the last review and we therefore conclude that the basic and special responsibility allowances for 2006/7 should increase by 2.7% (RPI Index for October 2005).

(ii) Special Responsibility Allowances(SRAs) – Licensing Committee and Sub-Committee Members

In its Report dated 21 February, 2005 the Panel agreed to review the levels of allowances currently payable to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the

Licensing Committee (£2493.48 and £1246.74 respectively) and Chairs of the Licensing Sub-Committees (£2493.48) at the end of the first year of operation.

In reviewing the allowances, the Panel considered the following evidence and information:-

- the number of hearings held since the Sub-Committees had been established (9 in total) together with details of who chaired and attended each
- information from other local authorities in the County on their levels of remuneration , the number of hearings held and the set up of their Sub-Committees
- any forthcoming changes to the legislation or any factors that would substantially increase the number of hearings over the forthcoming year

The Panel acknowledges the level of responsibility Members have in that the Sub-Committees are quasi-judicial, notes the comprehensive training they have undertaken and the knowledge they have acquired of the Council's Licensing Policy and legislation. We consider that the SRAs paid in the first year reflects this.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer (Licensing) has advised that no changes to the legislation are expected at present although a review of the Guidance is due in 2006/7. The work of the Sub-Committees will therefore continue as at present ie to consider new applications, variations (where there are objections) and any requests for reviews.

At the time of establishing the level of allowances the number of hearings was anticipated to be considerably higher, and the Panel therefore considers that the volume of business is such that the Chair of the Licensing Committee (or the Vice-Chair in his/her absence) could reasonably be expected to Chair the hearings. This is a practice adopted by other authorities within the County.

The Panel therefore concludes that with effect from 1 April 2006, only the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Licensing Committee should receive an allowance and this be at the rates they currently receive ie £2493.48 and £1246.74 respectively, plus 2.7% (in line with the increase agreed for the basic allowance and other SRAs for 2006/7).

(iii) **Amendment to Members Allowance Scheme**

The Panel were asked to consider a recommendation from the Council's Internal Audit Section that the Scheme be amended to include "Members are encouraged to travel together or with an Officer where possible".

In considering this, we were provided with a copy of the Audit Manager's report to Audit Scrutiny Committee.

The Panel considers that Internal Audit's recommendation would help to achieve efficiencies and is in line with the Council's environmental improvement principles. We therefore conclude that the Members Allowance Scheme should be amended accordingly.

6. **Additional Comments – Subsistence Allowance**

The Panel Report dated 17 September, 2003 recommended that claims for subsistence allowance should be accompanied by an official receipt and we note that this advice was rejected by the Council on the basis that the scheme was considered to be modest and the requirement to produce receipts would be unnecessarily onerous and counter productive in administration costs. (Receipts are only required in the event of Members claiming over and above the agreed rates for out of pocket expenses where unavoidable).

We wish to make it known that the Panel's views on this remain unchanged but note the Council's position.

7. **Recommendations**

The Panel recommends that:-

- (i) basic and special responsibility allowances be increased in line with the RPI Index for October (2.7%);
- (ii) in relation to Licensing Sub-Committees, only the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Licensing Committee should receive an SRA with effect from 1 April 2006 at the rates currently payable plus 2.7%;
- (iii) the Chair of the Licensing Committee (or Vice-Chair in the Chair's absence) be responsible for chairing Sub-Committee hearings.
- (iv) the Members Allowance Scheme be amended to include that 'Members are encouraged to travel together or with an Officer where possible'.

Dated 22 February 2006

S Allen (Chair)
Prof R Hudson
H Pattison
Canon K Woodhouse