

Cabinet – 14th June, 2006

Report of the Independent Chairman of The Standards Committee

Members' Allowances Scheme

Purpose of Report

1. To consider the decisions of the Standards Committee arising from their consideration of a report from the Members' Allowances Independent Panel and, on the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2006/7.

Background

2. The current Members' Allowances Scheme was approved by the Council at its meeting on the 18th July 2005 when additional allowances for members serving on the Licensing Committee and its Sub-Committees were approved as a result of increased responsibilities for the implementation of the Licensing Act 2003. These additional allowances were payable for the period February 2005 – November 2005.
3. When considering any amendments to the Scheme the Council must have regard to the recommendations made by the Members' Allowances Independent Panel appointed by Dudley MBC, Sandwell MBC and Wolverhampton MBC.
4. The Independent Panel has recently been asked to consider whether:-
 - Additional special responsibility allowances should be paid post November 2005 for members serving on the Licensing Committee and Licensing Sub-Committees, and
 - Allowances should be paid to co-opted members.
5. The report of the Independent Panel is attached at Appendix 1. In summary, their recommendations are that:-
 - there is no case for an on-going additional special responsibility allowance for Liquor Licensing work, and
 - whilst there is no compelling argument for payment to co-opted members, authorities may want to recognise the commitment of "statutory co-optees" to Scrutiny Committees dealing with Education matters, who serve on a voluntary basis, and pay them an allowance of up to £1,000 (including

travelling and other expenses) depending on actual workloads and time commitments.

6. The existing Scheme allows for an annual percentage increase in line with the agreed pay awards for NJC Local Government Services. This will mean an annual increase of 2.95% with effect from the 1st April 2006.
7. Arising from consideration of the report submitted on the above issues, the Standards Committee at its meeting held on 27th March, 2006, resolved:-
 - (1) That, arising from consideration of the recommendations of the Members' Allowances Independent Panel, the Cabinet be recommended to recommend the Council that:-
 - (a) The recommendation that there was no case for an ongoing additional special responsibility allowance for Liquor Licensing work be endorsed; and
 - (b) The view expressed that there was no compelling argument for the making of payments to co-opted members with particular reference to those 'statutory co-optees' serving on Scrutiny Committees dealing with Education matters be endorsed and that accordingly no such payment be made.
 - (2) That, in accordance with the annual percentage increase in line with the agreed pay award for National Joint Council Local Government Services allowed for in respect of the existing Members' Allowances Scheme, approval be given to an annual increase of 2.95% on payments to be made in accordance with the Scheme with effect from 1st April, 2006.
 - (3) That consideration be given by the Cabinet to the suggestion made that the Members' Allowances Independent Panel consider possible alternative arrangements for the payment made to Members in respect of telephone charges given the change in which such communication is now entered into particularly with regard to the use of mobile telephones and recommend the Council accordingly.

Finance

8. Provision has been made in the Revenue Budget for 2006/07 for the increase in Members' Allowances.
9. Following the review of Member Allowances in 2003/04, the Council agreed the recommendation from the Independent Panel to consolidate both travel and telephone expenses into the Basic Allowance, to reduce the cost of processing expenses claims. The amount consolidated for telephone expenses was based on an assessment of actual telephone costs in 2002/03. Given the views of the Standards Committee, it might be appropriate to ask the Director of Finance to undertake a survey to inform any request to the Independent Panel for a further review.

Law

10. The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 set out the arrangements for setting Members' Allowances or amending an existing scheme. In making an amendment to an existing scheme the Council must have regard to the recommendations of a local Independent Remuneration Panel and any amendments to the Scheme must be publicised in accordance with Regulation 16.

Equality Impact

11. This report complies fully with the Council's policies on equality and diversity and there are no implications for services to children and young people.

Recommendation

12. That the Cabinet consider the decisions of the Standards Committee as set out in paragraph 7 above and recommend the Council accordingly.



**Independent Chairman of
The Standards Committee**

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List of Background Papers - None