

Independent Remuneration Panel: Interim report on the Horsham District Council Members' Allowances Scheme

Introduction

The Independent Remuneration Panel ("the Panel") carried out an in depth review of Members' Allowances in 2014/15. The Panel's report and recommendations were accepted in full by the Council in September 2015 and the respective increases in allowances were back dated to 11 May 2015. Since that date allowances have been increased in line with annual increases in Officers' pay, per the Panel's recommendation.

Horsham District Council ("the Council") completed a Governance Review in April 2016 and a Constitutional Review was completed in December 2016. Following these reviews, changes were made to the Council's Committee structure. The Personnel Committee was dissolved, and a Governance Committee established. Policy Development Advisory Groups ("PDAG's") were created, each being chaired by a Cabinet member. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee dissolved its four standing sub committees with the intention of using Task & Finish Groups for specific pieces of work from time to time. Changes in Committee structure resulted in savings of approximately £4500 per annum in total Scheme costs.

The Panel have now carried out an interim "desk top" review to determine whether the current Scheme allowances remain appropriate.

Methodology

1. An email was sent to all Councillors inviting feedback on the current Members Allowances Scheme and the various allowance entitlements.
2. Interviews were held with three Chairs/Vice Chairs of Committees and two Cabinet members
3. The 2016/17 SEE survey facilitated comparisons with allowances paid by 44 other District and Borough Councils(see Appendix 1).

Findings

Eight of forty four Councillors responded to the Panel's email invitation. Most replies focused on the lack of an attendance allowance, which was of course ended following the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. Replies were critical of the fact that Councillors with poor attendance records still received the same basic allowance. No comments were received on the current level of either the basic allowance or the various special responsibility allowances.

The face to face interviews were extremely helpful in facilitating the Panel's understanding of the roles of Cabinet Members and PDAGs, and the responsibilities of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (including Task and Finish Groups) and the Governance Committee. None of those interviewed felt that any allowances should be increased.

The Panel noted that whilst there was potentially a difference in workload between the various cabinet posts, (including the frequency of PDAG meetings) trying to link special responsibility allowances to individual cabinet responsibilities would not be practical.

The SEE 2016/17 survey results and Horsham District Council's relative positioning are set out in Appendix 1. Horsham District Council's basic allowance and special responsibility allowances for 2016/17 compare less favourably with the respective SEE averages and medians for 2014/15. The special responsibility allowance for the Leader looks particularly low.

Recommendations

1. When a full review by the Panel is carried out later in 2018, the Panel should investigate linking the special responsibility allowance for the leader of the minority group to the number of councillors in that group as is the case with many other local authorities. The current allowance appears disproportionate to the small number of councillors in the minority group. In the short term the allowance should be frozen pending the next full Panel review.
2. The basic allowance and special responsibility allowances should continue to be increased in line with the annual percentage increases in Officers' pay.
3. Travelling and subsistence rates should continue to be linked to the rates for staff and those of the casual user rate.
4. The dependent carer's allowance should continue to be in line with the National living wage per hour rate
5. The Leader's allowance should be increased to £13250 from the current £12245 to bring it more in line with the allowance paid by other SEEs.
6. The Chair of the Standards Committee's allowance should be reduced to £2365, the same as the current allowances for the Chair of the Audit Committee and the Chair of the Governance Committee
7. The Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee's allowance should be reduced to £4960, the same as the allowance for the Chair of Council. The allowance paid to the Deputy Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee should be one third of the allowance paid to the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The net effect of the recommended increases/decreases is a saving of £1305 per annum.

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