

# **The Welland Partnership Members Remuneration Panel**

## Report to Harborough Council Meeting

### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 This Report has been prepared by the Independent Panel set up to make recommendations and provide guidance to the Council in respect of its scheme for Members' allowances.
- 1.2 The Report sets out the Panel's recommendations for the Council's consideration.

### **2. Framework**

- 2.1 The Local Government (Members' Allowances) 2003 Regulations put in place a consolidated and simplified framework for allowances that covers Principal Councils and Parish and Town Councils.
- 2.2 Part 4 of the Regulations makes provision for the establishment of an Independent Panel to make recommendations concerning allowances, travel and subsistence provision. The Welland Remuneration Panel, comprising John Cade (Chair), Ian Davis and Gordon Wells is compliant with the necessary arrangements.
- 2.3 A Council is unable to revoke or amend its scheme of allowances without first considering the recommendations of an Independent Panel. Whilst the Council is not bound by the recommendations of the Panel, there is a duty placed upon it to consider the recommendations, publish the Panel's recommendations and publish its Scheme.

2.4 Essentially, legislation provides that Local Authorities' Schemes of Allowances:

- Must make provision for a Basic Allowance, payable to all Members.
- May make provision for Special Responsibility Allowances.
- May include provision for payment of travel and subsistence expenses.
- May include provision for Co-optee Allowances

2.5 Government guidance on the scheme has generally become more relaxed. There are, however, three constraints on the Panel's work which it is important to highlight:

- Attendance Allowances are prohibited.
- The Basic Allowance must be paid equally to all Members.
- Where one or more Groups on a Council form an Administration, a Special Responsibility Allowance must be paid to a Member of the Opposition – usually paid to the Leader of the Opposition.

2.6 Allowances can be backdated to the beginning of the financial year.

2.7 For the avoidance of doubt the Council has also adopted the good practice that only one Special Responsibility Allowance can be claimed.

### 3. Our way of working

- 3.1. We are always keen to hear from as many Councillors as possible on the scope of the allowances scheme. The payment of allowances is always a contentious issue with rarely a consensus of view – some Councillors emphasising the voluntary nature of the role while others believe there is a need for better remunerations. We need to be aware of these opinions in conjunction with the comparative information we look at from neighbouring and similar sized Councils.
- 3.2 Our Panel met to take evidence at the Symington Building on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2025
- 3.3 Over the course of the day we met with Councillors Phil Knowles (Leader of the Council), Darren Woodwiss (Leader of the Green Party), David Gair (Labour Group Member and Chair of Audit and Standards Committee), Phil King (Conservative Group Member), Peter James (LibDem Group Member and Chair of the Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee) and John Richardson (Chief Executive).
- 3.4 We also had a virtual meeting with Councillor Jon Bateman (Conservative Group Leader) and received written submissions from Councillors Graves, Bannister and Page.
- 3.5 We are very grateful to all those who gave us oral and written evidence.
- 3.6 We are also very grateful for the Officer support we received from Nancy Barnard (Head of Democratic Services and Elections) and Cameron Maclean (Interim Democratic Services Officer).
- 3.7 Another key component of our work is to examine how your allowances compare with neighbouring and similar sized Authorities. For this purpose, Nancy provided us with comparative figures and analysis for Charnwood, Melton, Blaby, Hinkley and Bosworth, North West Leicestershire, Bromsgrove, East Hampshire, Horsham, South Cambridgeshire, Stratford Upon Avon, Test Valley and Wyehaven.

#### 4. Context

- 4.1 From the evidence we took from Councillors, and underpinned by the comparative information provided to us, there seems a broad consensus that the level of allowances is, on the whole, at the right level.

#### 5. Findings

##### 5.1 Basic Allowances

5.1.1. We are satisfied that, provided this continues to be index-linked, this is an appropriate level of remuneration.

5.1.2. Your current allowance is higher than the average for comparators both in Leicestershire Districts and Statistical neighbours.

5.1.3. Moreover, we received no evidence for an uplift here.

##### 5.2 Special Responsibility Allowances (S.R.A.s)

5.2.1. Most Councils work with Special Responsibility Allowances being either a factor of the Basic Allowance or of the Leader's remuneration. You work to the former model.

5.2.2. The Leader's remuneration is currently set at 2.75 x Basic Allowance. We received a number of comments in our taking of evidence that the demands on the role of Leader are increasing.

Whilst you are not in the first tranche of transition under the Local Government Reform (LGR) there will still be plenty of preparatory work to be undertaken.

We believe that the Leader's level of remuneration should now be at 3 x Basic Allowance. This also brings it more in line with other Councils.

5.2.3. In the same way we believe that there is a case for a modest increase in the remuneration for the Deputy Leader

and Cabinet posts. We believe the Deputy Leader remuneration should be 1.5 x Basic Allowance and a Portfolio Holder be 1.25 x Basic Allowance.

5.2.4. We were advised that there has been some lack of clarity regarding when it is appropriate for a Councillor to start receiving an S.R.A. In accordance with general practice this should be from their formal confirmation at your Annual General Meeting.

### 5.3. Scrutiny Chair

5.3.1. Since we last met the Council has reviewed and amended its Overview and Scrutiny arrangements. Previously a Scrutiny Commission was responsible for the whole of the function, and tasked two Standing Scrutiny Committees to conduct reviews.

5.3.2. The Scrutiny Commission was dis-established in May 2024 and two Committees (one outward facing and the other internally facing) have now been put in place.

5.3.3. The allowance should remain at its current rate of 0.75x Basic.

5.3.4. There should be no allowance for Vice-Chairs.

### 5.4. Chair of Planning Committee

5.4.1. This remains a demanding Committee and no change in the level of remuneration is proposed.

### 5.5. Chair of Audit and Standards Committee

5.5.1. We received no evidence for any change in this allowance.

### 5.6. Chair of Licensing Committee

5.6.1. Whilst there has been no need for meetings recently we understand meetings are scheduled for the next municipal year and therefore believe that the current remuneration should remain.

## 5.7. Leader of the Opposition

5.7.1. Your level of remuneration is favourable to your comparators. We believe this to be positive, especially when political balance is tight. We see no need for change.

## 5.8. Chairman and Vice Chairman

5.8.1. Your Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council both currently receive an allowance to cover expenses incurred in carrying out their civic role. These expenses are not included in the Members' Allowance Scheme.

5.8.2. Given that both roles have responsibilities in relation to the chairing of Full Council we believe that SRAs are appropriate. A separate budget should be maintained by the Council to cover the costs incurred in the civic role.

5.8.3. We believe an SRA of 0.75 x Basic Allowance for the Chairman and 0.4 x Basic Allowance for the Vice-Chairman would be appropriate.

## 6. Index-Linking

6.1. We continue to believe that it is important to index- link your allowances.

6.2. In our last review you agreed that the linkage should be with any increase in Officer pay. More recently the pay awarded to Officers has been correlated to different points of the salary scale. It is, therefore, necessary to specify a certain spinal point it should be related to. It is recommended that this should be linked to any pay awards for Officers' salary grade PO1 (Principal Officer), spinal point 43.

6.3. Given that there can often be delays in negotiating the pay award, indexed increases should be backdated to implementation for Officers.

## 7. Travel

- 7.1. We believe that travel payments should be brought in line with HMRC rates.
- 7.2. We are also of the opinion that it would be helpful to have some wording for when the use of a taxi might be allowable. Such words could be “In cases where no other form of public transport is available or in cases of acknowledged urgency, Members may travel by taxi. Upon production of a valid receipt, they will be reimbursed the actual fare plus any reasonable gratuity that has been paid.”

## 8. Subsistence

- 8.1. We believe the rate should be increased as follows:

Breakfast: £7.50

Lunch: £15.00

Dinner: £20.00

## 9. IT

- 9.1. We received a fair amount of evidence concerning the provision of IT equipment and support. The clear view emerging was that for the time-being it would be best to maintain the current “mixed-economy” arrangement.

## 10. Child-Care and Dependent Carer’s Allowance

- 10.1. Whilst the take-up of this allowance is not high, we believe that it is very important to both well publicise its availability and to set it at appropriate levels.
- 10.2. Your current scheme provides for reimbursement at the hourly minimum wage +50% for a 2<sup>nd</sup> and 25% for a 3<sup>rd</sup> dependent.
- 10.3. We believe that there is a case for separating the payment for child-care and that for dependents.

10.4. For a dependent we believe this should be in line with the hourly rate for home care. (For Leicestershire this is £20.60.) We will therefore recommend an hourly payment of £20.60.

10.5. For child-care we believe you should retain your current gradation but with a starting figure of the national living wage.

11. Maternity/Paternity/Adoption Provision

11.1. We were asked to give a view on the provision of Maternity/Paternity/Adoption allowances.

11.2. There is, at present, no legal right to parental leave of any kind for people in elected public office. These policies, therefore, can only currently be implemented on a voluntary basis.

11.3. Currently, during periods of maternity, paternity or adoption leave all Members continue to receive their basic allowance in full and Members entitled to an SRA also continue to receive that allowance in full.

11.4. We are not aware of any Council in Leicestershire paying for parental leave.

11.5. We take no view on this matter and leave it to the discretion of the Council.

12. Budget Implications

Included in the covering report.



### 13. Recommendations

1. The Basic Allowance remains at its current level.
2. The Special Responsibility Allowances of the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member be at 3 x, 1.5 x and 1.25 x Basic Allowance respectively.
3. The Special Responsibility Allowance for the Scrutiny Chair remain at 0.75x Basic
4. The Special Responsibility Allowance of the Planning Chair remain the same.
5. The Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chair of Audit and Standards Committee remain the same.
6. The Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chair of the Licensing Committee remain the same.
7. The Special Responsibility Allowance for the Leader of the Opposition remain the same.
8. The Special Responsibility Allowances for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman be at 0.75 x Basic Allowance and 0.4 x Basic Allowance respectively.
9. The index-linking of allowances continue and be to any pay awards for Officers' salary grade PO1(Principal Officer) spinal point 43.
10. The implementation date for allowances should be from their formal approval at a Council meeting.
11. The travel payment be brought in line with HMRC rates.
12. The subsistence rates be increased to:

Breakfast: £7.50

Lunch: £15.00

Dinner: £20.00

13. Subject to no public transport alternative or acknowledged urgency, taxi use should be permissible.
14. The IT equipment and support provision and support remain as at present.
15. The rate for dependent support be £20.60 per hour.
16. The rate for child-care support be the hourly living wage for the 1<sup>st</sup> dependent, 50% to be paid in respect of a 2<sup>nd</sup> dependent and a further 25% to be paid in respect of subsequent dependents up to a maximum payment of twice the level of the living wage.
17. Any payment for parental leave be at the discretion of the Council.

J. Cade

Chair Welland Remuneration Panel

April 2025