



ANNEX A

**Report of the West Suffolk Independent
Remuneration Panel**

December 2023

1. Background

- 1.1 In September 2023, the Council appointed an Independent Remuneration Panel ("the Panel") to review and amend the Members Allowances Scheme ("the Scheme"). The Council must have regard to the Panel's recommendations as required by The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.
- 1.2 This report provides details of the Panel's amendments to the Scheme together with their rationale. The amended Scheme is set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

2. The Panel

- 2.1 The Regulations provide that the Panel shall consist of at least three members none of whom is also a member of an authority in respect of which it makes recommendations or is a member of a committee or sub-committee of such an authority; or is disqualified from being or becoming a member of an authority.
- 2.2 The Panel is made up of four independent individuals, each selected by a panel of three councillors, an independent person, a strategic director and the monitoring officer following a recruitment process. They are:
 - Sue Putters (Chair)
 - Tricia Bernard-Hector
 - Sandra Cox
 - David Irvine

3. Acknowledgements

- 3.1 The Monitoring Officer acted as advisor to the Panel and was supported by a Democratic Services Officer. A member of the Policy, Projects and Performance team provided background assistance in obtaining benchmarking data and material.
- 3.2 The Panel received a range of representations, both via a survey and during interviews, to help inform their deliberations and would like to thank the Council for their support and assistance in undertaking this review.

4. Introduction

- 4.1 The current West Suffolk Council Members' Allowances Scheme expires in February 2024 and the Panel is required to make recommendations to Council on the level of remuneration, allowances and expenses for councillors so that a new Scheme is in place upon expiry of the existing Scheme. The Council must give due regard to the Panel's recommendations but may agree alternative proposals.
- 4.2 In undertaking the review, the Panel considered a range of supporting material, details of which are attached at Appendix 2. The Panel has been particularly mindful of the following factors:
- The Leader and Cabinet decision making model together with the committee structure and role descriptions for councillors, and how these are reflected in the relative level of responsibilities for special responsibility allowances
 - The outcomes of benchmarking activities to review levels of remuneration agreed by other local authorities
 - The legislative framework
 - Feedback received from councillors on the current scheme and their thoughts on the role, benefits and challenges associated with being a councillor
 - External cost of living factors
 - Cost of the proposals to the public purse
- 4.3 This report provides detail on how the levels of remuneration and allowances proposed within this scheme have been calculated and the associated rationale.

5. Legislative framework

- 5.1 Any scheme of allowances that is adopted by West Suffolk Council must comply with the requirements of the Local Authorities (Members Allowances)(England) Regulations 2003 ("The Regulations").
- 5.2 The Regulations stipulate what form of allowances and expenses may be made to councillors. In particular, the Council:
- Must set a rate of Basic Allowance, that shall be payable to all councillors at the same rate
 - May pay a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) to councillors who have special responsibilities (the form of special responsibility is detailed in the legislation)
 - May make arrangements to pay the expenses of councillors who have caring responsibilities when they are undertaking official council duties
 - May make arrangements to pay travelling and subsistence expenses to councillors incurred when undertaking official council duties
 - May make arrangements for the provision of payments to co-opted members when undertaking their duties

6. The basic allowance

- 6.1 The basic allowance is payable to all councillors, regardless of the level of activity they undertake, although a councillor may elect to forego their allowance (see section 12. below).
- 6.2 The Panel recognises the aims and ambitions of the Council; enabling greater financial resilience; being better placed to capitalise on opportunities and having strong leadership to encourage and sustain growth.
- 6.3 The Panel also recognises how the Council places a strong emphasis on the role of the ward councillor in the community, as embodied in the Council's Families and Communities Strategy. The Panel notes that the workload for ward members has increased in recent years - for example, where help and support from residents has been sought during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.
- 6.4 During the course of the Panel's work, councillors provided representations regarding their time spent on council business and that the basic allowance needs to be sufficient to accurately reflect the amount of time undertaken, particularly where some need to take time off work, and the impact this would have on their finances when committing to Council activities. The Panel noted that being a councillor is something that people elect to do, and there is a degree to which people may take into account the wider public good in doing so. They recognise that a significant amount of the role of being a councillor is undertaken on a voluntary basis and whilst their efforts should be appropriately valued, the role should not be likened to paid employment.
- 6.5 All members were provided with a survey seeking their views on the current Scheme and 53 percent of all councillors responded. Councillors were asked what they considered the basic allowance should be. Answers varied:

Percentage of responses	Response
43%	Between £7000 to £8000
35%	Content with current allowance (£6,291.71)
18%	Above £8000

- 6.6 The Panel noted that some councillors felt the role was often a 24/7 role; residents may contact their councillors at any time of day, and many councillors put forward the high volume of correspondence they have to deal with on a day-to-day basis in addition to taking part in meetings. Due to the time commitment involved, which for many of the respondents equated to hours that would be spent in part-time or even full-time work, many felt they should be adequately remunerated. It was also felt the current level of allowances may deter people from standing for election, particularly those who require a regular income. The allowances were felt by some members not to adequately compensate for skills, expertise and loss of earnings.
- 6.7 The Panel took into account the outcomes of research undertaken to compare allowances from other councils based on their geographical location (in a

neighbouring county); their similarity in size to West Suffolk Council by population; and other authorities located in Suffolk. The Panel also noted that these rates were as at the Summer 2023 and that these councils may also be undertaking a review of their Schemes.

- 6.8 The Panel received representations about what costs the basic allowance should cover. Most schemes expect the basic allowance to cover incidental costs such as telephone calls, stationery and postage with some making separate provision for broadband costs. Some councillors highlighted that they are expected to cover the costs of using their own personal mobile phone, home energy and internet costs, and printing costs when undertaking council business.
- 6.9 The Panel noted provision for stationery, phone calls and home internet costs were already included in the basic allowance and it was felt appropriate that this should remain the case. The Panel also noted that all councillors are provided with a laptop and sundries (keyboard, mouse, etc) to assist them.
- 6.10 The Panel heard conflicting representations from councillors regarding mobile phone costs and whether the Council should supply mobile phones in addition to their Council-issued laptops. Some councillors choose not to accept a Council-issued laptop and make alternative arrangements with ICT to access their West Suffolk ICT profiles. This includes the use of 'Bring Your Own Device' (BYOD) which is a secure platform enabling members to access their profiles on their own personal devices, including their own mobile phones. In addition, where members request additional kit to support their use of ICT and to promote paperless working, such as the issuing of an extra screen, this is provided utilising a separate budget.

The Panel felt that no additional allowance should be provided for ICT costs to run the equipment, mobile phones, stationery, printers or any other consumables as this is deemed to already be covered in the basic allowance. There are alternatives offered to assist with communication, such as BYOD and the use MS Teams via their laptops which means the issuing of a Council-owned mobile phone is not required.

6.11 The Panel also considered the following:

- That since 2019, the basic allowance has increased by approximately 6.5 percent to the current rate of £6,291.71 due to the application of the annual uplift. Although no increase has been applied since April 2021 due to Council resolving not to accept the recommended 6.9 percent uplift in December 2022 or any further uplifts until the Scheme was reviewed in full (Council minute. 259 refers)
- That inflation was averaging at approximately 3 to 4 percent between 2019 and 2021.
- That whilst inflation had been running high in recent years, it was reported at 4.6 percent in October 2023 and still falling. The current Government and Bank of England were working towards an active programme of inflation reduction.
- That in order for the basic allowance to be at least £7,000, an increase of 12 percent would need to be applied to the current rate.

Recommendation:

- 6.12 Taking all the above into account, the Panel consider it appropriate to propose a basic allowance of **£6,606.30** for West Suffolk Council, which is an **increase of five percent** on the current rate.
- 6.13 The Panel felt this represented a modest increase which compared reasonably well with other council schemes, recognising that no increase had been applied since 2021 and councillors had also faced similar personal cost-of-living increases as residents. This new rate means West Suffolk Council currently has the highest basic allowance of the comparable district and borough councils in East Anglia; and that this is justifiable due to the extensive ward work undertaken by councillors (see paragraph 6.3 above).

7. Special responsibility allowances (SRAs)

- 7.1 As set out above, the Panel has reviewed a range of factors in calculating proposed levels of allowances. In particular, the Panel considered comparative rates with other councils as well as understanding from councillors who are in receipt of SRAs regarding the level of responsibility this entails.
- 7.2 The Panel has sought to carefully understand the relative nature of responsibilities and determine levels of allowances in a systematic way, evaluating roles in a similar way to how an organisation may evaluate different job roles. The Panel considered the rates and multipliers that apply in the current Scheme, the outcome of the member survey, and the oral representations received, following which a formal analysis of each role was undertaken to validate the rates being proposed.
- 7.3 A similar approach was adopted by the previous Independent Remuneration Panel as advocated in the South West Councils' guidance to operating remuneration panels. This guidance is one of few documents nationally available to provide assistance to remuneration panels in undertaking their work. This guidance suggests tiers of allowances, where the levels of allowance is varied according to relative responsibilities.
- 7.4 Each tier represents a different multiplier of the basic allowance, and so those with the least responsibility (Tier 7) will receive a proportion of the basic allowance as their SRA, whilst those with the most responsibility will receive a multiplier of the basic allowance (Tier 1). Each SRA is paid in addition to the basic allowance.
- 7.5 The Panel agreed that this methodology alongside the member role descriptions set out in the Constitution, the outcomes of the survey, the oral representations received and the comparative data remained an appropriate, fair and equitable system to continue to apply.
- 7.6 The Panel determined the roles that they felt should attract an SRA and has set the level of responsibility regarding where they feel the role fits within the following tier system. This is not an exact science and a degree of judgement is applied when placing roles within each tier; however, in determining whether an

SRA is appropriate for a role, the Panel acknowledged the importance of considering whether the role is:

- a. Outside the scope of the basic allowance
- b. Formally recognised by the Council, as set out in the Constitution
- c. Recognised within the Regulations

7.7 The Panel consider the following tiers should continue to apply:

Tier 1 – Leader of the Council: (2.5x basic allowance)

Tier 2 - Deputy Leader: (1.5x basic allowance)

Tier 3 - Cabinet Members and Chair of Council: (1.25x basic allowance)

Tier 4 – See table below: (0.9x basic allowance)

Tier 5 – See table below and Vice-Chair of Council: (0.66x basic allowance)

Tier 6 – See table below: (0.4x basic allowance)

Tier 7 – See table below: (0.35x basic allowance)

Tier 8 – See table below: (no SRA)

The Panel feel that the political Group Leaders should continue to attract an SRA on the following basis within Tier 7:

Group size of 21 to 32 members: (0.35x basic allowance)

Group size of 11 to 20 members: (Two thirds of 0.35x basic allowance)

Group size of 3 to 10 members: (one third of 0.35x basic allowance)

7.8 The Panel considers that the following Committee Chair and Vice Chair roles fell within the following tiers. Note the descriptors within each tier are example only:

Tier 4 (SRA = 0.9 x basic)	Tier 5 (0.66 x basic)	Tier 6 (0.4 x basic)	Tier 7 (0.35 x basic)	Tier 8 (no SRA)
<p>May be expected to chair meetings 8-12 times per year May be regularly required to defend Council decisions to public / press May be required to represent the Council / Committee Specific personal responsibilities in relation to decision making for which they could be held to account Expected to undertake regular (at least weekly) meetings with officers</p>	<p>May be expected to chair meetings 4-8 times per year May have some requirement to defend Council decisions to public / press May be required to represent the Council / Committee May have some liaison with officers / be consulted in relation to decision making (more than monthly)</p>	<p>May be called upon to act in Tier 4 / Tier 5 roles (as a Vice-Chair) May have some liaison with officers / be consulted in relation to decision making (monthly) May have some representative role / be required to represent the committee on occasions</p>	<p>May be called upon to act in Tier 4-6 roles (as a Vice-Chair) May have some liaison with officers / be consulted in relation to decision making (less than monthly) May have some representative role / be required to represent the committee on occasions</p>	<p>May be expected to chair / vice-chair a committee less than 4 times a year Unlikely to have further commitments beyond chairing the meeting</p>
<p>Roles within this band:</p> <p>Chair of Development Control Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Chair of Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee</p>	<p>Roles within this band:</p> <p>Chair of Licensing Committee Vice-Chair of Council Vice-Chair of Development Control</p>	<p>Roles within this band:</p> <p>Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Vice-Chair of Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee</p>	<p>Roles within this band:</p> <p>Vice-Chair of Licensing</p>	<p>Roles within this band:</p> <p>Standards Committee Chair / Vice-Chair</p>

Rationale

Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Members

- 7.9 Submissions received indicated that the role of Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member not only meant being on call to residents at all times, but will often mean delivering the role on a near full-time basis. The Panel also recognised that these roles have an important function in working with partners, putting forward the Council's position and lobbying on behalf of the Council on both a regional and a national scale.
- 7.10 The Panel recognises that members with executive responsibility are expected to be the driving force of Council strategies and have strong insight into a range of services. They will lead and champion initiatives, make decisions within their areas of responsibility, and are expected to lead where there is challenge and scrutiny to the work they and the Council do.
- 7.11 As with the basic allowance, it is challenging to give full value to the roles of the leader, deputy leader and cabinet members given the current legislative framework. However, it was recognised by the Panel that by maintaining the current multipliers for the roles, these would be within the mid-upper range of the peer councils' rates to which West Suffolk had been compared.

Recommendation:

- 7.12 It is proposed that the rates be established as follows:

Tier 1 - Leader: £16,515.74pa (2.5x basic allowance)

Tier 2 - Deputy Leader: £9,909.44pa (1.5x basic allowance)

Tier 3 - Cabinet Members: £8,257.87pa (1.25x basic allowance)

Chair and Vice Chair of Council

- 7.13 The Panel considers that being Chair can be a very demanding role. The Chair is expected to Chair Council meetings, facilitating difficult discussions, in a balanced, intelligent way, whilst also acting as the civic leader of the Council, representing the Council at numerous events. This requires someone with a wide skillset to perform the role effectively.
- 7.14 The Panel recognises the important role the civic leader can play in supporting the Council's priorities and acting as a key figurehead in the community. Even with a reduced commitment, the postholder would regularly be required to give up evening and weekend time, and very much put personal commitments aside, to fulfil the role effectively.
- 7.15 The Panel similarly recognises that the skillsets required to fulfil the role also apply to the Vice Chair. The Vice Chair may be called upon at little

notice, and needs to be prepared to have to step into the Chair's role at frequent intervals.

- 7.16 The Panel also acknowledges the demands on the personal time of the post holder – including travelling to many events – and that this should be reflected in the level of allowance received.

Recommendation:

The Panel therefore consider it appropriate to propose that the rates be established as follows:

Tier 3 – Chair of Council: £8,257.87pa (1.25x basic allowance)

Tier 5 – Vice Chair of Council: £4,360.16 (0.66x basic allowance)

Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs

- 7.17 The Panel analysed the relative responsibilities associated with being a committee Chair, and the time commitments involved, to determine relative levels of allowances. The Panel's evaluation has been undertaken with regard to the Constitution, which establishes the relative responsibilities of each Committee, and specific responsibilities given to the Committee Chair and Vice-Chair, as well as feedback from councillors.
- 7.18 The Panel also took a similar approach to the evaluation of Vice-Chairs, on the basis that the Vice-Chair would be expected to be able to fulfil all the responsibilities of the respective Chair.
- 7.19 The Panel received specific representations in relation to the Vice-Chairs' role for Development Control, including the need to have two vice-chairs and the need for the Vice-Chairs' to attend many of the same meetings as the Chair. The Panel consider it is a matter for the Council to decide whether to appoint one vice-chair or two but have taken the feedback relating to the demands of the role into account when setting the level of remuneration.
- 7.20 In addition, the Panel received representations in relation to the responsibilities of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee. The Panel considered that whilst attendance at scheduled meetings may be fewer than that attended by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the time commitment needed outside of meetings to become fully conversant with the topics under scrutiny was considered to warrant an SRA from the same tier. The Panel noted the statutory role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in that they may call-in and review decisions made; however the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee was responsible for scrutinising the performance of the Council's services; suggesting means of improving and promoting performance management and audit functions of the Council; and assisting the Cabinet and Council in the development of the budget framework. The Panel therefore felt that both the Chair and Vice Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee should be

sufficiently remunerated to recognise the importance of leading this committee's work.

- 7.21 The Panel, as with other roles, has also assessed comparative information in relation to other councils. This indicates that practices for payment of Committee Chairs varies significantly and, whilst regard has been given to this in establishing levels of remuneration, the Panel has focussed on what they consider to be suitable remuneration for West Suffolk Council. The Panel felt there was insufficient argument to alter the rates by any significant degree.

Recommendation:

This has resulted in the Panel recommending the following levels of allowances, as set out in the table at paragraph 7.8 above:

Tier 4 roles: £5,945.67pa
Tier 5 roles: £4,360.16pa
Tier 6 roles: £2,642.52pa
Tier 7 roles: £2,312.20pa
Tier 8 roles: No allowance

Group Leaders

- 7.22 The Panel acknowledged that Group Leaders are currently given a specific allowance for their role depending on the size of their Group (see paragraph 7.7 above). It was recognised that since the election in May 2023 that there has been a significant change to the political groups resulting in an administration where there is no overall control. The Conservative Group is the largest political group but does not have a majority. Representations had been received from some members where they felt more recognition should be placed on the role of 'Opposition Group Leader' principally due to the time and effort spent on the role. The Panel however, felt that this role was not formally currently recognised in the Constitution and it was difficult to quantify the amount of work entailed due to the political nature of the role. The Panel therefore felt that the current multipliers for Group Leaders should remain.
- 7.23 Following a representation received as to whether an SRA should be given to a Group Leader where the member may be different to the Leader of the Council, the Panel reasoned that there was nothing in the Constitution to prevent the roles from being taken on by different members of the same political group and this was not a matter within the Panel's remit to consider.

Other roles

- 7.24 Other roles have been considered for attracting an SRA, including the Chair and Vice-Chair of Standards Committee. Other councils provide an SRA for these roles; however, it was felt the workload of these roles at West Suffolk Council was limited and as no specific representations had

been received where members felt SRAs were warranted, these are proposed to remain categorised under Tier 8.

- 7.25 Some councillors had fed back that consideration should be given to making provision for members (and potentially substitutes) of the Development Control Committee to receive an SRA. The Panel recognised the extensive workload of this committee compared to other committees and had noted that some other councils provided this as an SRA. Having deliberated this matter at length, the Panel felt that members appointed to this committee were committed to their work and the absence of an SRA was not considered to be a barrier. It was therefore considered that no SRA should be recommended for this role at the present time.
- 7.26 The role of Cabinet Member (without portfolio) had also been raised by some members as a consideration whereby they would potentially receive less SRA than a Cabinet Member that held a portfolio. The Panel felt that this was presently irrelevant if members were only allowed to claim one SRA (see paragraph 7.28 below) and have therefore not proposed that this role be remunerated.
- 7.27 Some members had indicated that Chairs of informal working groups should potentially be remunerated; however, the Panel considered it would be difficult to quantify the workload involved for each which varied considerably and to try and be fair and equitable to all. These roles have therefore not been proposed to be remunerated.

Payment of multiple special responsibility allowances

- 7.28 The Panel considered whether councillors holding more than one special responsibility should be paid for one or more of these posts. This was discussed at length principally given the mixed views received in response to the survey and the oral representations received. Currently only one special responsibility allowance may be claimed and the Panel felt this practice should continue on the basis that it would encourage more members to take on key roles and discourage those that may wish to only be appointed to more than one role for financial gain. This was also a common practice amongst the councils where comparisons had been made. It has however, been clarified in the scheme that payment would be made for the SRA that attracts the highest rate.

Overall costs of special responsibility allowances and the proposed scheme of allowances

- 7.29 The total cost of special responsibility allowances based on posts held in May 2023, is £138,627. The proposed scheme, assuming the Council continues to appoint a full Cabinet of 10 members, and two Vice-Chairs of the Development Control Committee, and for remunerating the change in tier for the Chair and Vice Chair of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee recommended by the Panel would be £147,474 which is an increase of £8,847.

- 7.30 Overall, the proposed total costs of basic (paragraph 6.12) and special responsibility (paragraph 7.29) allowances will be £570,277. This represents an increase in costs of to the Council of 5.35 percent compared to existing costs. Note that this does not include costs spent on travel, subsistence or carers/dependents claims.

8. Uplifts and review of allowances

- 8.1 The Panel considers it appropriate to recommend that allowances are indexed and therefore periodically increased. This has the advantage of ensuring that allowances keep pace with increases in the cost-of-living, and as such remain fair and consistent. It also avoids the need for substantial increases in allowances simply to “catch-up” as opposed to changes in responsibilities.
- 8.2 The Panel has considered a range of indices that could be used for such increases, including Retail Price Index (RPI), Consumer Price Inflation (CPI), and Office for National Statistics (ONS) measures of increases in median salaries, together with the same increase that the majority of Council staff receive annually following the national local government salary settlement. The latter is currently written in the present scheme; however, for 2022 and 2023 there has been no direct comparative percentage increase as a cash lump sum has formed part, if not all, of the annual staff pay award for these two years.

Recommendation:

- 8.3 The Panel has therefore proposed that the basic allowance should be uplifted each year by the same rate as the CPI index for the reasons set out in paragraph 6.13 regarding its rationale for increasing the basic allowance. However, should CPI be above three percent, it is recommended that the Panel should convene to consider an appropriate level of increase.
- 8.4 In accordance with the Regulations, this annual uplift may only apply for up to four years. The Panel will, however, undertake an annual review of the Scheme to allow the Panel to assess whether the Scheme is operating effectively.

9. Co-optees allowance

- 9.1 The Panel has considered making provision for a co-optees allowance within the scheme; however, as the Council currently does not have any co-optees and was not seeking to appoint any to its committees at the present time, the Panel felt unable to recommend remuneration without an assessment of what a co-optee’s role might entail.

Recommendation:

- 9.2 The Panel recommends that no provision be made in the Members’ Allowances Scheme for a co-optees allowance for the reasons given

above; however, the Panel may be convened to review the matter should the need arise.

10. Other allowances

Travel allowances

- 10.1 Whilst the Panel was appreciative that costs of fuel have increased since the last review, HMRC set standard rates to allow for the reclaiming of fuel costs incurred. The Panel consider that these provide a sensible benchmark for councillors to reclaim expenditure for travelling.
- 10.2 The Panel therefore consider that if travelling by car or van, motorcycle or bicycle, the rates should remain in line with HMRC guidelines before being liable to pay tax on any mileage travelled over the threshold stated. To encourage car sharing, the rate for travelling with a passenger that was either another councillor or officer should remain in the West Suffolk Council (WSC) scheme.
- 10.3 Consideration was given to the rate by which mileage should be claimed if councillors are travelling by electric car. The HMRC guidelines state that if driving a personal electric car for business purposes, the mileage rates would be equal to those driving a petrol or diesel fuelled car. The Panel feel that to encourage 'greener' travel, the rate for driving an electric car, or other 'green' operated vehicle, should be same as a petrol or diesel fuelled car.
- 10.4 Consideration was given to the reduced rate for travelling over 10,000 miles by car in a given tax year as this was unlikely to apply; however, upon reflection, the Panel was minded for it to remain in the WSC's scheme in case the situation did occur.
- 10.5 The Panel recognised the mileage rates which were currently in line with the HMRC rates had applied for some time but may shortly be due for review. It is therefore considered that the scheme should continue to include similar reference to the statement already provided in WSC's Members' Allowances Scheme, which would allow the rates to be adjusted to accord with the new HMRC rates or the Council could reconvene the Panel to review the rates.
- 10.6 Councillors usually claim from their home addresses as a starting point if it is located in the district. Some members live outside the district and some may be returning from a temporary address (for example, having been away on holiday) to attend an event. To cover this, the Panel felt the scheme should continue to include similar reference to the text already provided; however, further clarification has been given to the starting point of the councillor's journey.
- 10.7 The Panel has also considered where members may travel by public transport and taxis and felt the provisions made for claiming in the current WSC scheme should continue to apply. Consideration was given to

capping the amount of fares claimed, particularly when using taxis; however, this might appear discriminatory if there was a genuine need to use taxis. No gratuity would be reimbursed when using taxis, as was permitted by some councils.

- 10.8 The Panel recognised the Council's commitment to protecting the environment and reducing carbon emissions and considered whether any other measures could be included in the scheme to 'incentivise' greener travel. Whilst use of public transport or bicycle was to be encouraged, it was acknowledged that this was not always practical when members are travelling from rural areas where public transport networks are sparse or a relatively long distance away. The following text was already provided in the current scheme and the Panel felt this should continue to be encouraged:

'Councillors should, when possible, seek to use alternatives such as walking, cycling, public transport or car sharing instead of personal car journeys to support the Council in reducing the environmental impact of its activities.'

- 10.9 Councillors may use the Council's existing pool cars and electric bicycles upon request therefore it is considered sensible to continue to make reference to this in the scheme.

- 10.10 Some councils reimburse for ship fares, aircraft fares, garaging costs and a proportion of the cost to hire vehicles. These were historically not matters that had arisen at West Suffolk Council and the Panel felt there was not a need to include reference to these within the revised Scheme.

- 10.11 The Panel felt the following conditions should apply when claiming travelling expenses:

- As was required by employees claiming mileage, receipts for fuel/electricity purchases were expected to be retained by the councillor for inspection upon request but not required to be submitted with the claim.
- Travelling by public transport: reimbursement would be given for a standard fare incurred. Councillors were expected to use any discount / concessionary fare entitlements and the claim was to be evidenced by receipts / tickets.
- Travelling by taxi: reimbursement would be given for the actual fare incurred, as evidenced by receipt. Use of taxis should normally be pre-approved by the Chief Executive or Monitoring Officer.
- Car parking and toll fares: reimbursement would be given for the actual cost incurred, as evidenced by receipt / ticket / statement.

Subsistence allowance

- 10.12 The Panel considered the comparative data and the criteria that needed to be met as set out in the current scheme and felt that the subsistence allowance should be kept as simple to understand and to administer as possible. It was also noted that where it was deemed appropriate, refreshments were provided at meetings utilising a separate budget.
- 10.13 Also acknowledging that overnight accommodation was able to be booked separately in advance, which often included the provision of breakfast if attending a conference for example, the Panel has made the following recommendation:

Recommendation:

'Where a member leaves the district and attends an event in their capacity as a councillor listed under Schedule 2, for five hours or more, claims may be made for subsistence up to a maximum of £20. This is to be evidenced by receipt.'

Carers and dependents allowances

- 10.14 A number of councillors raised concern with the Panel that it is difficult for those with family / caring commitments to become a councillor and this was recognised as a potential barrier. As referred to in paragraph 6.4 above, the Panel did not feel able to reflect this fully within the basic allowance, however did feel it important to ensure there is appropriate provision to enable councillors to be able to claim for the costs for care they would have to incur in order to undertake their council work.
- 10.15 Following feedback received from councillors and having noted how some other councils provide a carers /dependents allowance, the Panel felt the West Suffolk Council scheme should allow greater flexibility and be simplified. Discussion was held on the fact that the councillor's child(ren) or dependent/s may feel more comfortable being cared for by a family member or a trusted friend or neighbour, for example and professional care was therefore not always the most appropriate option. It was recognised that care may need to be pre-booked and that care was required for the entire time the councillor was away from their caring responsibilities (i.e. not just for the duration of a meeting). Whilst professional services may not always be required, research was also undertaken into the relative costs of childcare and more specialist support care for those with needs.
- 10.16 The Panel also considered that even where a councillor is required to take part in a virtual meeting as part of their role they may still require someone to assist with the care of their dependents to be able to concentrate on their Council work without distraction. Should this be the case, councillors should be aware they may claim under the Carers Allowances criteria outlined above.

Recommendation:

- 10.17 The Panel proposes that whilst undertaking Council duties, councillors who have caring responsibilities for dependents are allowed to claim for the costs they incur. Up to a maximum of £10 per hour may be claimed for childcare, and £28 per hour for support care for dependents. Costs incurred where care is required to be pre-booked may be claimed.
- 10.18 These payments will be reimbursed on production of receipts (which may include a personal receipt with the carer's details and signed by the councillor) or invoices for costs incurred. They should be claimed in respect of those who live with the councillor, or are dependent on the councillor for support, and cannot be left unsupervised during the councillor's absence.

11. When councillors are allowed to make claims

- 11.1 In addition to setting rates and conditions for allowances, the Panel determined what events members could claim for attending. The Panel considered the legal position and whether the Council allowed claims to be made for attending such an event within its current scheme. The Panel agreed that these should remain.
- 11.2 The Panel then considered what other events may be claimed for attending. This fell within the remit of 'the carrying out of any other duty approved by the authority, or any duty of a class so approved, for the purpose of, or in connection with, the discharge of the functions of the authority or any of its committees or sub-committees' as provided in the Regulations. The Panel considered what other duties would be seen to be in connection with the discharge of functions of the authority.
- 11.3 Examples of events that may or may not be deemed to be discharging the functions of the authority were considered in turn, together with others which showed where other authorities allowed their members to make claims if attending the event listed.
- 11.4 In making its deliberations on the above, the Panel was very clear in determining whether attendance at an event was deemed to be discharging the functions of the authority or was in a personal capacity. The Panel wished to make the list of events by which attendance could or could not be claimed for as clear as possible to assist appropriate officers authorising the claim.
- 11.5 The Panel then considered the examples of events that could and could not be claimed for attending in members' capacities as ward councillors, together with supporting text. This section of the current scheme was considered to remain acceptable and no suggested amendments have been made.

Recommendation:

- 11.6 The Panel recommends that the approved duties for the purpose of payment of travel, subsistence and carers / dependents allowances set out in Schedule 2 of the new draft Members' Allowances Scheme, be accepted.

Submission of claims

- 11.7 The Panel has considered how long councillors should have in which to submit expense claims. The Panel consider that the current two-month window provides sufficient scope for councillors to submit expense claims and although an operational matter, councillors should endeavour to use the recently introduced electronic method for submitting claims where possible.

12. Foregoing of allowances

- 12.1 Whilst members have not indicated that they wish to be able to forego allowances and expenses that they receive, the Regulations requires the scheme to allow councillors to forego their allowance and this has been included in the scheme.

13. Implementation of the new Members' Allowances Scheme

- 13.1 If adopted, it is proposed that the new scheme will take effect from 1 February 2024 when the current scheme expires. As referred to in paragraph 8.4 above, it will be subject to annual review as required by the Regulations. Thereafter, a full review would need to be undertaken with a new scheme adopted before 1 February 2028.