

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL
ON THE SCHEME OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES
FOR TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL 2024/25**

INTRODUCTION

The report has been prepared by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) for Tewkesbury Borough Council comprising five individuals drawn from the community; three of which have been established members for a number of years and two having served for two reviews.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (the Regulations) apply to all Local Authorities.

The Regulations require Local Authorities to make a scheme providing for the payment of a Basic Allowance to each Member of that Authority. The Basic Allowance must be the same for each Member of the Authority.

An Authority's Scheme of Allowances may also provide for the payment of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) to such Members as have additional responsibilities. The specified categories of special or additional responsibilities which may be considered in a Scheme of Allowances include:

- i) Acting as Leader or Deputy Leader.
- ii) Acting as a Member of an Executive where the Authority is operating Executive arrangements within the meaning of Part 2 of the Local Government Act.
- iii) Presiding at meetings of a Committee or Sub-Committee of the Authority.
- iv) Representing the Authority at meetings of or arranged by any other body.
- v) Acting as a Member of a Committee or Sub-Committee of the Authority which meets with exceptional frequency or for exceptionally long periods.
- vi) Acting as a spokesperson of a Political Group on a Committee or Sub-Committee of the Authority; and
- vii) Carrying out such other activities in relation to the discharge of the Authority's functions as require of the Member an amount of time and effort equal to or greater than would be required of him or her by any of the above-mentioned activities.

SRAs need not be the same and may reflect the different expectations, time and effort involved in particular roles.

Members' Allowances Schemes may also provide for the payment of a Carers' Allowance and also for Members' travelling and subsistence whilst acting in connection with their duties as a Member of the authority (Approved Duties).

Before a Local Authority may make or amend a Scheme of Allowances, it must have regard to any recommendation(s) made in relation to the Scheme by its Independent Remuneration Panel.

CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW

The current Scheme of Allowances expires on 31 March 2024 and a new Scheme needs to be in place with effect from 1 April 2024.

By way of context, and particularly for the benefit of more newly-elected councillors, set out below are the outcomes of allowance reviews in previous years.

In 2002, the Council's Scheme of Allowances allowed for a Basic Allowance of £6,500pa increasing by £1,300 on an annual basis, as part of a four-year scheme, rising up to £10,400.

In 2004 a Basic Allowance of £9,100 was proposed, increasing to £10,400 in 2005.

In 2008 a Basic Allowance of £9,000 was approved for a three-year period.

In 2011 the then Independent Remuneration Panel recommended the following Scheme of Allowances which was adopted by the Council:

- Basic Allowance of £7,200 (four years).
- That the following Special Responsibility Allowances be payable:

Leader of the Council	£7,937
Deputy Leader	£5,953
Lead Members (7)	£3,969
Committee Chairmen (4)	£1,984
Mayor	£2,000
Deputy Mayor	£1,250
- Councillors who carried out more than one role which would attract a Special Responsibility Allowance were only entitled to claim the highest applicable Special Responsibility Allowance.
- That the Independent and Parish Members of the Standards Committee receive a Co-Optees Allowance of £1,000, to be kept under review should the Council opt to introduce voluntary arrangements.
- That Co-Optees/invitees should not receive an Allowance but the Council should ensure that they are fully reimbursed for any travel expenses incurred in attending meetings.
- That no reference to IT be included in the Council's Scheme of Allowances.
- That no change be made to the existing arrangements in respect of the payment of Travel Allowances.
- That no change be made to the existing arrangements in respect of the payment of Subsistence Allowances.
- That the existing arrangements for the Dependant Carers' Allowance remain unchanged.
- That Tewkesbury Borough Councillors should not currently be entitled to be part of the Local Government Pension Scheme.
- That no change be made to the current provisions on Suspension and Renunciation.

- That the following provision be included in the Council's Scheme:

"If a Councillor does not attend at least two-thirds of the total number of scheduled meetings of the Council, or of the Executive, or of Committees of which he/she is a Member, the Councillor concerned should be invited to pay back an appropriate percentage of his/her Basic Allowance up to a maximum of 25% of the Basic Allowance."

"If a Member is absent from Council business for more than one continuous month (other than on illness grounds) the Member concerned should be invited to pay back a sum equivalent to the amount of Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances paid for any single period of absence which exceeds one month."

"For periods of long-term absences due to illness the Council should review its position on a case by case basis."

- That the Scheme be introduced for four years but, should the political structure of the Council change following the Elections in May, the Panel be reconvened to review its recommendations.
- That no other changes be made to the Scheme of Allowances, including the Schedule of Approved Duties.
- That the Scheme run from 1 April 2011.

In 2016 the current Chair of the Panel was elected, and the following Scheme was recommended to, and adopted by, the Council:

- Basic Allowance unchanged.
- SRAs amended:
 - Leader of the Council - £8,400
 - Deputy Leader - £6,300
 - Lead Members (7) - £4,200
 - Committee Chairmen (5) - £2,100
 - Mayor - £2,100
 - Deputy Mayor - £1,300
- That the provision which states that Councillors who carry out more than one role which would attract a Special Responsibility Allowance are only entitled to claim the highest applicable Special Responsibility be deleted from the Scheme and that any Member carrying out a role subject to a Special Responsibility Allowance should receive payment for each role undertaken. *(In respect of the current Mayor particularly, who was also a Lead Member; this provision should be back-dated so that he receives both Special Responsibility Allowances during his Mayoral Year. Accordingly, it is recommended that the provision in the 2015/16 Scheme restricting claims to one Special Responsibility Allowance be removed).*
- That no reference to IT be included in the Council's Scheme of Allowances.
- That the arrangements for travel allowances remain unchanged except that the reference to 'journeys exceeding 50 miles in total will be payable at a mileage rate of 1p per mile after the first 50 miles' be deleted as the Panel cannot see any rationale for this to remain in the Scheme.

- That the arrangements for subsistence allowances remain unchanged except that the Democratic Services Group Manager be given delegated authority to approve increased amounts in special circumstances, such as visits to London, subject to them being reasonable and upon the production of receipts.
- That the Dependent Carers' Allowance remains in place but that the maximum amount payable be increased from £6 per hour to £7.20 in line with the living wage.
- That it be noted that, from 1 April 2014, the entitlement of local Councillors to join the Local Government Pension Scheme was abolished.
- That the repayment provision within the Scheme remain unchanged.
- That the Scheme be introduced for one year from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, during which period the Panel will meet to review the Scheme and recommend any amendments if necessary.

That no other changes be made to the Scheme of Allowances, including the Schedule of Approved Duties.

From 2017-2020 the Basic Allowance remained unchanged, but the Panel did propose increases and changes to the SRAs and the Dependent Carers' Allowance which were adopted by the Council.

In 2020 the Panel proposed that the Scheme to run from April 2020 to March 2021 remain unchanged other than an increase in the Basic Allowance of £150 to £7,350pa which represented a 2% increase. This was adopted by the Council.

In 2021 and 2022 the Panel proposed no changes to the Scheme other than in 2022 an increase in the Dependent Carers' Allowance from £7.50 to £9.50 per hour in line with the National Living Wage.

The pay award for staff in 2022 had been accepted and was a lump sum which equated to 5% additional cost to the manpower budget whereas individual staff awards ranged from 10.5% down to 1.5%.

Inflation was then running in excess of 10%.

The Council's financial position was as previously advised to the Panel with significant deficits forecast over the medium term.

In 2023, the Independent Remuneration Panel recommended the following changes to the Scheme of Allowances:

- (i) the Basic Allowance be increased from £7,350 to £7,650
- (ii) Special Responsibility Allowances be payable as follows:
 - Leader of the Council £9,150
 - Deputy Leader of the Council £6,860
 - Other Lead Members £4,575
 - Support Members £180
 - Committee Chairs £2,290
 - Mayor £2,290
 - Deputy Mayor £1,400
- (iii) the Dependent Carers' Allowance be increased from £9.50 per hour to £10.42 per hour.

The Panel recommended that all other provisions within the then existing 2022/23 Member Allowances Scheme should be unchanged and remain in place for 2023/24.

Whilst the Council's Basic Allowance had remained amongst the highest in the country, the Panel had recognised the impact of inflation and felt it appropriate to recommend an increase of 4%, or £300; along with a similar percentage increase in Special Responsibility Allowances; and an increase in the Dependant Carers' Allowance in line with the National Living Wage.

EVIDENCE AND METHODOLOGY FOR THE REVIEW

The Panel met on three occasions (a further meeting was cancelled due to illness). Discussions were held with the Executive Director: Resources & S151 Officer and six Members of the Council (across different political/other groups, different levels of experience as councillors, and different roles including Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and others without any 'special responsibility'). Unfortunately, one of the Panel members was unable to attend the two most recent meetings as his home had been subject to flooding in recent weeks; and, understandably, his attention and commitment had been needed elsewhere.

In addition to the Member discussions, the Panel reviewed the following information:

- Allowance payments made by Gloucestershire Councils
- Allowance payments made by Councils falling within the CIPFA Nearest Neighbour Group definition (i.e. councils with similar demographics and characteristics)
- Allowance payments made by Councils from across the country that operated Committee structures as opposed to executive (Cabinet) arrangements
- Allowance payments made by other authorities within the South West Region
- The deliberations of the South West IRP Chairs at their meeting held 20th September 2023.

FINDINGS

Significant amounts of time were spent on Councillor duties, particularly dealing with Ward matters, and this could easily be equated to a full-time job.

Some Members dedicated more time than others to the role depending upon the needs of their Ward and the time available to commit to the duties - this was not unusual. A number of Members were also Parish/Town Councillors, and several were Parish/Town and County Councillors. However, irrespective of the amount of time spent supporting their communities, the dedication and commitment shown was clear; and there were many examples cited of councillors working together for the good of their residents and communities, irrespective of party affiliation.

Allowances were not a factor considered when decisions were made to stand for election, which was borne out of an overriding desire to help and support the community. However, allowances did help in meeting the costs involved in terms of loss of earnings, using homes as offices, and travelling in the Ward (particularly in the very rural areas where Members could attend many Parish Council meetings).

Allowances are not salaries and could not be set at a level to compensate fully the time spent on Council business - and nor should they be.

Some Members expressed the view that the allowances were less of an issue for those with other sources of income, such as a pension, or if a person did not need to rely on a working income at all. However, it was acknowledged that without other sources of income it would not be feasible for all people to put themselves forward for the role.

The significant workload of the Leader was acknowledged as was the differing level of responsibility and workloads of the various Lead Members and, also, the Committee Chairs. It was, however, accepted that it was difficult to justify fully any further increases at this time given that the new member structures had been in place for less than one full year and further adjustments might be forthcoming in the light of experience. A member questioned whether it might be appropriate for some additional recompense to be made to those members who served on committees that met more frequently, such as Planning, but it was acknowledged that any allowance scheme could not be attendance-based.

The comparisons with other relevant/similar/neighbouring Authorities showed that whilst Tewkesbury still had a relatively high Basic Allowance, the gap had narrowed; and that, in terms of the SRAs paid, many of the Tewkesbury sums were by no means in the upper ranges.

There was a general view that the allowances were appropriate, particularly bearing in mind the Council's overall financial position and the fact that increases had been adopted for the current year.

CONCLUSIONS

Having regard to the comparator information provided, and the feedback from the discussions with Members, the Panel felt, unanimously, that there was no justification to increase any of the allowances for 2024/25. The Panel was also mindful that, overall, discussions with Members had not identified support for increases at this time.

The Panel expressed the view that it was also difficult to justify any increases at this time given that the new Member structures had been in place for less than one full year and many Members were either new to the role of councillor and/or to a role that attracted a Special Responsibility Allowance.

However, given the significant changes to membership and Member structures following the 2023 elections, the key focus of the work of the Panel in the coming year would be a detailed examination of Special Responsibility Allowances to understand fully the roles that should be eligible for this type of Allowance and what payments they should attract. This would involve face-to-face discussions with the relevant office holders.

RECOMMENDATION

That no changes be made to the current Scheme of Allowances, with all current allowances to remain in place for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

(END)