

Item

Member allowances/Virtual Area Committees/ Parental Leave for Councillors

To:

Civic Affairs Committee 2/02/2022

Report by:

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Wards affected:

All

1. Introduction

This report covers three topics within democratic services:

Consideration of the Independent Remuneration Panel's report on recommendations for a Members' Allowance Scheme 2022/23; a review of Area Committees which have been held virtually June-December 2021; and responding to a Council Motion on a parental leave policy for Councillors.

2. Recommendations

Committee is asked to:

- (i) Consider the Panel's report and recommend an Allowance Scheme to Council on 3 March 2022.
- (ii) Receive a progress report on the Independent Remuneration Panel's non financial recommendations in February 2023.
- (iii) Recommend to Council that Area Committees continue virtually for March 2022 as set out in paragraph 1.6
- (iv) Note a report recommending a parental leave policy will be submitted later this year.

3. Background

Members' Allowances

- 1.1 The payment of Member Allowances is regulated by the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 and overseen by an Independent Remuneration Panel (the Panel). Allowances are split into two categories, basic allowance which is available to every member of the Council and special responsibility allowance which apply to specified positions identified in the Regulations and any additional positions of special responsibility that may be identified by the Panel. Special responsibility allowances increase because they are linked to the Basic Allowance as a multiplier or fraction, so for example an Executive Councillor SRA is 2 x Basic Allowance, the Chair of Civic Affairs Committee SRA is 0.25 of a Basic Allowance.

- 1.2 The Members' Allowances Scheme was comprehensively reviewed and approved in July 2016, with additions on some minor aspects with relation to special responsibility allowances in subsequent years. In February 2021, Council agreed to freeze the Allowances Scheme for 2021/22 at 2020/21 levels. The current scheme is appended for reference and the Panel's report and recommendations are attached.

- 1.3 The proposed changes to the current scheme are that:
 - any percentage increase in the Basic Allowance is the same as for local government employees agreed through the National Joint Committee (this replaces increases in line with the National Living Wage)

 - those councillors who are members of a Combined Authority committee receive a special responsibility allowance and that the SRAs are at the same level whichever the committee

 - the two Deputy Leaders of the Council receive a special responsibility allowance

 - the non-statutory Deputy Leader's role is defined

- 1.4 The Panel have made many recommendations (**marked R below**) relating to the way councillors work and what officers should address to make the job of a councillor more manageable.
- 1.5 It is worth noting that whilst the Independent Remuneration Panel was doing its work in the autumn 2021 and seeking views from city councillors, an assessment of the Council's decision making and governance by the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny was being done at the same time, resulting in some synergies/cross-overs. It is envisaged an action sheet will be developed combining the two. A report reviewing progress on each recommendation will come to Committee (and be circulated to the Panel) next February. Updates in-year will be given to the Chair and spokes, and other Members will also be involved because of the range of topics covered.

Time efficiency

To increase the efficiency and effectiveness of meetings:

R-Use hybrid / remote meetings where possible

This is being done. Pre committee briefings, Topical briefings, non-decision making fora are all being held on-line. Hybrid meetings are now possible (from January 2022) in the Council Chamber/Cttee Rooms.

R-Use proxy voting if it becomes possible to do so

This will require legislation and the Council has written to Government and Local Government Association.

R - Consider pairings between political groups

This would be for councillors to agree to and advise officers accordingly.

R- Continue to lobby Government with evidence of improved efficiency/effectiveness/attendance when using a hybrid meeting structure

There is a continuous campaign run by LGA and Association of Democratic Services Officers and Local Government Lawyers on this, most recently when the Omicron Covid variant emerged in December 2021. There is a current on-line petition to Government.

R - Consider chair's training for all – for both the chairs and the chaired – what to expect from meetings, agendas, reports, executive summaries

Professional training is offered to new Chairs and Vice Chairs and current Chairs. It could be arranged for a larger number if councillors agree it would be worthwhile. We will review the range of training opportunities with training champions including the scrutiny role of the councillor.

R- Consider improvements in paperwork for meetings – this to include training for officers in report writing

Officers can respond to this internally, however the issue of the quality and volume of paperwork for joint meetings and the ease of access to the location of those meetings will need to be passed to the relevant Leaders of those partner bodies, which we shall do by sharing this report with them.

R- Consider the timing of meetings and length of meetings (balancing late evening travel / those in full-time work)

Committees can review the day and time of meetings, usually this is done at the start of the Municipal Year, officers would like to understand better what changes/improvements could be made.

R - Consider a reduction in the number of meetings per committee and / or the number of committees

An assessment by the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny was undertaken in November 2021. Members will be briefed soon on the findings and this recommendation fits with this piece of work.

R- Consider whether Area Committees still have a use
An assessment by the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny was undertaken in November 2021. Members will be briefed soon on the findings and this recommendation fits with this piece of work.

R-Increase (and stick to) deadlines for reports and amendments for meetings

Leadership Team monitors performance on late reports submitted by officers. The Forward Plan is published 28 days before an Executive Decision is taken. However, there are a minority of times when reports are late and explanations are legally required to be given.

Amendments can be put to a committee by a councillor with no notice. A change to council procedure rules would be required if there was to be a deadline (like in the case of Full Council meetings)

R- Keep abreast of the opportunities provided by new software

The Council's Our Cambridge programme will focus on improvements and efficiencies and councillor ways of working will be part of that work. Culture change must be reflected and practiced by the leadership of the organization, both political and managerial.

Job satisfaction and well-being

R- Introduce a Parental Leave policy – for new babies – to include cover for all Councillor duties including ward duties

Introduce a Carers' Leave policy – for continued care of dependents – older children / elderly relatives / disabled dependents – to include cover for all Councillor duties including ward duties

This will be reported in later this year.

R- Consider accessibility issues for all venues and ensure that partner bodies do likewise

We will share this report with our partners. Area Committee venues are chosen only if accessible.

R- Consider an exit interview for Councillors standing down

This will be incorporated into leaver's actions for the EA to Leader and Members' in April of each year.

R- Consider a cross-party 'youth group' of Councillors

This is a good idea and new councillors 2019 suggested that cross-party engagement for newly elected councillors could be a positive contribution to the political culture and dynamic-unfortunately this didn't happen because of the pandemic. This would be a matter for councillors themselves to determine and it need not be formal.

For new Councillors

R Access to information – on-line briefings have been well received as has 'who does what' in the Council. This could be expanded to 'who to go to' in the City Council and with enhanced information about County officers and

other partnership groups as appropriate – to be sent to both new and experienced Councillors

Regular officer changes/restructures mean the Who Does What document can quickly get out of date. Keeping a document up to date for external organisations would be extremely onerous. We have a dedicated Members Support Officer who is linked into a network of colleagues across various organisations and who is there to help and direct councillors find the right officer for their purpose. We will explore how councillors can be integrated into the Council's internal library of information, this is being done across the other two councils HDC/SCDC supported by 3C ICT.

R Induction training – consider whether to rerun or provide an update after 6 months

We contact newly elected councillors for feedback in late summer each year to see how they are doing and whether they need any updates/assistance. We will in future ask about a refresher. We also liaise with the new Councillors and the Member Training Champions as we develop each new Induction.

R- Consider further/different training for new minority group Councillors

We will liaise with the Green & Independent Group to establish what additional support is required.

R - Consider the provision of an FAQ page for Councillors – this would need an officer to keep it updated

Councillors don't have access to CityNet. We would need to think where this would be and what would it contain. Are there other ways in which Members can get this information? Members have a dedicated support officer who is able to support them. We will explore how councillors can be integrated into the Council's internal library of information, this is being done across the other two councils HDC/SCDC supported by 3C ICT.

R - Mentoring – consider formalising a mentoring system for new Councillors. This is particularly pertinent for those in the minority group.

This requires investigation with councillors as Groups do have a buddy system in place.

In relation to Councillors with SRAs / Executive Councillors

R - Consider different structures of delegation to encourage diversity in these roles and to spread the load

R- Consider streamlining the organisation of the Council

Both these recommendations are for Leadership Team/political leadership.

Case work

R - Initially, to research and introduce case-work software – there are several to choose from

The EA to Leader and Members is undertaking initial investigation on this- members need to be involved. This will look at self-serve options on the market which are low-cost eg <https://ecasework.com/> and what use can be made of the council's customer services software.

Expenses

R Investigate the reasons for the poor take-up of claimed expenses

Each year Councillors are reminded of the allowances scheme. As a small district council (in geography) there are less claims for travel. When councillors attend conferences they claim rail travel/hotel/subsistence. There is now an on-line claim system connected to payroll where councillors can submit claims.

To encourage diversity – strategic issues

R- Those Councillors of working age rely on flexibility in their paid work. Consider an outreach to employers in relation to their social responsibility and to outline the value that service as a Councillor will bring to them as employers, ie training and development in management areas. (This was done nationally to encourage employers to support their staff in taking up school governorships and was very successful with large and medium sized employers.)

This is an action that will be taken forward in 2022/23.

R - Reach out to pre-Councillors – to encourage and give a realistic view of Councillor work

Every person standing for election is given information about the Councillor induction period (May to June). We will update information on the website about becoming a councillor. There is also a responsibility on the part of political parties to be honest to prospective candidates about what the workload will be like.

Virtual Area Committees

1.6 Councillors have been asked whether for March 2022 cycle, Area Committees should continue to be held virtually (ie. on-line via the Council's MS Teams). At the time of writing eight councillors had responded:

4 preferred on-line (1 acknowledging hybrid in the long-term)
2 preferred on-site
1 hybrid
1 no strong view.

The Labour Group has commented that there is a preference for virtual meetings for now.

The number watching an area committee live between June and December 2021 varied from 32 to 4. There is no significant uplift in attendance/viewing by holding the meetings virtually, but equally no significant reduction.

The officer view is that the March 2022 cycle of meetings should be held virtually and that councillors are consulted again in good time to make decisions on Area Committees scheduled for June 2022. This could mean a further report to this committee to consider the issue further in May.

The reasons for retaining virtual meetings are primarily the remaining uncertainty over the public health situation. Also it will not be straightforward to find appropriate venues in the local area as there are differing approaches to coming out of Plan B, notwithstanding we would normally confirm bookings well in advance.

Parental Leave Policy

1.7 At its meeting on 21 October 2021 Council adopted the following Motion:

This Council resolves the following.

1. To adapt to suit a Cambridge context the parental leave policy drafted by the LGA Labour Group's Women's Task Force and to bring the

recommendations to Civic Affairs as part of the next round of discussions on councillor remuneration.

2. To ensure that councillors with children and other caring commitments are supported as appropriate.
3. To acknowledge this is only one part of the picture, and to commit to investigating other inclusive policies and bringing those recommendations forward in the future.
4. To write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to urge him to introduce legislation to allow councils to adopt remote and hybrid meetings where they deem it appropriate to do so.
5. Further to this council's resolution at Civic Affairs on 9th October 2019 (19/41/Civ), that this council shall continue to apply pressure via the Local Government Association and any other appropriate routes to allow for proxy voting for local government for those on parental leave, which is not currently permissible, despite already being available to MPs in parliament.

<https://local.gov.uk/parental-leave-policy-councils>

It has not been possible to bring proposals to this meeting because of officer resources. A report will be brought later in the year following consultation with a representative from each of the Political Groups and taking into account the Independent Remuneration Panel's report and the outcomes of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Review.

4. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

On the Allowances Scheme, if the recommendations are adopted on basic allowance an increase would await whatever the officer national pay award is agreed for 2022/23, but for illustration a 2% increase would equate to £4,376 increase overall on the budget. For the new special responsibility allowances it would increase the budget by £15,630. The final figures will be reported in any Finance recommendations to Council in July.

For room hire and audio provision at Area Committees, there is funding in the 2021/22 budget for March 2022.

(b) Staffing Implications

(c) Equality and Poverty Implications

The Panel's recommendations aim to address some of the impediments to a manageable councillor workload/life balance. In the Panel's Terms of

Reference it requires recommendations ensure that equality and diversity implications are considered so that a diverse range of Councillors can be attracted.

(d) Environmental Implications

(e) Procurement Implications

(f) Community Safety Implications

Nothing specific for the above.

If you have a query on the report please contact Gary Clift, Democratic Services Manager, tel: 01223 - 457011, email: gary.clift@cambridge.gov.uk.