

To: Council
Date: 29 January 2018
Report of: Head of Law and Governance
Title of Report: Councillors' Allowances – Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present the report and recommendations of the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP). The IRP's report contains proposed amendments for the Oxford City Council Members' Allowances Scheme which will expire on 31 March 2019.

Report Approved by: Head of Finance and Head of Law and Governance

Policy Framework: Not applicable

Recommendations: The Council is recommended to:

1. agree that the non-statutory Deputy Leader should receive a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) from 1 January 2018 at the rate of one full SRA (1 x Basic Allowance) in accordance with paragraphs 17-23 of the report from the IRP;
2. agree that if a qualifying member in receipt of an SRA wishes to take a leave of absence from the duties for which they receive the SRA due to maternity or adoption leave they will continue to receive half of the SRA to which they are entitled for a period of up to six months in accordance with paragraphs 26-31 of the report from the IRP;
3. delegate to the Committee and Member Services Manager authority to pay the costs of making reasonable adjustments for any Councillor with a disability who makes an application to him up to £1,000 in any one year (1 April – 31 March) in accordance with paragraphs 24-25 of the report from the IRP;
4. delegate authority to the Head of Law & Governance to exercise her discretion if a member with a disability requires reasonable adjustments in excess of £1,000 in any year;
5. authorise the Head of Law and Governance to amend the existing Members' Allowances scheme in accordance with the above recommendations and to incorporate it into the Council's Constitution; and
6. thank the Independent Remuneration Panel for its work.

Appendices

*Appendix 1: Report by the Oxford City Council Independent Remuneration Panel
November 2017 (to follow agenda publication)*

Introduction

1. This report and its appendix outline the Independent Remuneration Panel's (IRP) proposals for the current Members' Allowances Scheme ("the Scheme").
2. The Council's current Scheme was approved in December 2014 and expires on 31 March 2019.
3. The Council at its meeting on 20 July 2017 requested that the IRP consider proposed amendments to the Scheme. The IRP met on 28 November 2017 to carry out a review of the Scheme. The IRP comprised representatives appointed by the Head of Law and Governance (in accordance with the delegated authority from Council) from the voluntary, public and business sectors. The members of the IRP were:
 - Professor Alistair Fitt – Vice-Chancellor, Oxford Brookes University
 - Kathy Shaw – Chief Executive, Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action
 - Prisca Bradley – Director, Hedges Law

The Independent Remuneration Panel Report and Recommendations

4. The IRP's report and recommendations are attached at Appendix 1.
5. The Panel's view continues to be that the revised scheme of allowances must be: set at a level to encourage access by all; be fair and transparent and be affordable. The Panel would like to draw attention to the following aspects of their recommendations:
 - The addition of a Special Responsibility Allowance for the non-statutory Deputy Leader (paragraphs 17-23 of the report from the IRP);
 - The introduction of a scheme for maternity and adoption leave for qualifying members in receipt of a Special Responsibility Allowance (paragraphs 26 -31 of the report from the IRP); and
 - That a contingency fund should be made available for the cost of reasonable adjustments for Members who have a disability (in accordance with paragraphs 24-25 of the report from the IRP).

Cost of the Proposed Scheme

6. The addition of an SRA for the non-statutory Deputy Leader (from 1 January 2018) would result in additional spending of £1,238 in the financial year 2017/18 and a budget pressure of £5,017 for the year 2018/19.
7. Spend on maternity or adoption leave will depend on take up. It is anticipated that any additional spend resulting from this change could be absorbed within the overall scheme or general contingencies.
8. Spend on reasonable adjustments/adaptions will be variable. It is considered prudent to make budgetary provision of £5,000 per annum.

9. The IRP was mindful that their recommendation of a total maximum amount that may be claimed in one year of a £1,000 may be a barrier to a Councillor performing their duties. It suggested that a mechanism should be put in place for dealing with special circumstances. This should perhaps be dealt with by the Head of Law and Governance. The financial effects of any agreement should be dealt with at the time.
10. Members are asked to note that other work is underway around supporting councillors with disabilities, including the commissioning of an accessibility audit of the Town Hall and St. Aldate's Chambers, and a separate audit of the audio visual facilities in the Town Hall meeting rooms. The Chief Executive is also convening an internal disability support working group.

Legal issues

11. The Council must consider the recommendations of an Independent Remuneration Panel before adopting or amending a Members' Allowances Scheme.

Financial Issues

12. Provision will be made within the Councils Medium Term Financial Plan for an additional £10,017 per annum (£5,017 for the additional SRA allowance and £5,000 to cover reasonable adjustments for councillors with disabilities). Paid maternity and adoption leave is allowed for within general contingencies to be used if and when the need arises.

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Background papers: None

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