

CL 04/08

MEMBERS' REMUNERATION REVIEW

Report of the Independent Panel

March 2008

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Independent Panel comprised:

Dr Alan Lower (Chairman of the Panel)
Mrs Penny Austen- Brown (Member of all previous Suffolk Coastal Remuneration Panels)
Dr John Hill

1.2 For members information all three of us have considerable expertise and experience on various independent remuneration panels in Suffolk.

1.3 We met on three occasions between January and March 2008. This report summarises our remit, the information we received, our discussions with Group Leaders and officers at Suffolk Coastal and sets out our recommendations for changes in members' allowances.

2. THE REMIT GIVEN TO THE PANEL

2.1 The District Council last carried out a comprehensive review of its members' allowances in November 2003 as a result of new Government regulations. This was followed in March 2005 by a review of the special responsibility allowances paid to the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of the new Overview and Scrutiny Committees when they were increased from two to four in number.

2.2 In conducting the current review the Panel was asked to:

- Ensure that Suffolk Coastal District Members' Allowances are comparable to those set by other similar Local Authorities both across Suffolk and nationally;
- Ensure that Members' Allowances reflect individual responsibilities and workloads, including consideration of any recent changes to member structure, workloads and roles
- Take into account recent guidance and legislation on Members' Allowances

3. INFORMATION CONSIDERED

3.1 In carrying out this review we were aware of the report of the previous Independent Panel, the way in which it arrived at its recommendations and the decision of Council. We also considered the information provided to us by the Monitoring Officer and requested some additional information to assist us.

Comparative Data

3.2 We considered the Council's current member allowance scheme together with comparative data from the other local authorities in Suffolk. We also had for our information national data on members' allowances according to a Local Government Analysis and Research Survey.

3.3 The key issues emerging from this comparative review of allowances were that Suffolk Coastal's basic allowance and many of its special responsibility allowances were well below the average levels of other comparable authorities. This, we feel, is an important point to emphasise because it demonstrates that the allowances currently paid to Suffolk Coastal members do not reflect their national worth.

Members Workloads

3.4 To help us in our deliberations we had an analysis of responses to a questionnaire that was recently sent to members seeking information about their role at Council and the time they spent carrying out Council duties. In addition we had information relating to the number of meetings attended by each member since June 2007, the percentage attendance of all members to meetings of committees etc of which they are members and the percentage of Council meetings attended by each member since June 2007.

3.5 What is clear is that earlier estimates of members' workloads are on the low side and do not reflect the current demands made on members time as a result of Government initiatives, new ways of working, negotiating shared services and partnership working.

- 3.6 Although we do not have any empirical evidence we believe from the analysis of the members' questionnaire that the average workload of backbench members is increasing.
- 3.7 In addition the workload of some members with specific responsibilities, particularly Cabinet members and Group Leaders, is increasing because of the demands placed upon them by Government and partners and the need for the Council to be more externally focussed.

Members and Group Leaders Views

3.8 We felt that it was important to hear, at first hand, the views of Suffolk Coastal's members so we had, as mentioned above, the analysis of responses to the members' questionnaire. We also met with two of the three Group Leaders to discuss their own views and those of their group members. The key points emerging from these discussions were:

- That the review of member allowances needs to be thorough and not simply a light touch tidying up exercise.
- There had been a significant increase in workload, particularly for members with specific responsibilities. Government has increased councils' workloads and responsibilities, the number of meetings locally, regionally and nationally had increased and was very time consuming and issues were now more complex.
- The community leadership role is growing as is ward casework.
- The role of opposition councillors is becoming increasingly busy and these members also carry out a lot of research.
- The general view of members is that current allowances are on the low side when compared to other Suffolk authorities. The vast majority of members' work hard caring for their wards and dealing with issues arising in them.
- There is a change of attitude by members who are now more willing to consider an increase in allowances as recognition of the larger workloads which they are required to undertake. Suffolk Coastal members are now comparing themselves with neighbouring authorities and beginning to feel undervalued.
- Suffolk Coastal members must be more realistic about their worth and the value of the resource they commit to the role of councillor.
- New members soon realise that if they take on their new role properly they will earn their allowances.

Review of the Political Structure

- 3.9 We were informed that the Council had reduced the number of Scrutiny committees from four to two and that these two committees were no longer involved in policy development. Additionally a lot of the Council's work is through task groups which may be task and finish or standing groups. We noted that these were not decision making bodies but made recommendations, usually to Cabinet.
- 3.10 We do not feel that these changes impact on the Council's members' allowances scheme.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Basic Allowance

- 4.1 The information provided to us by members and officers consistently indicates that the general workload of members at Suffolk Coastal is higher than is reflected by the current scheme of Members' Allowances. One of the reasons for this is that previous recommendations from this Panel have always been reduced by Council before being agreed. This has led to a scheme of Members' Allowances that has been kept at an artificially lower level than we would consider appropriate.

- 4.2 The average Shire District Basic Allowance across the country is currently £3,991. However many local authorities are currently reviewing their allowance scheme so this average figure is likely to increase.
- 4.3 In considering the level of basic allowance, we agreed that members work fell within the middle band of SCP salary scales. Most members worked between 22-28 hours per week in their role of councillor which approximates to ½ a week's work, or ½ a year over the full period.
- 4.4 The SCP mid salary point is 21 at £18,430 per annum. When halved this results in £9,215 and when 50% for public service has been deducted the result is £4,600.
- 4.5 We feel that this figure as a basic allowance might be too high when comparing it to the shire district average and being aware of Suffolk Coastal's culture of prudence to the level of allowances.
- 4.6 So we recommend that the Basic Allowance should be increased from £2,988 to £4,000. We accept that this represents a 33% increase, but this is because the Suffolk Coastal allowances have fallen so far behind in recent years. It has still only just caught up with the national average and should, in our view, be reviewed again in the near future.
- 4.7 Whilst there may be public sensitivity to such an increase, if members do their job properly they should be properly rewarded.
- 4.8 It is currently difficult to measure member performance and for this reason we feel that the Council should give serious consideration to the introduction of job descriptions and annual appraisals for all members. We believe that these would give members a clearer understanding of what was expected of them and an insight into their perceived performance. Job descriptions would also make the task of the Remuneration Panel much easier.

Special Responsibility Allowances

- 4.9 Currently Special Responsibility Allowances are linked to multiples or proportions of the Basic Allowance. We feel that this is a reasonable way of considering the impact of differences in workloads and it is common practice amongst authorities. Consequently we agreed to continue with this practice.
- 4.10 We note that 61% of Suffolk Coastal members are in receipt of a Special Responsibility Allowance which we feel is too high and should be reduced. However we do accept that it spreads the workload more evenly amongst members.
- 4.11 Based on the information given to us and the views expressed by members and Group Leaders we have made appropriate judgements about the relative workloads of specific roles and responsibilities. In doing this we recognise that roles and responsibilities can change quickly but we feel that the decisions we have made reflect the current situation.
- 4.12 Our recommended special responsibility allowances are set out in Appendix 1 to this report. We also believe that you should continue with your current policy that only one Special Responsibility Allowance should be paid to each member, which we feel should be the higher allowance.

Carer Allowances

- 4.13 We were pleased that group leaders continue to recognise the importance of support for members that have carer responsibilities. We think it is important that the scheme of member allowances does demonstrate a commitment to equality of opportunity for all.
- 4.14 We feel that the current allowances are out of date so our recommendations have attempted to bring them up to what we feel reflects today's costs. Our recommendations are also on Appendix 1.

Attendance, Subsistence and Travel Allowances

- 4.15 We are not recommending any changes to these allowances and these are also included in Appendix 1.

Further thoughts

- 4.16 There are certain duties that we feel should not attract a Special Responsibility Allowance as they are part of the normal activity of a councillor. These are:
- acting as a substitute
 - acting as a chairman of a task group
 - acting as a Cabinet support member
- 4.17 We note that members are supplied with laptops and broadband and agree that the Basic Allowance should be seen as containing an amount in respect of mobile phone costs.
- 4.18 We also feel that those members who are eligible should be allowed to join the Local Government Pension Scheme if they wish.
- 4.19 In considering a further review it would be helpful if members kept a log of their duties over a three month period prior to the review starting.
- 4.20 Finally we would like to thank Hilary Slater, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, and Alan Biddle, the Democratic Services Manager for the invaluable assistance that they have given throughout the review process.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 We would recommend that the Council adopt the schedule of Members' Allowances attached as Appendix 1.

Appendix 1

Recommended Members Allowances Scheme – February 2008

	<u>At 01/04/2007</u>	<u>Recommended By Panel 04/02/08</u>	
<u>Basic Allowance (BA)</u>	£2,988	£4,000	
<u>Special Responsibility Allowances</u>			
Leader of the Council	£8,961	£12,000 (BA x 3)	
Deputy Leader of the Council	£5,976	£8,000 (BA x 2)	
Cabinet Member	£2,988	£4,000 (BA x 1)	
Chairman of the Council	£4,482	£6,000 (BA x 1.5)	
Vice Chairman of the Council	£1,494	£2,000 (BA x .5)	
Chairman of Scrutiny Committee	£2,241	£3,000 (BA x .75)	
Vice-Chairman of Scrutiny Committee	£1,119	£1,500 (BA x .375)	
Chairman of Development Control Committee	£ N/A	£2,000 (BA x .5)	
Chairman of a single Development Control Sub-Committee	£ 1,494	£4,000 (BA x 1)	
Vice-Chairman of a single Development Control Sub-Cttee	£1,119	£1,500 (BA x .375)	
Member of Development Control Sub-Committee	£495	£800 (BA x .2)	
Chairman of Licensing & Health Committee	£2,988	£4,000 (BA x 1)	
Vice-Chairman Health Committee	of £1,494	Licensing £2,000 (BA x .5)	&
Chairman of Rights of Way Committee	£747	£1,000 (BA x .25)	

Chairman of Standards Committee	£1,494	£2,000 (BA x .5)
Co-opted Member	£ N/A	£400 (BA x .1)
Group Leader of Liberal Democrats	£2,988	£4,000 (BA x 1)
Group Leader of Labour	£1,194	£800 (BA x .2)

Attendance Allowances *(recommending no change)*

Conferences	£10 per meeting up to 4 hours £15 per meeting over 4 hours
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Travelling Allowance (in own vehicles) *(recommending no change)*

451 to 1450cc	40p per mile
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Care of Children and Dependants

An allowance is paid to any councillor who in the course of their work as a councillor has to provide care for children and/or dependants and in doing so incurs additional expenditure. In these circumstances the following hourly rate are recommended:

- Baby sitting up to a maximum of £10.00 per hour (currently £4.00 per hour)
- Child minding up to a maximum of £13.00 per hour (currently 10.00 per hour)
- Care of dependants up to a maximum of £13.00 (currently up to a maximum rate advised by Suffolk Carers)

Subsistence *(recommending no change)*

Absence from home of over 4 hours (payable only with valid receipt. Not payable if there are refreshments at meetings):-

		Max Allowance	
(a)	more than four hours before 11.00am	Breakfast	£6.20
(b)	more than 4 hours including 12 noon to 2.00pm	Lunch	£8.50
(c)	more than 4 hours including 3.00pm to 6.00pm	Tea	£3.40
(d)	more than 4 hours ending after 7.00pm	Dinner	£10.50

Subsistence *(recommending no change)*

In London or at approved conferences	£91.04
Other	£79.82