

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

JANUARY 2013

JOINT INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

Report prepared by Janet Barnes

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In November 2011 the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel conducted a full review of the Maidstone Members' Allowances Scheme. The report is attached as Appendix A.

The recommendations were considered by Standards Committee and then Council in December 2011 and Members resolved: -

"That the recommendations of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel on Members' Allowances for Maidstone Borough Council, as set out in the report attached as an Appendix to the report of the Standards Committee, be approved."

ISSUES RAISED FOR 2012

All Members have been asked if there are any particular issues they would like the Panel to consider as part of the 2012 review, to which there have been no submissions. However, one Councillor did make the comment that he felt there should be no increase in Councillor's allowances and that consideration should be given to a reduction in the allowance for the next couple of years.

Earlier this year, our Internal Audit department conducted an audit of Members Allowances and rated us as Substantial, which is one below the top ranking. One of the recommendations from the audit was regarding the Broadband Allowance where they felt the Independent Remuneration Panel should consider the levels of payment made and confirm whether or not they feel they are at the appropriate level.

The Broadband Allowance currently paid to members is in line with the payment made to staff who work from home on a regular basis and have "gold" access, which is a rate of up to £23.49 per month. The amount paid is the actual amount paid, up to the maximum, by the Member to the Internet Service Provider ("ISP") and this is confirmed by Members' submitting a copy of their bill to Payroll on a yearly basis, or earlier if they change ISP.

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

The Independent Remuneration Panel has previously considered whether there should be a special responsibility allowance for the Leader of the Opposition. The Council currently has a special responsibility allowance scheme whereby Group Leaders have an allowance of £11,663 which is split between each of them on the basis of the number of Members within their group divided by the total number of Members of the Council.

Currently there is no formal role for the Leader of the Opposition set out within the Council's Constitution other than the title would be given to the person who leads the largest political group outside of the Cabinet. Previously, the Leader of the main opposition party at the Council had indicated that she felt that this was not a significant recognition of the role of the Leader of the Opposition.

This issue has been discussed with the Group Leaders within the Council and a job description for the Leader of the Opposition has been developed which whilst not setting out a role for that post within the Constitution, does clearly set out a specific role for the Leader of the Opposition. This job description is attached to this report at Appendix A. You will see that the Leader of the Opposition now has a clear role with a number of different areas including political leadership, representing the Council's opposition, Governance Ethical Standards and Relationships.

It is felt that with this new job description the Independent Remuneration Panel could review their previous decision in respect of an allowance for this role and consider whether it should be allocated a specific allowance.

The options which could be available to the Panel could be: -

- a) No change.
- b) Give a percentage of the existing allowance of £11,663 to the Leader of the Opposition and then allocate the remainder to Group Leaders in accordance with the existing policy. It is suggested that the percentage to be given to the role of Leader of the Opposition should not be higher than 50%.
- c) That the allocation of allowances to the Group Leaders on the current basis is scrapped and a new system is adopted namely an amount is given to the Leader of the Opposition equivalent of up to 50% of the existing amount which would be £5,832. This would be given to the Leader of the main opposition group but which should have a minimum of 10 Members. An allowance would also be given to Group Leaders of groups of 5 or more Members which would equate to 20% of the total amount of £11663, a sum of £2333, and that Group Leaders for groups below 5 should receive no allowance. This could be funded from the existing budget allocation.

In addition, the Leader of the Opposition has worked with me in the preparation of this document and supports the attached Job Description. She also favours Option B but is less concerned on this part other than the need for recognition of this role. Also attached (Appendix B) are the views of the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Independent Group, both of whom support the principle and the Job Description, though the Leader of the Independent Group has suggested some minor changes but support different options.

Recommendation:

That the Panel consider the report and determine which option they would support and recommend for adoption to the Council.

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Purpose

To provide visible *and vocal* political leadership for the main Opposition Group on the Council in relation to the Council and its citizens, stakeholders and partners in terms of Council policies, strategies and service delivery.

Duties and Responsibilities

Political leadership

- To be a political figure head for the opposition group; to be the principal political spokesperson for the Council's opposition;
- To constructively challenge the vision for the Council and community where appropriate;
- To provide strong, clear leadership in the co-ordination of alternative policies, strategies and service delivery;
- To manage the work of councillors within the opposition group, and the overall co-ordination of opposition spokespersons and the business of the group;
- To shadow and scrutinise the Leader of the Council and the policy committees in their duties;
- To participate *inclusively* in the development of corporate strategies and policies.

Representing the Council's opposition

- To represent the opposition group to a high standard; providing a strong competent figure to represent the opposition within the Authority;
- **To submit to regular re-election as the opposition leader and to choose an opposition team**

Governance, ethical standards and relationships

- To promote and support good governance of the Council;
- To promote and support open and transparent government;
- To promote, support, and adhere to respectful, appropriate and effective relationships with officers;
- To promote and support development opportunities for members of the Council.

Personal Competencies

1. Ability to think strategically, analyse complex and often conflicting information and develop a clear vision.
2. Excellent communication skills, including the ability to manage the reputation of the Council as well as interacting with staff, stakeholders, partners and the community.
3. To be able to act as an ambassador for the Council with the ability to identify and exploit opportunities to achieve corporate and community objectives.
4. Ability to understand the business of local government including budgets, corporate planning and performance management.
5. Ability to think creatively, challenge and generate innovative and effective solutions.

Dear Neil

Thank you for your email. Although you didn't specify timescales, I trust it's not too late to give my views.

For the democratic, effective governance / management of the borough, I think it is very important for the role of Leader of the Opposition to be clearly defined, and consequently, be recognised formally and financially. I'd favour option b).

The role spec (Appendix A) is succinct. I have suggested a few possible amendments which you may or may not find acceptable. Otherwise I'm happy for it to go forward as it stands.

Fay
Independent Ward Member for Barming & Teston
Leader of the Independent Group

Hi Neil

I am Ok with this but would favour option C, as you do need to define what constitutes a group in number terms. I would also favour making the group leaders' allowance £12,000 to round up from £11,663. This would not be a problem in budgetary terms as I don't take my share because of the SRA for leader.

Fran would therefore get £6,000 if we go for Option C.

I am happy with the role description.

Thanks,

Chris
Leader of the Council