



**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL ON THE REVIEW OF
ALLOWANCES FOR MEMBERS OF MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL
21ST OCTOBER 2009**

INTRODUCTION

The Council's Independent Remuneration Panel met on 21st October to consider and review suggestions made by the Council regarding the current Members' Allowance Scheme and to review the changes relating to the Dependent Carers' Allowances as recommended in the Panel's Report of October 2008.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel has made the following recommendations, that:

- no change be made to the level of Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) paid to the Chairman of the Audit Committee at present, but that this be reviewed again in a year's time
- the Chairman of the LDDAG be awarded an SRA equivalent to 5% of the Leader's allowance, which at the time of writing would be £1,160 per annum
- the level of allowance paid to the Chairman of the Planning Committee and to the Chairman of each of the Scrutiny Committees continue at the current level
- that no allowance be paid to members of the Standards Sub-Committee, and that the Chairman of the Standards Committee continue to receive his Special Responsibility Allowance at the current rate
- no change be made to the operation of the Dependent Carers Allowance, following the removal of the 12 hour restriction in 2008.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

In accordance with the requirements of the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) (Amended) Regulations 2003, the terms of reference of the Independent Remuneration Panel at this meeting were to make recommendations to the Borough Council in relation to:

- The Work of the Audit Committee

- Chairmen's Allowances - review of payment of allowance to Chairman of the Local Development Document Advisory Group and of the allowance paid to the Chairman of the Planning Committee and of the Scrutiny Committee
- Payment of Allowance to Standards Sub-Committee Members
- The Dependent Carers Allowance

INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

The membership of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) is as follows:

Susie Bonfield (Chair) – Policy Officer, Democracy and Governance, South East Employers

Victoria Wallace, Chief Executive of Leeds Castle and member of the Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Valerie Page, Independent Member

CONSIDERATION OF THE KEY ISSUES

The Panel received an overall briefing from Janet Barnes, PA to the Cabinet, and Neil Harris, Democratic Services Manager at Maidstone Borough Council. In addition, the Panel noted that all Members of the Council had been invited to comment on the Council's current Members' Allowance Scheme and to raise any issues for discussion by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP).

The Panel then considered the key issues as follows:

The Audit Committee

Councillor Horne, Chairman of the Audit Committee, requested that the Panel note that there has been an increase in the range and work of the Audit Committee.

The IRP met with Councillor Horne and with Zena Cooke, Director of Resources and Partnerships and the Council's Statutory 151 Officer.

The Committee heard that the role and the workload of this Committee had grown in recent months but that a formal change to the remit and responsibilities of this Committee was subject to approval by the full Council.

The Panel recommended that no change be made to the level of SRA paid to the Chairman of the Audit Committee at present, but that this be reviewed again in a year's time.

Chairmen's Allowances

- **Review of payment of allowance to Chairman of the Local Development Document Advisory Group (LDDAG)**

Councillor David Marchant, a member of the LDDAG, requested that the Panel review and consider again the payment of an allowance to the Chairman of LDDAG.

The IRP noted that the meetings have been held on an ad-hoc basis, but since August 2009, meetings have been booked for every month for the foreseeable future, although, the Panel noted that not every meeting has been necessary. Noted that the October meeting of the Group had been cancelled and that the September and November meetings had been changed to Seminars to inform members of progress on different matters within the Local Development Framework.

- **Review of allowance paid to Chairman of the Planning and Scrutiny Committees**

Councillor Lusty, Chairman of Planning Committee and the Local Development Document Advisory Group, requested that the Panel look at the Special Responsibility Allowances paid to Committee Chairmen. Councillor Lusty had expressed the view that there is a discrepancy between the allowances paid and the workload of the Chairman, in particular, in relation to the Special Responsibility Allowance paid to the Chairman of Planning and the Chairmen of the four Scrutiny Committees and that this is not reflected in the payments.

The Panel met with Councillor Richard Lusty, Chairman of LDDAG and also of the Planning Committee, and with Sue Whiteside, Team Leader, Planning Policy. In addition, the Panel met with Councillor Eric Hotson, Chairman of the External Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and with Angela Woodhouse, the Borough's Scrutiny Manager.

The Panel heard that in relation to the LDDAG, whilst the post of Chairman of this Committee had not received an SRA in the past, the Committee had a demanding workload, likely to continue for the foreseeable future, with members having to consider a large amount of evidence based information. Noted that the Committee were dealing with a sizeable amount of Government guidance, and that Maidstone was a complex area to plan for. Noted that the Chairman of this Committee plays an integral role in both the monthly meetings and the seminar style sessions.

The Panel recommended that the Chairman of the LDDAG be awarded a Special Responsibility Allowance equivalent to 5% of the Leader's allowance, which at the time of writing would be £1,160 per annum.

The Panel also considered very carefully the role of the Chairman in relation to both Planning and Scrutiny, and whilst noting that the agendas for the Planning Committee meetings were very full and that these meetings commanded the highest public attendance of any of the council meetings, the Panel felt that there was not a sizeable discrepancy in the role and responsibility of the Chairman in relation to Planning and Scrutiny Committees to warrant any adjustment in the level of their respective SRAs.

The Panel recommended that the level of allowance paid to the Chairman of the Planning Committee and to the Chairman of each of the Scrutiny Committees continue at the current level.

Payment of Allowance to Standards Sub-Committee Members

Councillor Marchant, in his capacity as a member of the Standards Committee, also requested that the Panel consider paying an allowance to the members of Standards Sub-Committees, when meetings are held.

The IRP met with Mike Powis, one of the co-opted independent members of the

Standards Committee, and received a briefing note from Maidstone BC's Monitoring Officer, Paul Fisher, who was unable to attend for interview.

The Panel noted the new responsibilities of the Standards Committee in relation to the Members' Code of Conduct and the investigatory role it has, via the Sub-Committee. However, the Panel noted that following these changes, there had not been a major impact on the hours involved for members of the Sub-Committee.

The Panel recommended that no allowance be paid to members of the Standards Sub-Committee, and that the Chairman of the Standards Committee continue to receive his Special Responsibility Allowance at the current rate.

Dependent Carers Allowance

In October 2008, the IRP recommended that the restriction of 12 hours per week for this allowance be removed with immediate effect and that the impact of this be discussed at the next meeting. This recommendation was agreed by Council in December 2008.

Following a review of the changes, the Panel noted that there has been no adverse impact following this change and, in fact, claims under this allowance have fallen for the first 9 months of this calendar year, in comparison to the same time last year.

The Panel recommended that no change be made to the operation of the Dependent Carers Allowance, following the removal of the 12 hour restriction in 2008.

The Panel would like to thank all the members and officers who gave up their time to speak to them, and in particular to Janet Barnes who provided advice and support to the Panel throughout the day.