

Recommended Members Allowances for 2007-08

Report to Cannock Chase Council

by the Independent Panel for the Assessment of Members Allowances

Independent Panel for the Assessment of Members Allowances

Introduction

The Local Government Act 2000 requires each Council to have regard to the report of an Independent Panel before setting a scheme for the payment of allowances to its members.

This report has been compiled by such a Panel, constituted by Cannock Chase Council, with the following terms of reference:

- o To act as an Independent Panel for the assessment of members allowances and related matters in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2000.
- o To prepare reports to the Council recommending:
 - a) Schemes of members allowances, and,
 - b) How those schemes should be maintained in future years
- o To consider and report on items referred to the Panel from time to time by the Council on allowances payable to councillors or related matters.

The Panel

The Panel is constituted as five members, reflecting the interests of the public, the voluntary sector and businesses in the District. Four of the members who undertook the task in the previous year remained as members for a further year. These four were supplemented by one new member, nominated by Chase CVS. The Panel met on three occasions during April and May 2007 to consider the level of allowances which should be paid from May 2007.

The Panel were addressed at their first meeting by Councillor Neil Stanley, Leader of the Council, who explained the issues raised by the Staffordshire Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Local Government White Paper and answered the Panel's questions. Councillor Stanley left the meeting following his presentation and took no part in the Panel's deliberations.

The issues considered by the Panel are set out below.

Questionnaire Returns

A questionnaire was sent to all members of the Council seeking information on the time they spent on their activities as a Councillor, in the same way as in previous years. A blank questionnaire is included at Annex 1 to this report.

The Panel were again disappointed at the number of returns received from back-bench members, and requested that a further reminder was sent to those members who had not sent back their information. As a result of this, 28 returns were ultimately able to be taken into account.

The replies received are summarised at Annex 2.

The Panel asked for it to be emphasised to members of the Council yet again that these returns are key documents that form the basis for much of their work. The quality of the Panel's recommendations relates directly to the efforts that Councillors make in sending complete and accurate information to them. Response to the Panel's requests for information has not, generally, been good. A much better response is needed in future years for the Panel to carry out its job effectively,

Rate of Remuneration

The Panel decided that it would retain the previous practice of determining three rates of remuneration, to enable the setting of basic allowances, cabinet members' allowances and committee chairmen's allowances.

For some time the Council's allowances scheme has been based on the Local Government Association's standard "daily rate" for use in the calculation of members' allowances. This rate is based on the national average white collar rate of pay and, updated to current prices, is £132.88.

In considering the applicability of the rate to the Council, the panel decided that 100% of this rate should be used for the cabinet members' allowance, with the committee chairmen's rate at 65% of the figure and other members at 60%. This is equivalent to £17.96, £11.67 and £10.77 per hour respectively.

Paid Hours

Government guidance states that "It is important that some element of the work of members continues to be voluntary – that some hours are not remunerated."

The Panel decided to review the percentages used last year to determine the time which should be paid within each element. These revised percentages are set out in the table below.

Activity	Basic	Chairman	Cabinet
Attending Member Meetings	65%	65%	65%
Preparing for Member Meetings	60%	40%	60%
Travelling to Member Meetings	0%	0%	0%
Attending Outside Body Meetings	15%	15%	15%
General Ward Work	60%	40%	30%
Civic & Other Functions	20%	20%	20%
Receiving Briefings From Officers	50%	40%	50%
Attending Conferences & Seminars	15%	15%	15%
Other Council Related Work	35%	35%	35%

Expenses Allowance

The Panel noted that an element of the current basic allowance continues to be in respect of expenses incurred by members, particularly in respect of telephone calls and rentals, fax machine costs and the provision of indemnity insurance for work on outside bodies. It was determined to continue this expense element, and to set it at £1,175 for 2007-08, an increase in line with retail prices.

Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)

The application of the rates of remuneration above to the paid hours and the addition of the expenses allowance results in the following proposed allowances:

Basic Allowance	£5,047
SRA - Cabinet Member	£9,046
SRA - Committee Chairman	£1,512

It is proposed that the special responsibility allowances should be applied as follows:

Cabinet Member x 2	Leader
Cabinet Member	All Cabinet members Chairman of Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member x 1/2	Opposition Leader
Cabinet Member x 1/4	Shadow Cabinet member
Cabinet Member x 2/3	Chairman of Planning Control Committee
Committee Chairman	Chairmen of Select Committees (except Performance & Partnerships) Chairman of Licensing Committee Chairman of Audit & Governance Cttee Chairman of FSR Panel (per review)
Committee Chairman x 1/4	Chairman of Standards Committee

These proposals represent an increase in special responsibility allowances in a number of areas, most notably the Leader of the Council, to recognise the increased responsibilities of the role and additional commitment required, the Shadow Cabinet, which is recognised for the payment of allowances for the first time, and the Cabinet allowance, which is representative of the growing role of cabinet members as evidenced by the returns received.

Group Leadership

The specific element of the allowance related to group leadership was increased to £100 per group member and the allowance for the deputy leader of any political group with at least 10 members was increased to £30 per member. These increases are in line with inflation.

Council Chairman and Vice-Chairman

The nature of the allowances payable to the Council Chairman and Vice-Chairman were acknowledged as different in nature from the other allowances payable, due to the very much different role played by these members as civic leaders. These are thus payable as "cash" sums, rather than the more salary-like basis of most other allowances.

It was noted, however, that the "work" of the Chairman has been decreasing, and as a result, allowances have been retained at their current cash level of £8,765 for the Chairman's and £3,441 for the Vice-Chairman.

Independent Members

The payment to independent members with decision-making powers, such as those on the Standards Committee, was increased to £210 per annum in line with inflation.

Local Area Agreement

The Panel considered the changes to the Local Strategic Partnership to enable it to become the District Delivery Board under the Staffordshire LAA. It also noted the Council's proposals that the main LSP board would be attended by the Council Leader, supported by the Deputy Leader and Opposition Leader, and that each block would be attended by a nominated Cabinet member, supported by the Select Committee Chairman and Opposition Spokesman.

In view of the above, the Panel proposed the payment of the equivalent of a Cabinet allowance to the Leader in respect of this responsibility, with a 50% Cabinet allowance each to the Deputy Leader and Opposition Leader. For each LAA Block, it is proposed that the Cabinet members leading the block for the Council should receive a 50% Cabinet allowance, with a 25% allowance each for the Select Committee Chairman and Opposition Spokesman.

Travel and Subsistence

Last year, the Panel made recommendations to the Council regarding travel and subsistence which were not accepted. The Panel originally planned to revisit this issue, but due to the complexities of the changes affecting the allowances scheme, decided to defer consideration to next year.

Members Computers

The panel were asked to consider updating the system for the provision of computers to members by allowing an "allowance" system in certain instances. The Panel supported the proposals, which are set out at Annex 3.

Ongoing Scheme Review

It was the view of the Panel that the current scheme should stand until the annual meeting of the Council in 2008, and be reviewed in full by the Panel before the end of that period in order to recommend any revisions required for the 2008-09 municipal year.

The scale of the changes to the proposed scheme this year have been significant, recognising both the changes arising from the Council's early implementation of some of the requirements of the Local Government White Paper and the implementation of the Staffordshire Local Area Agreement (LAA). Next year's review would be critical to test if the changes projected have actually materialised. It was again emphasised by the Panel that accurate returns from all members would be critical to a successful review next year.

The further issue of membership of the Panel was considered.

Due to the changes to the scheme, the Panel considered that this year's panel should remain together to undertake a full review next year. It was decided to dispense with the principle of rotation for this year only, and ask the whole of the Panel to stand for next year's review. All members of the Panel agreed to do so.

Conclusions

The recommendations of the Panel are contained throughout the report. The Panel noted that their recommendations, if implemented, could be met within the Council's current budget provision, as supplemented by the reserve set aside for the implementation of the White Paper and LAA..

Finally, the Panel would like to thank the Council's Deputy Chief Executive, Les Trigg, and Principal Committee Officer, Matt Challoner, for their assistance and support for the Panel's work.

M Mellor
Chairman
10 May 2007

Panel Members:

Mr M Mellor
Mr J Derry
Mrs E Nelmes
Mrs M Roberts
Mr D Tiff

INDEPENDENT PANEL FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF MEMBERS ALLOWANCES

The Independent Panel will be meeting again during April to prepare its report, which will be presented to the Annual Council Meeting on 23 May.

I am currently pulling together information to present to the Panel. To this end it would be helpful if you would complete the short form below and return it to me by Friday 20 April. **Please note that I will not be presenting the forms themselves to the Panel, just a summary of the replies received, without names.**

Please do not include in your answers work as a member of a political party, other than the attendance at Group or other party political meetings related to Council work.

Thank you for your help.

Les Trigg
29 March 2007

NAME:	
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In a typical month, how many hours would you normally spend:	Hours per Month
Attending "Member" meetings (eg. Council, Committee, FSR, Cabinet)	
Preparing for Member Meetings (eg. reading papers)	
Travelling to Member Meetings	
Attending meetings of outside bodies as the Council's representative	
General Ward work (eg. surgeries, dealing with issues on behalf of residents)	
Representing the Council at civic and other functions	
Receiving briefings from officers	
Attending conferences and seminars	
Any other Council related work (please give examples below)	

If you have any comments that you would like brought to the attention of the Panel, please write them on the reverse of this note.

Independent Panel for the Assessment of Members' Allowances

Analysis of Questionnaire Results

	Back Bench Members hrs/month	Committee etc. Chairmen hrs/month	Cabinet Members hrs/month	Council Chairman hrs/month	Overall hrs/month
Numbers:					
Maximum Returns	26	7	7	1	41
Actual Number Returned	15	6	6	1	28
Average of Replies:					
Attending Member Meetings	12.9	18.0	29.7	30.0	18.2
Preparing for Member Meetings	11.0	27.0	23.0	20.0	17.3
Travelling to Member Meetings	5.5	7.8	10.0	12.0	7.2
Attending Outside Body Meetings	4.0	3.7	11.5	0.0	5.4
General Ward Work	18.9	22.2	35.2	20.0	23.1
Civic & Other Functions	1.7	10.3	5.5	45.0	5.9
Receiving Briefings From Officers	2.5	7.8	12.0	1.0	5.6
Attending Conferences & Seminars	0.3	4.2	17.0	0.0	4.7
Other Council Related Work	4.0	2.0	14.0	0.0	5.6
TOTAL	60.8	103.0	157.9	128.0	93.1

Annex 2

Members IT Support

The proposed scheme is set out below:

- The Council should retain the current policy of providing "thin client" workstations to those members who require them.
- An alternative scheme should also be offered to those members where this method of access does not meet their needs. This alternative scheme is outlined below.
- Each Member would be asked to choose, following their (re-) election, which alternative they are opting for. This would then be fixed until the end of their current term in office.
- Members elected in May 2006 and May 2007 would be given a one-off option of changing to the alternative scheme if they would prefer it.
- Other Members would not change to the new scheme other than in exceptional circumstances.

The alternative scheme would work as follows:

- Instead of the Council providing a computer and related equipment, Councillors opting for this scheme would be expected to provide their own computers, printers, broadband link, software and consumables. The Council would not provide any equipment at all.
- An allowance would be paid to Members of £1,200 in their year of (re-)election, followed by £400 per annum for each of the following three years. This would be paid as an £800 lump sum on (re-)election followed by monthly payments of £33.33 for the remainder of their current term in office. The payments would be taxable.
- No access would be provided to the Council's internal systems, but e-mails, minutes and agendas would be accessible via the internet.
- Other than initial set-up of the e-mail system and training on e-mail and accessing committee papers, no support would be provided by the Council.
- Members opting for this scheme would need to certify to the Council on an annual basis that they have a PC available to them at all times at home which provides broadband internet access, printing facilities, and a means of reading Adobe Acrobat, Word and Excel files.

Those Members who are also County Councillors would be able to choose to use "thin-clients", the alternative scheme above, or to access their CCDC information via the County computer. If they opt to use the County computer, no allowance would be payable.