

ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

Independent Remuneration Panel

FOREWORD

This report of the Independent Remuneration Panel sets out our conclusions and recommendations on members' allowances for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 for the consideration of Staffordshire County Council (the County Council).

The Panel was established under the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2001 to provide advice and recommendations to the County Council on amounts to be paid under its members' allowances scheme. Members of the Panel are appointed by the County Council and are independent members of the community. The County Council is required to have regard to our recommendations in deciding what to pay councillors. Additionally, the County Council must also publish our recommendations and conclusions, together with the approved scheme.

PANEL MEMBERSHIP

- **Christina Robotham** (A retired Staffordshire Headteacher)
- **Annie Barrett** (A retired Staffordshire Deputy Headteacher)
- **Christopher Burden** (A newly qualified teacher)

For 2020/21 the Panel has increased its membership with the addition of two new members -

- **Anthony Styles** (A retired Police Officer)
- **William Read** (A retired Emergency Planning Officer)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Panel is required to gather information, to hear and consider evidence and to make recommendations to the County Council on:

- the amount of basic allowance to be paid to members
- those positions that should receive special responsibility allowances (SRAs), and the level of those allowances
- travel, subsistence and certain other allowances

The full terms of reference of the Panel are set out in **Appendix A**.

The Process we have followed

We met on six occasions from September 2019 until the conclusion of our review of members' allowances in February 2020.

We have previously considered a range of comparative information in respect of allowances paid in comparable local authorities. Although the remuneration offered to elected members by other authorities varies considerably, there was nothing in our consideration of comparative information that provided us with anything specific to investigate further in respect of Staffordshire members' allowances at this time.

In order to understand the views of the County Councillors themselves, we arranged for a questionnaire to be sent to all Councillors and we received twenty-eight responses, a 45% response rate. We specifically invited both group leaders to meet with us and the questionnaire also offered Councillors the same opportunity. We met with 12 Councillors; the Group Leaders, the Chairman of the County Council, two Cabinet Members, two Cabinet Support Members, a Regulatory Committee Chairman and Vice-Chairman, the All Party Working Group (APWG) Chairmen and a member with no SRA linked role.

Introduction

Our prime role has been to assess and recommend the allowances to be made available to elected members.

In formulating our recommendations, we have borne in mind:

- that the successful delivery of the various roles of members depends on a sense of corporate social responsibility and public service and that members are motivated to a significant extent by a sense of public good.
- the current economic climate and the continuing substantial financial constraints on the services which the County Council provides.

Nevertheless, those who decide to stand for election should not be required to make unreasonable sacrifices in their private lives. In this context, we continue to recognise that there is a substantial gap between the level of financial remuneration provided nationally to elected councillors and the commitment they are expected, or believe that they need to make, both in terms of time and responsibility, to fulfil the increasingly demanding roles in public life.

Proposals considered and recommendations

The Panel reports in respect of the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019 and 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 proposed substantial rebalancing of Special Responsibility Allowances to reflect changes in Special Responsibility arrangements in recent years. The County Council at its meeting on 21 March 2019 resolved:

“The Council also feels in a time of change, that the recommendations of the Panel to make changes to the levels of remuneration be deferred for further consideration later this year, as the recommendations do not reflect the future ongoing developing roles of Members”.

The County Council have however since approved our recommendation:

“That the Chairman of the County Council, in consultation with the Leader of the County Council, be authorised to increase the allowance paid to the Vice-Chairmen of Committees to the level of the corresponding Chairman’s allowance if they are required to take on the responsibilities of the Chairman for a sustained period and, in those circumstances, the Chairman’s allowance will cease for the duration of their absence”.

In preparation for our report this year, several common themes or issues were brought to our attention. These included a view that some of the differences in allowances paid between roles did not properly reflect differences in time commitment and responsibility/accountability.

In addition, in line with normal practice, the Special Responsibility Allowances are proposed to be increased by 2% in line with the employee pay award for 2019-20. Please note that the figures below include this pay award.

The concept of task and finish groups, operating for a specified time period, was suggested, with an SRA for the Chairman, allowing greater flexibility in the future. The IRP will consider this in 2020-2021 and invite comments from members.

Our proposals are set out below:

Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Members

We were not made aware of any issues regarding the appropriateness of allowances being paid to members holding these responsibilities. Analysis of comparative information suggested allowances for these posts differed considerably across county councils but that the Staffordshire payments were reasonable when considered against them. It is, therefore, recommended that these SRAs remain at the same relative levels.

Leader	£37,963.14
Deputy Leader	£28,472.87
Cabinet Member	£18,981.57

Cabinet Support Member

In our investigations we had feedback from three out of the four members and the Leader which gave us a wider understanding of the role, in particular, the emerging differences in the levels of accountability and responsibility. We feel that the responsibility and importance of the role to the County Council should retain the allowance below, however we will investigate these emerging differences in our report next year

Cabinet Support Member	£12,527.73
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Select Committee Chairmen

We were not made aware of any issues regarding the appropriateness of allowances being paid to members holding these responsibilities. It is, therefore, recommended that these SRAs remain at the same relative levels:

Chairman of Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee	£7,944.98
Chairman of Other Select Committees	£7,221.17

All Party Working Group Chairmen

Both Chairmen of the All Party Working Groups (APWG) came to discuss the importance of the role that APWGs do for the County Council. There was consideration as to whether the allowance reflected the importance and time commitment expected, however we believe we have had insufficient evidence to support any proposal for a change. We do not propose a change to the current allowance of:-

All Party Working Group Chair	£6,263.86
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Community Cabinet Support Members

We have had a lot of conflicting feedback from members regarding the need for and the impact made by Community Cabinet Support Members

In the Panel's view, however, whilst the administration expects the role to play a particular function within the Council it continues to warrant remuneration via an SRA. To assist those members holding the SRA and all members it will be helpful for that function to be made clearer and for its effectiveness to be monitored and championed by the Cabinet member for Communities.

Community Cabinet Support Member	£3,131.94
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Regulatory Committee Chairmen

The regulatory committees include Planning, Audit and Standards and Pensions. They each perform a crucial regulatory role on behalf of the Council, and have the benefit of closer levels of regular, wider and ongoing professional officer support than Scrutiny Committees. In our previous reports, we had not been able to identify any justification for the Chairman of the Planning Committee to receive a greater SRA than the Chairman of Audit and Standards or Pensions. However, we have been made aware that the Chairman of the Planning Committee is also the Chairman of the Countryside and Rights of Way Panel, a Sub-Committee of the Planning Committee. We understand this role to have a large and potentially challenging workload and therefore, it is the Panels view that the Planning Committee Chairman's allowance should remain at the same relative level, providing that they are also the Chairman of the Countryside and Rights of Way Panel.

We were not made aware of any issues regarding the appropriateness of the other Regulatory Committee Chairman's allowances being paid to members holding these responsibilities. It is, therefore, recommended that those SRAs remain at the same relative levels:

Planning Committee Chairman	£7,221.17
Audit and Standards Committee Chairman	£4,334.40
Pensions Committee Chairman	£4,334.40

Police, Fire and Crime Panel Chairman

We are aware that the Police and Crime Commissioner has additionally undertaken the role formerly within the remit of the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Fire and Rescue Authority until August 2018. We were not made aware of any impact of this or any issues regarding the appropriateness of the allowance therefore, the Panel recommends that the current payment should be retained at the same relative level.

Police, Fire and Crime Panel Chair	£2,889.95
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Vice-Chairmen

As per our proposals for the Chairman of the Planning Committee, we believe that the Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee should also be required to be the Vice-Chairman of the Countryside and Rights of Way Panel. We propose no other changes to allowances paid to Vice-Chairmen.

Opposition Roles

Currently the majority opposition group are granted one Shadow Cabinet role. It has been noted that the opposition have currently taken advantage of the opportunity afforded within the constitution to split the allowances available between a greater number of members. The County Council approved our recommendation to formally recognise the Shadow Cabinet as Opposition Select Committee Vice-Chairman and we consider the number of SRAs payable to be reasonable, given their total representation on the County Council at this time.

Although questions have been raised in respect of the responsibilities of the role of the Opposition Leader and Deputy and the allowances paid, nothing was raised with the Panel to conclude that the expectation of the roles by the Authority has changed. Thus, our view is that the current level of the allowances should remain at the same level as a Cabinet Member.

Opposition Leader	£18,981.57
Opposition Deputy Leader	£6,453.84
Opposition Select Committee	£5,695.00
Vice-Chairman (may be split between up to 3 members)	

Civic

We were not made aware of any issues regarding the appropriateness of the allowances being paid to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the County Council. It is, therefore, recommended that these allowances remain the same.

Chairman	£18,238.65
Vice-Chairman	£9,115.73

Basic Allowance

We note that the basic allowance is intended to recognise:

- (a) the time commitment of all councillors, including calls on their time for meetings with officers, constituents and attending political group meetings; and
- (b) incidental costs, such as the use of their homes, telephone calls and meetings with constituents.

We have allowed for an increase in the basic allowance in line with the NJC pay award for staff in 2019/20 (2%) as this is included within the Council's constitution. We make no recommendation to increase the allowance further than that.

Basic Allowance	£9,786.35
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Travel Allowances

We are aware of the increased use in electric and hybrid vehicles. For these vehicles, we propose that millage allowance can be claimed at the same rate per mile as motor vehicles as currently written in the allowance scheme. This fits in-line with the Office for Low Emission Vehicles which states that electric and hybrid cars are treated in the same way as petrol and diesel cars for the purposes of Approved Mileage Allowance.

We make no other proposals for change to travel allowances paid to members for 2020/21.

Other allowances

Subsistence allowance

We make no proposals for change to subsistence allowances.

Meetings Allowance

We recommend that the “meeting allowance” paid to Appointed Members (i.e. faith and parent representatives on the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee or any independent members / persons serving the County Council), be increased by the same percentage as that made to the basic allowance (2%). Therefore, the new allowance is proposed to be £631.53 per annum.

Carers/Dependents Allowance

We had no issues raised with us in respect of these allowances and so make no proposals for change.

Other comments

Some members have expressed concerns that County Council members who sit on the Fostering Panel do not receive any financial payment. We understand that this role is a valuable but voluntary role and that there is no wish expressed from the service area to include an attendance allowance. It is the Panel’s understanding further that attendance allowance of the kind mooted is not offered for other additional commitments that members engage in. Therefore, we do not believe it appropriate for the Panel to make any recommendation in this regard.

We have also been made aware that there is no SRA for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel. We understand that the Chairman for this Panel is required to be the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services and therefore, as they cannot receive a second SRA under the Council’s arrangements it is not necessary to consider this matter further. It is the case that the current Vice-chair also happens to hold an SRA for another unrelated responsibility but the Council may wish to consider whether a vice-chairs allowance should be included within the scheme should this not be the case in future.

Having completed our task for this year, we would like to express our thanks to the Members and Officers of the County Council for all their help and support in producing this report.

**CHAIRMAN and Members of the
Independent Remuneration Panel on Members’ Allowances**

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. To meet annually, on agreed dates prior to the commencement of the County Council's financial year, and at such other times as required on agreed dates, as the County Council propose to amend, revoke or replace their Members' Allowance Scheme.
2. In their considerations, to have particular regard to (i) the previous reports and recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel (ii) the DETR's Guidance on Members' Allowances; (iii) the relevant Regulations referred to in the Guidance and those Regulations made in respect of the provision of pensions and pensionable remuneration for certain members of local authorities (iv) information submitted by the Chief Executive; and (v) such other information commissioned by the Panel, through the Chief Executive relevant to the Panel's Terms of Reference.
3. To make recommendations to the County Council as to the amount of basic allowances that should be payable to its elected members.
4. To make recommendations to the County Council about the categories of members who should receive a special responsibility allowance and as to the amount of such an allowance.
5. To make recommendations as to whether the County Council's allowances scheme should include an allowance in respect of the expenses of arranging for the care of children and dependants and if it does make such a recommendation, the amount of this allowance and the means by which it is determined.
6. To make recommendations to the County Council on which of their members, by designation, should be entitled to pensionable remuneration.
Quote from Constitution: As of 1 April 2014 new councillors will not be able to join the Local Government Pension Scheme. Any members who have joined the scheme before 31 March 2014 will be allowed to continue their membership for their **current** term of office (renewal on re-election will not be permitted).
7. To make recommendations to the County Council on travel and subsistence allowances for members and the level, or levels, of "meetings allowance" for appointed and co-opted members of County Council Committees.
8. To note, in their considerations and recommendations, that the County Council must have due regard to the recommendations of the Panel in any decision to maintain, amend, revoke or replace their Members' Allowance Scheme, but that ultimately, the determination of the Scheme is a matter for the County Council.
9. To note that the Panel's reports and recommendations, as made from time to time, will be publicised, as soon as reasonably practicable, in at least one local newspaper, be made available for inspection by the public at County Buildings and be published on the County Council's website.

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