

A Review of the Scheme for Members' Allowances for 2008/09
for
Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

Joint Independent Remuneration Panel

G. Tomlinson (Chair)
S. Holmes
S. Knott
J. Selmes
C. Wilby

21 December 2007

Joint Independent Remuneration Panel

The Joint Independent Remuneration Panel (JIRP) for Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Sevenoaks District Council was originally established in 2001 and now operates under the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. The function of the panel is to make recommendations to Council in accordance with Statutory Instruments (primarily 2003 No.1021 and No.1692).

The JIRP was established jointly by the three Councils but it considers each Council individually and makes separate recommendations for each according to the particular structures and requirements of the organisation.

In September 2007, the terms of appointment of four of the original five members of the panel matured and, following interviews in October, a new panel was established in November. The panel is drawn from residents of the three council areas it serves and the members of the new panel are:

- Geoff Tomlinson (Chair), a retired Clearing Bank Project Manager who lives in Sevenoaks Weald.
- Susan Holmes, Chief Executive of Medway Mediation, living in Cranbrook.
- Simon Knott, a Counsellor working within the NHS, living in Matfield.
- Jean Selmes, a Senior HR Adviser at the London Borough of Lewisham, living in Hildenborough.
- Colin Wilby, a Non-Executive Director of Medway NHS Trust, living in Kings Hill.

Introduction

In its last report (31 December 2006), the previous JIRP gave notice of its intention to carry out a comprehensive review of Members' Allowances after the local elections in 2007. However, the timing of the new appointments to the Panel has not allowed sufficient time to make a full review feasible within the Council's budgeting cycle in time for the 2008-09 financial year. The recruitment of new panel members provides an opportunity for a fresh look at members' remuneration and we propose to complete this in time for the 2009-10 financial cycle.

The JIRP report of December 2006 highlighted three committee roles to be followed-up at the next annual review: Standards, Licensing and Audit, in each case to allow sufficient time for the roles to become established. These are dealt with in turn below.

We have had the opportunity to discuss these roles and other organisational changes with Councillors Mark Worrall, David Thornewell and Mark Rhodes. They also highlighted for us the practical implications of the outcome of the 2007 elections on roles and responsibilities for elected members and leaders. In particular, the Panel noted the increased responsibilities and time demands on group leaders resulting from the changed political balance of the Borough. We would like to thank them for taking time to brief the new Panel.

Recommendations:-

1) Chair of Standards Committee

The Panel reviewed the evolving role of the Standards Committee and heard that potentially there would be increased responsibilities in the future to be delegated from the Standards Board for England for such issues as complaints and investigations. As yet, it is unclear how significantly this changes the nature of the role and therefore we

recommend that the SRA is maintained at its current level. A further review can take place once the additional duties are clearly established.

2) Chair of Audit Committee

The Audit Committee was established in 2006 and Members have had to undertake financial and risk management training in order to be able to take up their duties, which are primarily to review the internal systems and processes of the Council. Having discussed the role with the current Chair, we recommend that the SRA for the Chair of Audit Committee is established at the same level of SRA as Standards and General Purposes (currently £1137 p.a.). Should the duties or responsibilities of this role change significantly in the future we should revisit the issue then.

Given that the Chair of Audit has been in place for some time, we further recommend that payment of the allowance is backdated to 1st April 2007.

3) Licensing Committee

Licensing was subject to a high workload in its early stages as Members had to be trained and gain experience in the new responsibilities. We understand that this has now stabilised but that further regulatory change in respect of Gaming is due at a future but unspecified date. With this in mind we recommend maintaining the allowance at the current level (although subject to the general inflationary specified below). When the impact of the Gaming Regulations is clearer we should revisit this area again.

4) General Increase to allowances

We recommend that allowances specified in the Scheme of Members' Allowances should be indexed in line with the increase in RPI (All Items) with effect from 1st April 2008.

5) Future Action – Review of current Scheme of Member's Allowances

The Panel have received initial comparative information on allowances paid for key councillor positions in neighbouring and similar councils in England. This has highlighted some significant differences in the structure and scale of Councillors' remuneration at Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council compared to those paid elsewhere which we wish to review and understand better. Consequently, we propose that we undertake a fundamental review of all allowances and responsibilities in 2008 with a view that a revised scheme would be proposed to take effect in the 2009-10 financial year.

This review will be comprehensive and we will take into consideration all available evidence, both external and internal. Some original research may be necessary, for example to obtain current data on actual time dedicated to members' duties, but we do not envisage that it will be particularly time-consuming for any individual. We would, however, request the co-operation and participation of Leaders, Members and Officers in achieving this task.

Some anticipated sources of information for this review are:-

- Audit Commission data such as the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.
- Comparative data for Members' Remuneration in South-East authorities and in comparable councils elsewhere in England.
- Views of Leaders, Members and Officers within Tonbridge & Malling B.C.
- Customer Satisfaction surveys.
- Role profiles and activity logs for the key Member roles to assist in identifying the natures of responsibilities and in quantifying the workload involved.

Furthermore, the Councillors Commission report '*Representing the Future*' published on 10 December 2007 by the Department for Communities and Local Government has a comprehensive document on '*Member Remuneration*' which we wish to digest and understand the directional implications as part of our deliberations.

We anticipate the timescale for the review as follows:-

- Jan-Mar 2008 – basic research, compile data
- Apr-Jun 2008 – formulate proposals around structure of Allowances
- Sep-Nov 2008 – consultation with Leaders, Members, Officers
- December 2008 – report to Council with recommendations

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