

**ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL**

**Minutes of a Meeting held on Wednesday 19 November 2008 at 10.00 am  
in the Council Chamber, Borough Offices, Angel Hill, Bury St Edmunds**

PRESENT: Dr A D Lower (Chairman), Mr R R Hansen,  
Dr J R Hill and Mr A L Jary

BY INVITATION: Councillor Farmer, Chairman of the Members' Allowances Panel

**6. Apologies for Absence**

No apologies for absence were received.

**7. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**8. Representation from the Chairman of the Members' Allowances Panel**

On 22 October 2008 the Panel considered a report from the Members' Allowances Panel (MAP), set up by full Council in December 2007, which contained representations in respect of Members' Allowances. Following consideration of this report the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) had requested that Councillor Farmer, Chairman of the Members' Allowances Panel, be invited to attend this meeting of the Independent Remuneration Panel.

The Panel briefly reviewed the discussions held at the previous meeting and determined what questions would be put to Councillor Farmer.

Relevant extracts from the Members' Bulletin containing articles relating to the work of MAP were tabled at this meeting.

*(At this point in the proceedings Councillor Farmer joined the meeting.)*

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Farmer to the meeting. Councillor Farmer provided a brief overview as to the reasons why Council had formed MAP and a brief overview of the work undertaken. He stated that MAP was not there to undermine the IRP but to complement its work and to engage with all Councillors on their views on the Members' Allowance Scheme, especially the allowances associated with special responsibility. Members of MAP had been appointed by the 'normal' procedures used by the Council and was based on the political balance of the Council and the membership nominated by Group Leaders.

In response to questions Councillor Farmer informed the Panel that:-

- (1) MAP had concentrated on collecting evidence from within the Council rather than looking at information from elsewhere. When considering workloads conclusions were largely reached on a subjective basis rather than through the detailed collection of data. He emphasised that after each meeting of MAP an article had been published in the weekly Members' Bulletin informing all Members as to the proposals being considered by MAP and also requesting any feedback and comments;

- (2) work had transferred to both the Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds Area Working Parties from the Sustainable Development Panel (SDP) but that this enabled the SDP to concentrate and devote greater time to major and strategic issues and therefore considered it inappropriate to adjust the SRA for the Chairman of this Panel;
- (3) MAP considered it more appropriate that the 'pay award' for Members should be based on a national inflation index rather than the award given to members of staff. One of the main reasons for this was that the rate of increase of Council Tax was currently linked to the preceding years September Retail Price Index, unless exceptional circumstances dictated otherwise. This indexation was used by the Government in indexing certain State Benefits;
- (4) he considered it appropriate that in the event of extended periods of sickness a Member should cease to receive a Special Responsibility Allowance when the responsibilities and the allowance were transferred to another Member. In addition he endorsed the Panel's proposal that no basic allowance should be paid to any Member after a period of sickness exceeding one year;
- (5) he provided examples of how the MAP proposal for the payment of Leader of the Opposition would work and considered that this role offered greater challenges than that of a Group Leader, especially a leader with a small group;
- (6) although there was no formal appraisal for Members with a Special Responsibility Allowance, Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees were appointed annually either by full Council or the Committee;
- (7) MAP did not invite any representation from officers, although confirmation of some information; and
- (8) comments received from other Members of the Council were made to various Members of MAP and therefore he could not say how many comments had been received to the proposals. However, that he had the impression that only a minority of Members had made representations.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Panel, thanked Councillor Farmer for attending the meeting and providing detailed explanations to the questions raised.

*(Councillor Farmer left the meeting at this point.)*

The Panel then held a general discussion as to the points raised by Councillor Farmer.

## **9. Members' Allowances 2008/2009 and 2009/2010**

Following the representations from Councillor Farmer, taking into account the report of the Members' Allowances Panel and following detailed discussion by the Panel the Independent Remuneration Panel concluded that:-

### **(1) Indexation of Allowances**

The recommendations made by MAP seemed to be 'complicated' and indeed since that report there seemed to be a move away from the recommendations. In addition, the Panel considered that the basic philosophy of linking both Members and staff 'pay awards' was still sound and not divisive, was simple to administer and easily understood by all parties. Therefore, the Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances should continue to be indexed in line with the pay award received by staff.

(2) **Long Term Sickness**

Its previous conclusion that payment of Members' Allowances should be adjusted in the eventuality that a Member was absent on long-term sickness was further considered. The Panel concluded that no Special Responsibility Allowance should be received by the absent Member when the responsibility was undertaken and the allowance was payable to another Member. Taking into consideration the sickness scheme for staff, it was agreed that a Member should receive 100% of the basic allowance for the first six months of absence, from the date on which they last attended a meeting and 50% of the basic allowance be paid for the following six months absence provided the Council had given the necessary dispensation. No allowance should be payable after one year's absence.

(3) **Special Responsibility Allowances**

The Chairman of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee should not continue to receive a Special Responsibility Allowance due to the current workload not being as originally envisaged. The Panel recognised that the Service Delivery Review Panel had been disbanded and therefore no allowance was now required. With regard to payments to the Leader of the Council, Deputy Leaders and other Cabinet Members the Panel considered that if the workload had become particularly onerous then consideration should be given to delegating some of the work to other Members of the Council. As no firm evidence had been provided the Panel concluded that the SRAs in respect of these post holders should remain unchanged.

The Panel considered there were inconsistencies with the MAP proposals regarding the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Scrutiny Committees and again as no firm evidence had been supplied considered that the current scheme should continue.

(4) **Miscellaneous Allowances**

No change should be made to the Childcare and Dependent Carers' Allowances, Travel and Subsistence.

(5) **Overview**

The Panel considered that its work had concentrated on the report of the Members' Allowance Panel and due to the necessary timescales in making recommendations had not had the time to undertake its own independent examination. In addition, with the Boundary Committee for England Local Government Review being undertaken and the possibility that the Borough Council may not be in existence from 1 April 2010 it was considered that no further work should be undertaken as part of this review. However, it was agreed that once the outcome of the Local Government Review was known and if the Borough Council was to continue in its existing form then the Panel wished to undertake a fuller review at the beginning of the 2009/2010 financial year, or when the outcome of the Local Government Review was known.

**10. Date of Next Meeting**

The Panel concluded that there was no need to meet again as part of this review. It was agreed that a draft report would be forwarded to all Members as soon as possible for comment as the report had to be presented to Council on 9 December 2008.

The meeting concluded at 12.13 pm.

**DR A D LOWER  
CHAIRMAN**