

County Council

7 December 2016

Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel



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Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Council of the outcomes of the review of Members' Allowances carried out by the Independent Remuneration Panel for 2017/18 and to ask the Council to agree a scheme of allowances for that financial year, taking into account the views of the Panel.

Background

2. Under the Local Authority's (Members' Allowances England), Regulations 2003 (the "Regulations") the County Council shall make a scheme in accordance with the Regulations which provide for the payment of an allowance in respect of each year to each member of the Council. This is referred to as the "basic allowance".
3. The scheme may also provide for special responsibility allowances to such Members of the authority that carry out special responsibilities in relation to the authority as are specified in the scheme and fit within one or more of the categories set out in the Regulations.
4. The Regulations also provide that before the beginning of each year the authority shall review the scheme and before confirming or amending it, members shall have regard to the recommendations made in relation to it by the Independent Remuneration Panel.

Independent Remuneration Panel

5. On 9 September 2016, the following Members of the Panel met to review the allowances for 2015/16:-

John Cuthbert, Joyce Drummond-Hill, Alan Fletcher, John Hitchman, Ian Machin and Kate Welch
6. The Panel was advised of representations made by Members. In this case, only two Members had submitted views. One was that the council had too many councillors and urged a comparison between the annual basic allowances paid in each council and an annual allowance

cost per resident figure across the region. The writer suggested that such a figure would be likely to put Durham at a higher rate per resident and in such circumstances the writer favoured no increase. Another member was of the strong view that the mileage rate should be capped and reduced per mile: that the Broadband allowance should be should be reconsidered in the light of free deals now being more readily available. The same councillor also expressed concern that the fact that the basic allowance has not risen for six/seven years would lead to erosion of the allowance and a danger of the allowance being perceived as below minimum wage and a disincentive to potential new members. The suggestion as also made that the arrangement for group leader allowances was not credible for small groups, such as two members and should be replaced by one of a basic amount pule a figure based on the numbers in the group and these were not supportive of any increase in allowances during the current period of austerity.

7. The Panel was advised that no further representations had been received in relation to allowances for the Police and Crime Panel or the Health and Wellbeing Board.
8. Details of the appointments made by the Council to the North East Combined Authority (NECA) were provided to the Panel. At the time of the preparation of the report, the outcome of the NECA Leadership meeting on whether to consult on the scheme of Governance in relation to the Devolution Agreement was not known and the report of the Panel was written in the context of it not being clear what workload changes would be. The Panel was advised of the outcome at the meeting.
9. The Panel took into account the current background of austerity and the reductions in services that that could entail. It also considered the number of members and was reluctant to recommend any changes to the allowances at this time. An agreed note of the meeting is attached at Appendix 2
10. The current scheme of allowances is appended at Appendix 3. If the Council was to agree with the recommendations of the Panel, then it may simply agree that that allowance scheme is made. The recommendation in this report is therefore based upon the acceptance of the Panel's recommendation.

Recommendations and reasons

11. That Council make the allowance scheme as appended and in doing so take account of the Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel.

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – None specific within the report.

Staffing – None specific within the report.

Risk – None specific within the report.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – None specific within the report.

Accommodation - None specific within the report.

Crime and Disorder - None specific within the report.

Human Rights - None specific within the report.

Consultation – None specific within the report.

Procurement - None specific within the report.

Disability Issues – None specific within the report.

Legal Implications – None specific within the report.