

**Report of the Northumberland County Council Independent
Remuneration Panel - April 2022**

Executive Summary

The views of the Independent Remuneration Panel are required to be taken into account by the Council when considering any changes to the Members' Allowances Scheme. The Panel has been requested to consider and make recommendations in relation to:

- The Members' Allowances Scheme for the 2022/23 municipal year;
- The level of special responsibility allowance to be attached to the posts of Deputy Cabinet Member which were appointed to in May 2021;
- The Parental leave policy recently adopted by the Council in September 2021; and
- The provision of payment of broadband allowances.

In carrying out our work the Panel has undertaken research into the workload and levels of responsibility of elected Members and has had regard to the level of allowances in nearby authorities together with authorities named by CIPFA as being comparable councils.

The Panel has carried out this review within a relatively short timescale and recommends that it carry out a more detailed review in time for Full Council in January 2023 which the Panel understands could then feed into the Budget-setting process and could take effect for the municipal year 2023/24.

The Panel recommends that:

- (1) the level of basic allowance for elected Members be maintained at its current level of £15,033 from the start of the 2022/23 municipal year, with the index-linking previously agreed for this allowance to be continued;
- (2) the Panel be authorised to give further consideration to the level of special responsibility allowances as part of the next review of the Members' Allowances Scheme;
- (3) a special responsibility allowance of one third of the value of the Cabinet Members' special responsibility allowances be attached to the three Deputy Cabinet Member positions (this being, at present, £4,950) from the date of the Annual Council meeting of 4th May 2022;
- (4) The issue of broadband allowances be considered further at the next review
- ~~(5)~~ that a review of the Parental leave policy takes place at the next review
- (6) the panel be authorised to carry out a more considered and detailed review of members allowances be carried out in time for Full Council in January 2023 which the Panel understands could then feed into the Budget-setting process and could take effect for the municipal year 2023/24

INTRODUCTION

- 1.0 The Remuneration Panel has been established and maintained under the provisions of the Local Authority (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.
- 1.1 Our Terms of Reference are as follows: -
- a) To consider issues and representations relating to Members' remuneration and expenses including a review of current Members' Allowances Scheme and a number of new matters not specifically provided for within the Scheme at present namely;
 - i) A proposed Parental Leave Policy;
 - ii) The proposed payment of a special responsibility allowance to new Deputy Cabinet Members; and
 - iii) The provision of payment of broadband allowances.
 - b) To make recommendations and provide advice to the Council with regard to the above.
- 1.2 The current Panel comprises of Mr. John Anderson CBE, Chairman of the North East Business Innovation Centre (BIC); Mrs. Allison Thompson, chair of South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Trust and Mrs. Jacqui Henderson, adviser to the Further Education Commissioner's Office

3.1 BASIC ALLOWANCE

- 3.2 Under the current scheme all members of the Council are entitled to receive a basic allowance of £15,033. This allowance is intended to cover a range of incidental expenses incurred by Members, including stationary, postage, telephone calls etc; and to recognise the unpaid work spent on ward matters.
- 3.3 The Panel has had access to a wide range of benchmarking data from the LA7 authorities together with comparable authorities in terms of geographical size, population and other parameters as named by CIPFA.
- 3.4 A brief analysis of the current member allowances schemes of those authorities, as well as feedback from the interviews the Panel conducted with some members, has persuaded the Panel that there is no compelling need to recommend any change to the current level of the basic allowance at this time. Panel members heard that members can spend significant time in travelling around the County on Council business and acknowledged that, in comparison with comparator authorities including its closest geographical neighbour out of those authorities, Durham County Council which has 126 Members, the Council has 67 councillors to cover a large geographical area and the Panel considered that this was an important factor to be considered when resolving whether to recommend a change to the basic allowance.
- 3.5 The Panel also considers that it is appropriate to keep the existing index link between the Members' basic allowance and the annual percentage salary increase for local government staff previously agreed by the Council in accordance with a recommendation of the previous Panel.

5.0 DEPUTY CABINET MEMBERS

- 5.1 The Leader, at the Council's Annual Meeting held in May 2021 announced the positions of

Deputy Cabinet Members. The positions were therefore not considered by the previous Panel and, as a consequence, we have now been asked to consider what allowance, if any, should be paid in respect of the positions.

- 5.2 There are few analogous roles in the benchmarking groups used in connection with this authority's Panel reviews although we have heard from a current incumbent as to the time that is expended in carrying out the role together with other Members, both in support of and against the principle of the provision of a Special Responsibility Allowance to the role. On balance however, when considering the legislative criteria to be met for the provision of an allowance in conjunction with the submissions and evidence presented we considered that the role met the relevant criteria and would be eligible for a special responsibility allowance. The Panel then went on to consider what level the allowance should be and adopted the "one third" approach which they considered to be appropriate in common with the methodology adopted by the previous Panel when considering at that point in time the role of Deputy Business Chair.

6.0 BROADBAND ALLOWANCES

- 6.1 Panel members, while aware that they had been requested to review this area, considered that they did not have sufficient information before them to make a considered decision on this issue at this stage and, mindful that a further review is recommended by the Panel, we recommended to Council that this area is covered by the proposed further review.

7.0 PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY

The Panel were provided with a copy of the parental leave policy and were addressed by members on this issue. Panel members were aware that the policy had only been introduced in September 2021 and, on this basis and on the basis that they would wish some further information we recommend that we consider this at the next review.

8 9 ACKGROUND INFORMATION AND REFERENCES

- The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003
- Members' Allowances Schemes of regional authorities and statistical neighbours (as defined by CIPFA)
- Local Government Act 1972
- Northumberland Council's Constitution
- Northumberland's Members' Allowances Scheme