

Minutes of the EAST KENT JOINT INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

Extract from the meeting held on 16 September 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the **EAST KENT JOINT INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Monday, 16 September 2019 at 2.30 pm

Present:

Chairman: Mr K London

Panel: Mr A Goodall
Mrs S Longden
Mrs K Sabin-Dawson

Officers: Head of Corporate Governance (Canterbury City Council)
Democratic Services Manager (Dover District Council)

20 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr W Ferrier.

21 CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME

The Democratic Services Manager advised the Panel that the Head of Corporate Governance (Canterbury City Council) was in attendance to answer questions relating to the Members' Allowance Scheme for Canterbury City Council.

The Panel at its previous meeting had questioned the level of remuneration for the Standards Committee members given that it had not met in the previous year and the proposals were for one meeting in the following year to consider the Annual Governance Statement. It was felt that this contrasted with the lower remuneration levels for the 3 Forums which had more meetings per year and the Audit Committee (4 meetings per year) and the Governance Committee (2 meetings per year). Given these differences, the Panel asked the following:

- (a) Are the three independent members on the Standards Committee the three parish council reps?
- (b) What is the role of the independent members on Standards Committee? It is assumed that the Independent Persons appointed separately undertake a role in member complaints?
- (c) What training is required for this committee compared to Audit and Governance Committees?

In response, the Head of Corporate Governance advised that:

- (a) That the three independent members were separate from the parish council representatives on the Standards Committee. The parish representatives were nominated by the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) and were not remunerated.
- (b) The Independent Persons operated separately from the Standards Committee assisting the Monitoring Officer in the assessment of Member complaints.

The parish members provided insight from a parish perspective. The paucity of meetings in recent years had meant that parish input into Standards had lessened, but in the past it has been particularly useful when debating matters such as the Code of Conduct or Probity in Planning or Licensing. The Council also invited a parish representative to attend a complaints hearing panel in a non-voting capacity and where the matter concerned a parish councillor then added weight is given to their views. In practice nearly all complaints are now resolved by the MO in consultation with the Independent Person so panels rarely meet.

- (c) The Audit Committee was responsible for approving the accounts with appropriate training while the Standards Committee members were provided training on the Code of Conduct.

In light of these answers, and benchmarking with Audit Committees at other authorities, the Panel agreed to recommend an increase in the allowance for the Chair of the Audit Committee. It was proposed that this should be in line with the allowance for the Vice-Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee which for 2018/19 was £2607.73. It was the view of the Panel that the position of Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee should remain unremunerated. It was acknowledged that this represented a small increase in the existing budget.

The Panel discussed whether to recommend amendments to the allowance for the Chair of the Standards Committee, such as the removal of the allowance, but agreed to recommend no further changes at this time.

In reviewing the overall levels of remuneration the Panel expressed support for the continuation of the two tier approach to committee chair and vice-chair remuneration and welcomed the limits on the number of Special Responsibility Allowances that could be claimed by a single councillor. The Panel would be willing to consider reviewing the two tier committee remuneration approach if asked, though it would require further information on the complexity and burdens on chairs, vice-chairs and members for each of the committees.

The Panel welcomed the benchmarking information provided and noted the difficulties in comparing a committee system model with a cabinet system model for the purposes of determining allowances. It was the overall view of the Panel that the Members' Allowance Scheme for Canterbury City Council seemed appropriate for an authority of its size and number of members.

The Panel agreed to recommend that the Carers Allowance be set at the National Living Wage rather than the National Minimum Wage. It was felt that the National Living Wage (£8.21 per hour) provided for a more realistic contribution towards the costs involved in paying for care.

The Panel acknowledged that travel and subsistence rates were in keeping with the levels set by HMRC and it welcomed the provision for a cycling allowance.

RESOLVED: That in answer to the questions asked of it by Canterbury City Council, the East Kent Joint Independent Remuneration Panel makes the following recommendations:

Based upon a reappportionment of the existing budget

(a) That it is recommended:

- (i) That the current Members' Allowances Scheme for 2019/20 be endorsed subject to a recommendation that the remuneration of the Chair of the Audit Committee be increased from £531.95 to

£2659.87. This was based upon the number of meetings involved and the importance and complexity of the work of the Audit Committee. For future benchmarking this would be in line with the allowance for the Vice-Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee.

- (ii) That the limit on the number of Special Responsibility Allowances that could be paid to a single member (excluding the group leaders allowance) be maintained.
- (iii) That the rate at which the Carers' Allowance is paid be changed from the National Minimum Wage to the National Living Wage.
- (iv) That the travel and subsistence allowances should continue to remain in line with HMRC approved rates.

The Panel acknowledged that these recommendations would result in a small increase in the existing budget but it did not see scope for reducing other areas of remuneration.

Based on no budget cap being applied

- (b) That, based on what it would suggest if there were no budget cap applied to the Members' Allowance Scheme, it was the recommendation of the Panel that given its view that the current Members' Allowances Scheme was appropriate for an authority of Canterbury City Council's size and noting the comparison with similar authorities operating a committee system, that it would only recommend increasing the level of Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances in line with the annual pay award for officers.

Extract from the meeting held on 4 September 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the **EAST KENT JOINT INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday, 4 September 2019 at 2.30 pm

Present:

Chairman: Councillor Mr K London

Panel: Mr W Ferrier
Mr A Goodall
Mrs S Longden

Officers: Democratic Services Manager

18 CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS' ALLOWANCE SCHEME

The Panel considered the report provided by Canterbury City Council in respect of its Members' Allowance Scheme.

The Panel was asked to consider the allowances for each role described in Canterbury City Council's Scheme of Members Allowances and make recommendations (a) based upon a reapportionment of the existing budget, and as an alternative; and (b) what it would suggest if there were no budget cap applied.

In answer to the first question it was the view of the Panel that it broadly accepted the current allowance levels, acknowledging that Canterbury's approach had seen other authorities' allowances rise above theirs to the point that were now in the middle of the range of comparable authorities on average.

In respect of the Dependant Carers' Allowance the Panel felt it should be benchmarked to the National Living Wage not the National Minimum Wage. This was in line with its position recommended to Dover District Council and Thanet District Council.

In respect of the basic committee structure, the Panel did not see an immediate case for departing from the current two-tier approach. However, acknowledging that Canterbury City Council operated a committee model it was the view of the Panel that it would be prepared to consider reviewing this approach if asked. However, the Panel would need more detailed information on complexity and burdens on Members for each of the committees.

The Panel supported the continued use of HMRC levels for travel and subsistence and were pleased to note that there was a cycling allowance.

In respect of the role of the Standards Committee, the Panel requested further information on the following matters:

- (a) Were the three independent members on the Standards Committee the three parish council representatives?
- (b) What was the role of the independent members on Standards Committee? It was assumed that the Independent Persons appointed separately undertake a role in member complaints?

(c) What training was required for this committee compared to Audit and Governance Committees?

Based on the answers provided to these questions the Panel would finalise its recommendations. However, the Panel was minded to consider recommending an increase in the allowance for the Chair of the Audit Committee, depending on the outcome of its request for information.

In respect of the second question about “what it would suggest if there were no budget cap applied”, it was the Panel’s view that it would be inclined to recommend continuing with benchmarking against officer pay increases. The Panel acknowledged that the climate for local government finance has changed since their last recommendations on the matter.

RESOLVED: That the Democratic Services Manager contact Canterbury City Council and seek the answers to the Panel’s questions.