

IRP Nov 2021

Summary

The Independent Remuneration Panel has a statutory duty to review Members' allowances and to make recommendations to the City Council.

In November 2021, we collected evidence from Members through survey and interview, and by comparison with benchmarked authorities.

The survey and interviews suggest that time constraints are the most prominent factor in Councillors' perception of their ability to carry out their role to their own high standards.

A degree of dissatisfaction with current processes was evident.

This exercise has provided a wealth of pertinent information which could lead to efficiencies in the processes used by Councillors – and thus aid their time management and potentially increase their job satisfaction.

The IRP considers efficient use of time to be within our remit as it affects the 'per hour' nature of the allowances paid.

At a time of significant change in personnel within Council leadership and with many newly elected councillors, we believe this to be an opportune time to review several Council processes.

Background

Changes within the City Council, in terms of leadership, (both Chief Exec and Leader), composition of the Council (with three Groups) and a large number of newly elected Councillors (16), together with changes within the Combined Authority and other partnership groups make this an ideal time to give thought to the efficiency with which Councillor time is used.

The IRP takes the view that, if time spent on Councillor duties could be streamlined, this would impact on their efficiency and effectiveness. In the long-term, it could also impact on the recruitment and retention of Councillors.

We consider measures to improve Council processes which, in turn, encourage efficient use of Councillor time, to be within our remit as a reduction in hours spent increases the 'per hour' nature of the allowances paid.

Other factors which we have taken into consideration are:

Councillors face increasing responsibilities across different authorities.

Advances in technology

A constrained Council budget

The desire by Councillors to encourage diverse and equitable representation on the Council

Methodology

A confidential survey was sent to all Councillors. Ten were returned.

We took interview evidence from 16 Councillors ensuring that we included both new and experienced Councillors, Leaders of all three groups, members of all three groups, chairs of City Council committees and Councillors who sit on partnership bodies. We also interviewed the Chief Executive. These sources brought forth a wealth of information about processes and procedures. We feel that improvements in these, if implemented, would enhance the operation of the Council.

We looked at evidence from benchmarked authorities – our statistical and geographical neighbours: Cheltenham, Crawley, Exeter, Lincoln, Norwich, Oxford, St Albans and Welwyn Garden City plus all Cambridgeshire District Councils – also Cambridgeshire County Council (as local top tier authority).

Findings

Themes which emerged across both survey and interview are:

the amount of time which has to be given to the Councillor role

the difficulties experienced by Councillors with full-time jobs

the difficulties experienced by Councillors with caring responsibilities

the difficulties experienced by new Councillors

the 'softer' areas that could be addressed to increase Councillors' well-being and job satisfaction – to aid retention

the increased effectiveness of Councillors when allowed to have hybrid meetings and remote voting

the volume and opaqueness of some paperwork

that Cambridge City Council is an atypical District Council so benchmarking is useful but need not circumscribe decisions

RECOMMENDATIONS

Time efficiency

To increase the efficiency and effectiveness of meetings:

Use hybrid / remote meetings where possible

Use proxy voting if it becomes possible to do so

Consider pairings between political groups

Continue to lobby Government with evidence of improved efficiency/effectiveness/attendance when using a hybrid meeting structure
Consider chair's training for all – for both the chairs and the chaired – what to expect from meetings, agendas, reports, executive summaries
Consider improvements in paperwork for meetings – this to include training for officers in report writing
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.
Consider the timing of meetings and length of meetings (balancing late evening travel / those in full-time work)
Consider a reduction in the number of meetings per committee and / or the number of committees
Consider whether Area Committees still have a use
Increase (and stick to) deadlines for reports and amendments for meetings
Keep abreast of the opportunities provided by new software

Job satisfaction and well-being

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
Consider accessibility issues for all venues and ensure that partner bodies do likewise
Consider an exit interview for Councillors standing down
Consider a cross-party 'youth group' of Councillors

For new Councillors

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
Induction training – consider whether to rerun or provide an update after 6 months
Consider further/different training for new minority group Councillors
Consider the provision of an FAQ page for Councillors – this would need an officer to keep it updated
Mentoring – consider formalising a mentoring system for new Councillors. This is particularly pertinent for those in the minority group.
In relation to Councillors with SRAs / Executive Councillors

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

Consider streamlining the organisation of the Council

Case work

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

Expenses

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

To encourage diversity – strategic issues

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.)

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

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALLOWANCES

The change in Leader seems likely to prompt, if not necessitate, changes in the distribution of roles and responsibilities and ways of working. This, together with the potential outcome of the Governance review and the impact of increasing joint working with neighbouring councils on partnership bodies, make it likely that any recommendations made on SRAs in this Review will need to be revisited within the next two years

Special Responsibility Allowances

All Special Responsibility Allowances are calculated as a percentage of the Basic Allowance, including those not listed below.

1. Within the City Council:

In order to allow the Leader to delegate further, it is recommended that an SRA should be paid to each of the two Deputies at 25% of an Executive Councillor's allowance – ie half a BA. We recommend that this allocation be linked to a clear definition of the responsibilities of the Deputy Leader (non-statutory) role.

2. For Members serving on Executive Committees of the Combined Authority:

SRAs currently cover:

CA Board (10 scheduled meetings May 21-April 22) at the rate of one x Basic Allowance

CA Overview and Scrutiny (8 scheduled meetings May 21-April 22) at the rate of 25% of BA

CA Audit and Governance (6 scheduled May 21-April 22) at the rate of 10% of BA

It is recommended that those serving on all CA committees receive an SRA of 20 % of Basic allowance:

Overview and Scrutiny (8 scheduled meetings May 21-April 22)

Audit and Governance (6 scheduled May 21-April 22)

Transport and Infrastructure (6 scheduled meetings May 21-April 2022)

Skills (6 scheduled meetings May 21-April 2022)

Housing and Communities (6 scheduled meetings May 21-April 2022)

And the CA Board Member (10 scheduled meetings May 21-April 22) continues to receive BA x 1

Basic allowance index

3. It is recommended, following the suggestion by several Councillors, that Basic Allowance be linked to the index used for City Council employees instead of the National Living Wage.

For future consideration:

Examine the relationship between SRAs for Group leaders of opposition / minority groups

Examine whether Area Committee SRAs should be discontinued

There was a general concern among Councillors that, although the Basic Allowance for City Councillors is now commensurate with that of benchmarked District Councils, the non-typical nature of this council could mean that there are anomalies in the level of Basic Allowance in relation to the spread and depth of responsibilities undertaken by Councillors in Cambridge. The IRP recommends that the level of Basic Allowance be reviewed again in four years – together with the distribution between BA and SRAs.

Appendices:

Terms of Reference

To recommend a scheme or schemes to the Council which

- i. recognises that councillors undertake council work for the sake of public service and not private gain
- ii. recognises in both basic and special responsibility allowances the varying demands placed upon councillors, dependent upon their roles and responsibilities
- iii. fairly and equitably compensates councillors, so far as the Panel thinks appropriate, for the time and effort they can reasonably be expected to devote to their work as a councillor
- iv. is economic, efficient to administer and effective
- v. is easy to understand and explain
- vi. recognises the level of out of pocket expenses councillors incur
- vii. has flexibility to reflect changes of responsibilities of councillors during the course of the year
- viii. ensures that a benchmarking exercise is undertaken with other comparable Councils.
- ix. ensures that equality and diversity implications are considered so that a diverse range of Councillors can be attracted.

Evidence gathered

Allowances Schemes of the following Councils:

Cheltenham, Crawley, East Cambs, Exeter, Fenland, Huntingdonshire, Lincoln, Norwich, Oxford, South Cambridgeshire, St Albans, Welwyn Hatfield and Cambridgeshire County. Also East of England Allowances Survey (as at September 2021).

Interviews with Chief Executive and 16 city councillors (out of 42)

Survey questions to 42 city councillors (10 returned). The survey questions are at the end of this appendix.

Members of the Panel are:

Jane Phillips

Jane has worked as a teacher and a business psychologist. She has also been a school governor for over thirty years, working with five different schools in Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. During this time, she has been the Chair of Governors and the Chair of Personnel and has drawn up policies on governor expenses and a code of conduct for the governing body. From

1992-1995 she was the Chair of Hertfordshire Governors' Association and from 2000-2003 she was the Chair of the National Association of School Governors. She is now the Chair of Birdwood Area Residents' Association in Cambridge. In her spare time she has completed an MA in Crime Writing and is writing the third book in a crime trilogy. She lives in Cambridge.

Graham Jagger

Graham is a Cambridge graduate and professional HR manager and consultant with wide public and private sector experience. During the last 20 years he has worked in the NHS at Trust, regional and national levels including as Director of Corporate Development at Papworth Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and as Agenda for Change Director for Papworth, Addenbrookes and the East of England. He was appointed to the independent NHS Pay Review Body by the Secretary of State for Health in 2009, responsible for reviewing and making recommendations to government on changes to the pay and conditions of NHS staff. From 2012 he was Lead Governor, Papworth Hospital NHSFT and Director of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Currently he chairs the East of England Advisory Committee on Consultant Clinical Excellence Awards and is a Member of the NHS Reconfiguration Panel which advises the Secretary of State on contested service change proposals. He has six years' experience of reviewing a members' allowance scheme as member and then chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel at South Cambridgeshire District Council. He lives in Cambridge.

Rob Bennett

Rob is the independent person for Cambridge City Council dealing with complaints against councillors. He worked as a partner with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) until 2010 and led the public sector audit business in the South and East of England. He is a non-executive director and audit and risk committee chair for Flagship Housing Group, the largest housing association in the East of England with over 30,000 properties. He is a non-executive member of Norfolk & Waveney Clinical Commissioning Group's Governing Body and chair the audit committee and the conflicts of interest committee. Rob is the independent chair of the audit committee for the Norfolk Police and Crime Commissioner, the independent hospital manager for Norfolk & Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust dealing with the detention of patients under Mental Health legislation. He is also the chair for a local charity which manages a country park on the outskirts of Norwich and a volunteer at the Norwich Foodbank.

Independent Review Panel to advise on Councillor Allowances – Autumn 2021

Panel members: Jane Phillips, Graham Jagger, Rob Bennett

Questions for Councillors

Five years ago the Independent Review Panel undertook a major overhaul of the allowances for councillors. We have a statutory obligation to review this system every four years when linked to an annual increase by Index. This provides an opportunity to investigate changing requirements, ensures that allowances are appropriate and adequately reflect responsibilities. As part of this review we take into account practice in our statistical and geographical neighbours eg Oxford, South Cambs and Norwich. This year, we are mindful of the budget challenges in the next financial year and beyond.

It would be very helpful to get a wide range of councillor views on the following areas. Your responses will be treated in complete confidence and used to inform the Panel's deliberations. A response to any question is optional.

Equality issues and barriers to entry

1. Have you experienced any barriers in carrying out your role as a member? If so, what are they?
2. Have you a view on how these might be addressed in relation to councillor allowances?
3. Do you have any views on what needs to be incorporated into a Council parental leave policy and related family friendly policies to encourage a wider range of people to become councillors eg. better child-care provision and facilities; more flexible timing and mode of meetings (remote/hybrid); defined care leave cover arrangements etc?

Basic Allowance

The basic allowance currently aligns with the increases in the Government's National Living Wage. Cambridge's basic allowance is now on a par with neighbours who peg their BA annual increases to the local government employee increase.

4. A proposal is that the basic allowance is increased with local government employee pay (not chief officers). Do you think this appropriate?

Yes

No

Other

5. If Other, please expand

Special Responsibility Allowances

The City Council is generous in the proportion of SRAs it authorises – 72% of councillors are in receipt of an SRA. This is higher than the 50% recommended by South East Employers.

6. Should the number of SRAs be reduced? Yes/No

7. If Yes, which ones should be discontinued?

8. The City council also allows three SRAs to be paid to any individual councillor. This is higher than most comparator councils. Should the maximum number of SRAs per councillor be reduced?
Yes/No

Joint working with other Authorities

SRAs are paid to some councillors who serve on partnership bodies eg the Combined Authority and Greater Cambridge Partnership

9. Have there been any significant changes in joint working since the last IRP review, and if so, what are they?

Any Other Comments

10. Is there anything else you want to add or expand on?

About you ...

11. How long have you been a City Councillor?

1 – 3 years; 4 – 8 years; 9 – 12 years; 12 years or more; prefer not to say

12. What is your age range?

25 or under; 26 – 35; 36 – 45; 46 – 55; 56 – 65; 66 or over; prefer not to say

13. What gender to you identify with?

Male/Female/Other/Prefer not to answer