

ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

**Minutes of a Meeting held on Wednesday 3 November 2010 at 10.00 am
in the Mayor's Parlour, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds**

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

1. Election of Chairman

It was proposed, seconded and RESOLVED:-

That Dr A D Lower be elected Chairman of the Panel.

2. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Dr John Hill.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Members' Allowances: General Considerations

The Panel considered Report B273 which sought the Panel's consideration of some issues on Members' Allowances together with a copy of an email from Councillor Nettleton and statistics comparing the allowances paid by the Borough Council with other local authorities (all previously circulated).

The Panel considered each topic in turn:-

(a) Current Members' Allowance Scheme

The Panel examined the current Members' Allowance Scheme attached as Appendix A to the report.

The Panel considered that the allowance paid in respect of childcare was now below the national minimum wage and, after due consideration, agreed that this should be increased in line with the national minimum wage which was currently £5.93 an hour.

(b) Members' Attendance Statistics: 2009/2010

The Panel examined the statistics attached as Appendix B to the report and noted the wide range of attendance at official meetings but recognised that attendance at meetings was only one element of a Councillor's role.

(c) Indexation

The Panel endorsed the continuation of its basic principle that the basic and, therefore, the Special Responsibility Allowance continued to be index linked to the staff pay award percentage increase. The reasons being that this indexation was applicable to both Members and staff who 'work' for the same organisation, was not divisive, was easy to administer and was understood. In addition, it was

also agreed that the reimbursement of subsistence and travel expenses also continue to be linked to the rates paid to staff.

(d) Special Responsibility Allowances

The Panel noted the current review being undertaken regarding the structure of the scrutiny function and the intention that a report be presented to full Council on 14 December 2010. Consequently, it was considered appropriate that no further work be undertaken on the allowances in connection with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny, Policy Development and Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committees.

The Panel concluded that it was appropriate that the Special Responsibility Allowance paid to the Chairman of the Sustainable Development Working Party continue due to the considerable workload programmed for this Working Party.

A discussion was held on whether there were any implications for the payment of Members' Allowances arising from the vacancy for the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Efficiency. The Committee Services Manager informed the Panel that he understood that currently the Leader of the Council had taken on this responsibility as an interim measure and the final allocation of these duties had not yet been made.

(e) Encouraging members of the public to become candidates at elections

The Panel recognised that its previous work assisted people in becoming candidates in Borough Council elections. In addition, to the inclusion of Childcare and Dependent Carers Allowances and eligibility to join the Local Government Pension Scheme there was also a facility for the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to authorise additional expenditure when it was necessary to purchase specific items for a Councillor, such as specialised equipment, whether it meant adaptations to equipment or actual equipment.

(f) Future Allowances Scheme

The Panel considered it appropriate that following the forthcoming elections in May 2011 a full review of the scheme be undertaken. This review should include Councillors being requested to keep 'timesheets' for a specific period in order that an analysis of workloads could be undertaken. It was considered appropriate that timesheets be requested for October/November 2011 in order that the results could be analysed and any proposed amendments to the scheme be introduced in the 2011/2012 financial year and also feed into the budget setting process. Once the scheme had been determined and approved at full Council then the scheme be retained for the remaining term of the Council, until May 2015, rather than be subject to a full annual review. However, it would be necessary to keep members of the Independent Remuneration Panel informed and it was suggested that this be done in an annual update by email/post rather than a formal meeting, unless a major topic required consideration.

(g) Representation by Councillor Nettleton

The Panel considered an email from Councillor Nettleton dated 19 October 2010 and subsequent points of clarification. Most of the items contained within the email had already been addressed during the preceding discussions, especially regarding index linking and the Special Responsibility Allowances. With regard to reimbursement of travel expenses the Panel did not consider it appropriate to limit the amount a Councillor claimed in fulfilling his or her democratic responsibilities. Although it was stated that there was very little take-up

associated with the reimbursement of subsistence expenses, it was considered necessary that these should still be a part of the scheme and available to Councillors if required.

(h) **Comparison with other local authorities**

The Panel considered the comparison data with other local authorities for the basic allowance and also an overview of the other allowances produced by the Improvement and Development Agency in respect of shire districts based on their 2008 survey. After a detailed examination and discussion the Panel concluded that there was no reason for further examination into the level of allowances paid by the Borough Council at this moment in time.



RECOMMENDED:- That

(1) Annual Indexation

(a) Indexation of the Basic and, therefore, the Special Responsibility Allowances, continue to be linked to the pay award percentage increase received by staff; and

(b) indexation of Subsistence allowances also to remain linked to those given to staff.

(2) Next Review

(a) A detailed review be undertaken following the elections in May 2011; and

(b) consideration be given to the approved scheme being applicable for the remaining term of the Council, to May 2015, and only subject to review when required.

(3) Childcare Allowance

(a) The childcare allowance be increased to up to £5.93 an hour and linked to the national minimum wage.

The meeting concluded at 11.20 pm.

CHAIRMAN