

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES
Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel
to Oxfordshire County Council, September 2001

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The Local Government Act 2000 provides that before any new scheme of allowances is agreed, the Council is required to appoint an Independent Remuneration Panel to make recommendations on the levels and types of allowances to be paid under that scheme.

The Independent Panel appointed to carry out the task of reviewing the County Council's scheme has now completed its work. This report sets out the recommendations of the Panel.

Recommendations

The recommendations are as follows:-

(a) that the Basic Allowance payable to all Members be £6,000

(b) that, in addition to the Basic Allowance, a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) be paid as follows:-

- (i) Executive Members - £6,000;
- (ii) Leader of the Council - £6,000 (in addition to the allowance as an Executive member);
- (iii) Deputy Leader of the Council - £4,000 (in addition to the allowance as an Executive member);
- (iv) Chairs (Chairmen) of Scrutiny Committees - £3,000 (each)
- (v) Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of Scrutiny Committees - £2,000 (each)
- (vi) Chair(man) of the Planning and Regulation Committee - £2,000
- (vii) Deputy Chair(man) of the Planning and Regulation Committee - £1,000
- (viii) Chair(man) of the Best Value Committee - £2,000
- (ix) Deputy Chair(man) of the Best Value Committee - £1,000
- (x) Chairs (Chairmen) of other Committees (Standards, Democracy and Organisation, Pension Fund) - £1,000 (to be shared with Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) if, in practice, responsibility is apportioned between them)
- (xi) Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of other Committees - £500* (*to apply only in the event that responsibility is shared between the Chair(man) and Deputy)
- (xii) Chair(man) of the Council - £2,000
- (xiii) Deputy Chair(man) of the Council - £1,000
- (xiv) Leader of the Opposition - £6,000

(c) that Childcare and Dependent Carers' Allowances be paid on the basis that:-

- (i) the allowances can only be claimed when an "approved duty" is performed subject to the submission of receipts and to there being no other statutory allowance available;
- (ii) that the basis of the carers' allowances be the actual cost incurred up to the maximum hourly rates set out below:-
Childcare - £5 per hour
Care for dependant relatives - £15 per hour.

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Introduction

1. The Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances)(England) Regulations 2001 require local authorities to review their Allowances Schemes and to appoint Independent Remuneration Panels to consider and make recommendations on new schemes. The Government's "Guidance on Members' Allowances for Local Authorities in England" outlines the main statutory provisions and gives non-statutory guidance. In brief, the Guidance says that the following issues are to be addressed by the Panel:
 - Basic allowance: each local authority *must* make provision for a basic, flat rate allowance payable to all members. The allowance must be the same for each councillor; it can be paid either in a lump sum or in instalments.
 - Special responsibility allowance: each local authority *may* make provision for the payment of special responsibility allowances for those councillors who have significant responsibilities. The Panel has to recommend the responsibilities that should be remunerated and the levels of the allowances.
 - Childcare and dependent carers' allowance: local authorities *may* make provision for the payment of an allowance to those councillors who incur expenditure for the care of children or dependent relatives whilst undertaking particular duties (specified in the Guidance).

The Independent Remuneration Panel

2. The Independent Remuneration Panel for Oxfordshire County Council is:-
 - David Ashmore Chief Executive of Oxford Citizens' Housing Association
 - Mike Fleming Director of Human Resources & Corporate Services,
John Radcliffe NHS Trust
 - Adrian Harper-Smith Director of the Oxfordshire Racial Equality Council
 - Linda Lloyd Commercial Manager – ASDA Stores Ltd
 - Sir Peter North Principal of Jesus College, Oxford.
3. The Panel elected Sir Peter North to be its Chairman and David Ashmore to be Vice-Chairman.

Terms of Reference

4. The Panel's terms of reference are as follows:-
 1. To undertake a review of the County Council's allowances for elected members and to make recommendations as to:
 - The level of Basic Allowance for all members
 - The special responsibilities for which a Special Responsibility Allowance should be paid and the levels of these allowances

- Whether the authority's allowances scheme should include allowances in respect of the expenses of arranging for childcare and the care of dependant relatives and the level of such allowances.
2. To make such recommendations in the following circumstances:
- an interim recommendation to accommodate the abolition of attendance allowance as from 28 July 2001
 - a comprehensive scheme to complement the Council's new decision making arrangements, once these are determined, under the Local Government Act 2000
 - from 2002, annual recommendations on the Council's yearly scheme of allowances
 - when the Council proposes to revise or modify any aspect of an existing scheme

The Panel has already made a separate report (July 2001) to the Council on interim allowances consequent on the abolition of attendance allowance.

The Panel's Work

5. We met on five occasions, on 2 and 30 July, and on September 10, 11 and 12 2001.
6. These meetings dealt with a comprehensive review of allowances to complement the Council's new decision-making arrangements.
7. We received, and had regard to, a significant amount of information, which included the following:
- Copies of the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2001 and of the Government's "Guidance on Members' Allowances for Local Authorities in England";
 - Oxfordshire allowances: the allowances schemes and/or Independent Panel reports for Oxfordshire's District Councils (Cherwell, Oxford City, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire)
 - County Council allowances: details of the schemes and/or Panel reports of numerous County Councils, including some adjacent to Oxfordshire
 - Comparative population/budget data: information on the comparative sizes and budgets of other County Councils
 - County Councillor Role Profiles: examples of councillor job descriptions and role profiles produced by a number of authorities which had already adopted political management arrangements similar to those intended by Oxfordshire County Council
 - Copies of completed questionnaires submitted by Oxfordshire County Councillors on the subject of the time spent by them on Council duties and a tabulation summarising the responses received
 - Copies of other written submissions made by County Councillors
 - Wage rates: information on wage rates in the Oxfordshire area and the Local Government Association's white collar median rate

- Decisions of Oxfordshire County Council on 4 September concerning the new political management arrangements which the Council intends to introduce on 5 November 2001.
 - Information from the National Centre for Volunteers on the average time devoted in the United Kingdom to voluntary activity and the economic value of this activity
 - Information from the Council's Social Services Department concerning approximate costs per hour for childcare and the care of dependants.
8. We also received oral submissions from 18 councillors on a politically proportional basis (6 Conservative members, 6 Labour, 5 Liberal Democrat and one Green). The Panel believed this to be an important source of information additional to the written submissions. These interviews took the form of a brief presentation/address from the member followed by a short question and answer session with the Panel. The following members were interviewed:
- Conservative:
 - Cllr Tony Crabbe
 - Cllr Dickie Dawes
 - Cllr Mrs Diana Ludlow
 - Cllr Kieron Mallon
 - Cllr Keith Mitchell
 - Cllr George Sanders
 - Labour
 - Cllr Margaret Ferriman
 - Cllr Terry Joslin
 - Cllr Shereen Karmali
 - Cllr Margaret Mackenzie
 - Cllr Michael McAndrews
 - Cllr Sylvia Tompkins
 - Liberal Democrat
 - Cllr Julian Cooper
 - Cllr Janet Godden
 - Cllr Margaret Godden
 - Cllr Anne Purse
 - Cllr David Turner
 - Green

- Cllr Craig Simmons
9. The Questionnaire seeking evidence from Councillors as to the amount of time devoted to Council activities provided the Panel with very useful information. The Questionnaire was circulated to all 70 members of the Council and 32 forms (46%) were returned prior to the deadline (a further two forms were submitted thereafter – a total of 34 forms or 49% of the total).
 10. Our recommendations were finalised at our last meeting, having considered all the evidence submitted to us.

The Adopted Approach and Underlying Principles

11. Whilst we were fully conscious that any recommendations we made would have budgetary implications, we agreed at the outset that the nature of the task we had been asked to undertake meant that we should make our recommendations based on a range of evidence and without specific regard to budgetary implications. We considered that it was the purpose of an *independent* panel to make recommendations without regard to such political matters. Our aim, as we saw it within the legislative context, was to arrive at recommendations producing allowances appropriate to the role(s) intended to be performed by Oxfordshire's County Councillors under the new political management arrangements.
12. We were concerned that the allowances recommended should have the following underlying principles:
 - That County Councillors in Oxfordshire should be remunerated fairly in proportion to the tasks that they perform within the new political management arrangements envisaged by the Local Government Act 2000
 - That the allowances should be such that all sections of the community could realistically consider standing as a councillor without fear of the personal financial consequences; this was considered important for the health of local democracy
 - That an element of a councillor's time should be deemed to be voluntary
 - That any new scheme be subject to periodic reviews particularly when the actual burden of each duty becomes more apparent, or when new "posts" are created within the new management structure.

New Political Structure

13. We noted that the Council would be introducing new political management arrangements in place of the traditional committee system. From presentations and information we received from the Council's Heads of Corporate Services and Committee Services, we noted that the Council's timetable envisaged that the new arrangements were intended to be in operation from 5 November. The Panel therefore needed to make recommendations on allowances suited to those new arrangements to be submitted to the meeting of Council being held on 16 October. This effectively determined the timetable for the Panel's review.
14. We noted the new political management arrangements which the Council intends to introduce and our specific recommendations are designed to reflect these.

REVIEW OF ALLOWANCES

Basic Allowance

15. We noted that, under the new legislation, a Basic Allowance must be made available to all Councillors and that it must be of the same value for each. This allowance is

intended to remunerate councillors for their time spent as a councillor, covering all incidental costs incurred by them as ordinary members of the Council, including the use of their homes. It was not open to us to recommend the reintroduction of Attendance Allowances based on the actual number of meetings attended by each Councillor.

16. In determining an appropriate level of Basic Allowance, we had regard to:
- Oxfordshire County Councillors' own views as to an appropriate level of Basic Allowance (as expressed both in written submissions and in answer to interview questions)
 - The current level of Basic Allowance paid by the County Council and the value of the Council's Basic Allowance relative to that paid by other County Councils
 - The level of Basic Allowance paid by neighbouring and other authorities
 - The average number of hours spent by councillors on Council-related work and the range of activities covered
 - The need to take into account a "voluntary service" principle
 - The roles likely to be carried out by members not on the Executive of the Council or acting as Chairs (Chairmen) of the various committees
 - Information as to wage rates in the Oxfordshire and South East areas
 - The daily rate as adopted by the Local Government Association based on the mean male non-manual wage (as derived from the New Earnings Survey)
17. We were of the view that basic to the role of the councillor, even under the new arrangements, will be attendance at Scrutiny and other committee meetings and that the Basic Allowance should assume this. We were also of the view that the Council would normally wish to share out such responsibilities so that the general burden of formal Council duties was fairly apportioned. The Basic Allowance would therefore reflect the many varying calls on councillors' time.
18. We took note of the view expressed in the interviews by several councillors that the Basic Allowance should perhaps be varied to reflect the different commitments faced by members. It was pointed out that some members represented rural divisions necessitating extensive travel and attendance at numerous Parish Council meetings. Others representing urban divisions felt that they had a greater concentration of constituents raising issues with them.
19. In spite of such views it is clear from the law that the Basic Allowance must be of one value and so cannot be varied. We are also of the belief that the varying commitments of Councillors do in the main equate. While one Councillor may have to travel more, another may have more demands in terms of casework. If the Council considers that it would be beneficial for the Basic Allowance to be graded, then we would encourage the Council to make representations accordingly to Government and the local government associations.

Voluntary element

20. We noted the view expressed in the Government's Guidance that a proportion of a councillor's time should continue to be voluntary and should not be remunerated. This would reflect the fact that councillors choose to stand for election, and that many

do so in furtherance of their own political convictions. The Panel has accepted this point.

21. The questionnaire responses provided a useful insight into Councillors' own views on the amount of time they believed to be "voluntary", as did the interviews. The range of opinion was considerable. Of the 24 responding to the question (in the Questionnaire) "In your view, what percentage of your time as a County Councillor should continue to be voluntary?" the lowest percentage given was 0% and the highest 100%. Neither of these extremes were representative. The average response was 26% (of councillor time to be voluntary). In the interviews a range of opinion from 0% to 50% was forthcoming.
22. The Panel considered that, on balance, there is a public perception that becoming a County Councillor is a form of public service and therefore a significant amount of a councillor's time should be regarded as voluntary. We concluded that 40% of a councillor's time should be regarded as "voluntary".
23. For the avoidance of doubt therefore, the Panel wishes the Council to recognise that the figure recommended as Basic Allowance (and the figures subsequently recommended as special responsibility allowance) is effectively a figure that has already been discounted by 40%.

Determination of the level of Basic Allowance

24. An issue which exercised the Panel was whether there was any clear comparative financial basis for the calculation of the Basic Allowance, taking account of the suggested voluntary element. In proposals put to us various comparators were suggested, and the reports of other Independent Remuneration Panels also took other comparators. Whilst detailed mathematical calculations, based for example on predicted hours of work as a councillor, might then using the weekly or annual pay of the comparator post point to an actual figure for the Basic Allowance, there is no clear scientific basis for the adoption of any particular comparator. That appears simply to have been a matter of judgement as to the appropriate comparator to adopt. Rather than attempt what may be considered a somewhat spurious mathematical calculation, we have chosen to exercise our judgement directly in determining the Basic Allowance figure, having regard to all the evidence placed before us, as well as our judgement as to the extent of the voluntary element to be taken into consideration.

Recommendation

We RECOMMEND that a Basic Allowance of £6,000 be payable to each County Councillor.

Special responsibility allowance (SRA)

25. We then considered which posts should qualify for a Special Responsibility Allowance and the appropriate level at which each allowance should be set.
26. We had regard to:
 - The new political management arrangements which the Council intends to introduce from 5 November and the likely responsibilities within that framework
 - Examples of role profiles from other councils

- The range and levels of SRA proposed in other authorities particularly those where a political management structure has been adopted similar to that to be introduced in Oxfordshire
 - Evidence from Oxfordshire County Councillors (in person and through responses to the questionnaire) on the amount of time spent on duties that have traditionally attracted SRAs in the authority
 - Councillor comments in interviews and through the questionnaire responses
27. There are two preliminary points that should be made about the range and level of the SRAs proposed. The first concerns the relationship between the Basic Allowance and the range of SRAs, and between the individual levels of SRAs. It was impressed upon us in both written and oral submissions by Councillors that it would not be desirable, in the new but as yet untried political management structure, for there to be too wide a spread between the Basic Allowance and the largest SRAs, given, for example, the important role that Councillors will play as members of Scrutiny Committees. We have paid careful attention to this point, whilst attempting to assess the varied additional time commitments and burdens of responsibility attached to the different positions which we believe should attract SRAs.
28. The second preliminary point is to make clear that we have considered, but not accepted, a view put to us on one or two occasions that SRAs should be paid to “shadow” members of the Executive. Such positions have not been established, formally, as part of the Council’s new structure and we are unable to recommend allowances for them; though we would point to our Recommendation in paragraphs 56-58 for the payment of a SRA to the Leader of the Opposition.
29. We identified the following positions within the Council’s proposed structure as meriting a SRA:
- (i) Executive Members
 - (ii) Leader of the Council
 - (iii) Deputy Leader of the Council
 - (iv) Chairs (Chairmen) of Scrutiny Committees
 - (v) Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of Scrutiny Committees
 - (vi) Chair(man) of the Planning and Regulation Committee
 - (vii) Deputy Chair(man) of the Planning and Regulation Committee
 - (viii) Chair(man) of Best Value Committee
 - (ix) Deputy Chair(man) of Best Value Committee
 - (x) Chairs (Chairmen) of other Committees (Standards, Democracy and Organisation, Pension Fund)
 - (xi) Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of other Committees
 - (xii) Chair(man) of the Council
 - (xiii) Deputy Chair(man) of the Council
 - (xiv) Leader of the Opposition

Executive Members

30. We noted that under the Council’s new structure the Executive is to consist of up to 9 members (including the Leader and Deputy Leader). We also noted the present intention that decisions of the Executive will be collective. However we recognise that this may well change in future.
31. The Executive is programmed to meet fortnightly and it is anticipated that Executive Members will also be required to work very closely with senior officers. This is likely to result

in regular informal meetings and discussions in addition to the more formal meetings when executive decisions will be made. The number of such informal meetings is again difficult to predict but we anticipate that they will necessarily be frequent.

32. We are aware that it is open to us to recommend different levels of SRA for ordinary members of the Executive. We have not chosen to do this at the present time. If, in practice, the actual burdens between members of the Executive are markedly different, we will consider this again when we next undertake a review.
33. On balance we considered that the general burden on Executive Members would be twice that of individual members of Council.

Recommendation

We RECOMMEND that a Special Responsibility Allowance of £6,000 be paid to all Executive Members.

Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council

34. We considered that the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council will have a significant additional workload above their duties as ordinary members of the Council and as members of the Executive generally. This was illustrated in the typical job descriptions prepared by other authorities. The Panel also noted that the Leader and Deputy will be Chair(man) and Deputy Chair(man) of the Executive which is scheduled to meet fortnightly i.e. more frequently than any other meeting within the new structure.
35. We consider that there will clearly be an additional time commitment for the Leader and Deputy Leader. Nevertheless, we did also consider that there is a difference, if not great, between the positions of Leader and Deputy and that they do therefore merit differential treatment. The Leader will, as the legislation intended, have a higher public profile and consequently will carry more responsibility. We believe that the respective allowances should reflect this.

Recommendation

We RECOMMEND that a Special Responsibility Allowance of £6,000 should be paid to the Leader (this to be in addition to the Executive members' allowance and the Basic Allowance).

We RECOMMEND that a Special Responsibility Allowance of £4,000 should be paid to the Deputy Leader of the Council (this to be in addition to the Executive members' allowance and the Basic Allowance).

Chairs (Chairmen) and Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of Scrutiny Committees

36. We noted that there are to be five 15-councillor Scrutiny Committees. The frequency of their meeting has not been fully determined as in practice this will depend on the frequency with which Executive decisions are "called-in". At least six meetings per year of each Committee are envisaged.

37. The Scrutiny Committees are intended to perform a key function within the new management arrangements. They will scrutinise Executive decisions and the authority's performance generally and will also assist in the formulation of policy. Chairs (Chairmen) and Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of these Committees will therefore have a significant responsibility. The scrutiny function will by its nature also require, from those in the chair, a wider range of skills (e.g. assessing evidence and interviewing "witnesses") than those associated with more traditional committees. We accept, however, that there will be no executive decisions delegated to Scrutiny Committees.
38. We noted that the Scrutiny Chairs (Chairmen) and Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) will also have the additional responsibility of meeting regularly on an informal basis to co-ordinate the work of all the Scrutiny Committees.
39. We decided that the burden on Scrutiny Chairs (Chairmen) and Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) will be significant in terms of both formal and informal meetings. There will also be a need for considerable background reading and studying of Executive decisions. These roles will therefore necessarily be responsible.
40. Nevertheless, we do not believe that the actual responsibilities of those in the chair of Scrutiny Committees equate to those of members of the Executive. There is a difference, in our view, between the responsibility for decision-making and the responsibility for reviewing such decisions or suggesting improvements to policy.
41. Neither do we consider that the responsibilities of Scrutiny Chairs (Chairmen) and their Deputies are equal. Again, the lead role of chairing such committees is different, in our view, to the role of Deputy.
42. We therefore decided that Scrutiny Chairs (Chairmen) merited a SRA equal to half that available to Executive members, with a lesser allowance for Deputy Chairs (Chairmen).

Recommendations

We RECOMMEND that each Chair(man) of the five Scrutiny Committees should receive a Special Responsibility Allowance of £3,000.

We RECOMMEND that each Deputy Chair(man) of the five Scrutiny Committees be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £2,000.

Chair(man) of the Planning and Regulation Committee

43. We noted that there would be one 15-member Planning and Regulation Committee in the new structure. This is scheduled to meet every six weeks and is likely to carry a heavy statutory workload requiring occasional site visits (of, possibly, a day's duration). There will also be a need for training in the necessary law and regulations.
44. We consider that allowances for the Chair(man) and Deputy Chair(man) of this Committee should reflect the not inconsiderable burdens involved.
45. We concluded that this allowance carried responsibility on a level with Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of Scrutiny Committees.

Recommendation

We RECOMMEND that the Chair(man) of the Planning and Regulation Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £2,000.

We RECOMMEND that the Deputy Chair(man) of the Planning and Regulation Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1,000.

Chair(man) and Deputy Chair(man) of the Best Value Committee

46. We noted that, as with the Planning and Regulation Committee, the Best Value Committee would be meeting on a six-weekly basis. It will comprise 9 members and 3 co-opted members and will have an important role to play in managing individual Best Value reviews.
47. Again, we considered that the chairing of this Committee would involve a considerable amount of work above that of the ordinary member.
48. We considered that the overall burdens on the Chair(man) and Deputy Chair(man) would be likely to equate to those of their colleagues in the chair of the Planning and Regulation Committee.

Recommendations

We RECOMMEND that the Chair(man) of the Best Value Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £2,000.

We RECOMMEND that the Deputy Chair(man) of the Best Value Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1,000.

Chairs (Chairmen) of the other standing committees

49. We noted that the following committees would also form part of the new political management arrangements and would deal with matters that fall outside the remit of the Executive:
 - Standards Committee: the Council's Standards Committee will comprise six councillors plus two co-opted members; its function will be to exercise the statutory functions relating to the local Code of Conduct and related issues. We noted that it would meet twice yearly and additionally as required.
 - Democracy and Organisation Committee: this Committee will exercise functions relating to the electoral process, personnel and (through panels and sub-committees) appeals and appointments. It will meet twice yearly and additionally as required.
 - Pension Fund Committee: this Committee will manage the Oxfordshire Pension Fund. It will have eight members and two co-optees. It will meet quarterly.
50. Given that these committees will be carrying out specific functions of the County Council we considered that it was appropriate that the chairing of them should merit SRAs. However, as their frequency would not be great, we judged that it was more appropriate to equate the level of responsibility with that attaching to the Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of the Planning and Regulation and Best Value Committees.
51. We were also of the view that if, in practice, responsibility is shared between the Chair(man) and Deputy Chair(man) of these committees, then the allowance should be shared between them.

Recommendations

We RECOMMEND that the Chairs (Chairmen) of the Standards Committee, Democracy and Organisation Committee and the Pension Fund Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1,000 each.

We RECOMMEND that if, in practice, responsibility is shared between the Chair(man) and Deputy Chair(man) of these committees, then the allowance should be shared equally between them.

Chair(man) of the Council

52. We noted the central position which the Chair(man) of the Council will continue to have in the County Council. The role will continue to involve extensive civic/ceremonial duties and the chairing of Council meetings. We understood that it is intended that the Council will continue to meet 6 times a year with extraordinary meetings held as necessary. We did not consider therefore that the role under the new arrangements will significantly alter.
53. We noted that the level of allowance that has been paid to the Chair(man) in Oxfordshire has been traditionally relatively low in comparison with that paid to Chairs (Chairmen) of other authorities. As a balance to this, we considered that while the civic/ceremonial role does usually involve numerous engagements, the burden thus created does not equate with the burden of executive or scrutiny members. It is also arguable that the civic/ceremonial role also provides a degree of social reward.
54. We would wish to review the allowance payable to the Chair(man) of the Council if the actual burdens under the new arrangements alter.
55. We considered that the Deputy Chair(man)'s allowance should be half that given to the Chair(man).

Recommendation

We RECOMMEND that the Chair(man) of the Council be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £2,000.

We RECOMMEND that the Deputy Chair(man) of the Council be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1,000.

Leader of the Opposition

56. We noted that the new political management structure formally recognises the position of "Leader of the Opposition". We considered, that in the interests of democracy, the importance of this position should be recognised (as it is in Parliament). While we believe that, structurally, the Scrutiny function will now take on many of the roles of a traditional "opposition", it is important that the Leader of the main Opposition Party should provide a robust, comprehensive and well-informed counterpoint to the ruling administration. It is likely that an effective Leader of the Opposition will need to invest significant time and effort in keeping abreast of the work of the Executive, the Scrutiny Committees and the Council as a whole. It is appropriate, therefore, in our view, that the burden of this role should be adequately remunerated and that such remuneration should be equivalent to that afforded to ordinary members of the Executive.

57. We noted that the position of Deputy Leader of the Opposition has not been recognised within the new structure and do not therefore propose to recommend any SRA. Even if such a position was adopted, either formally or informally, we believe (without any compelling evidence to the contrary) that it would be inappropriate to allow a further SRA in addition to that already afforded to the Leader of the Opposition.
58. For the avoidance of doubt, we considered the role of Leader of the Opposition to be wholly distinct from the traditional role of “political group leader”. In short, we could not see any cogent reason for political group leaders to be given a SRA within the new arrangements. The organisation of party politics comes, in our view, within the “voluntary” aspect of a councillor’s commitment - especially within the new framework – and should not therefore be remunerated.

Recommendation

We RECOMMEND that the Leader of the Opposition be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £6,000.

General matters

59. The Government’s Guidance with which Independent Remuneration Panels have been provided indicates that Basic Allowances and SRAs may be paid either in a lump sum or monthly. We see force in their payment on a monthly basis.
60. There is an outstanding issue as to the pensionability of some or all allowances. The Government has not yet issued Regulations on this issue. However, we are aware that the Government is presently consulting authorities on its proposals for pensions for elected members. We believe that this is an important issue which the Council might wish us to address once the new Regulations have been issued.
61. We recognise that the personal financial circumstances of individual councillors vary considerably. We are also aware of the view that some feel that the voluntary element in the work of a councillor should be assessed at a higher percentage than the 40% which we have determined. We therefore recommend that the Council provide in the terms of its scheme of allowances that councillors may choose to forgo all or part of their Basic Allowance at any time and for periods of time.

Childcare and Dependent Carers' Allowances

62. We were advised that the Local Government Act 2000 has introduced a provision which enables Councils to include childcare and dependent carers’ allowances in their allowances schemes. Such allowances are discretionary.
63. The responses to the Questionnaire circulated to members provided some useful information. 63% of those responding thought that the inclusion of such allowances would further encourage active participation in the work of the Council among existing members. 70% also believed that it would be an encouragement to some people to stand for election knowing that an allowances scheme was in place to help with the care of children and dependants.
64. We also noted that 5 respondents said they currently had children under 16 years of age and only one had a dependant of another kind.
65. Of those responding to the question as to how much Councillors might expect to pay per hour for carer support, the average response was £4.40 per hour (least £3.00; most £5.00).

66. We received information on the levels of the allowances paid in neighbouring authorities and on research undertaken on rates local to Cherwell. This showed a wide range in the rates for childcare going as high as £8.50 an hour. The higher rates appeared to be applicable to the more rural parts of the District as childcarers/babysitters were more likely to have to travel to provide this service. Oxfordshire County Council's Social Services Department paid an average of £3 per hour for childcare costs.
67. A similar situation appears to apply to dependent carer rates. The costs per hour locally range from £8.40 an hour up to £10.50 plus VAT and mileage payments. The rates are higher for more specialist care. Oxfordshire's Social Services expected to pay an average of £10 per hour (plus travel).
68. Like many other Independent Remuneration Panels, we are of the view that the provision of childcare and dependent carers' allowances is appropriate and will serve to encourage participation in the Council's activities from both existing and future councillors. We considered that the levels should be set realistically and with an emphasis on encouraging participation in the work of the Council.

Recommendations

We RECOMMEND

- (1) that Childcare and Dependent Carers' Allowances be introduced on the basis that the allowances can only be claimed when an "approved duty"* is performed and subject to the submission of receipts and to there being no other statutory allowance available;**
(2) that Childcare and Dependent Carers' Allowances be provided to repay the actual cost of care incurred up to the maximum hourly rates set out below:-

Childcare - £5 per hour

Dependent Relative Care - £15 per hour

***As defined in Regulation 16 of the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) Regulations 1991 (S.I. 1991 No.351).**

Travelling and Subsistence Allowances

69. We were not asked by the Council to consider matters relating to the levels of members travelling and subsistence allowances. However, in the interviews with individual members, it became clear that, for some councillors, the cost of travel within their divisions is an issue of some concern. We noted that the more rural divisions do cover a wide area with numerous parishes some of which have regular Parish Council meetings which the County Councillors believe they are all but obliged to attend. Presently members are not remunerated for any such journeys as they are not "approved duties" within the terms of the current Scheme of Members' Allowances. We were in some sympathy with the concerns expressed. As travel allowances did not form part of our present review, it was not appropriate for us to make any specific recommendations at this time.
70. Nevertheless, we do believe that the Council should review its Travel and Subsistence allowances at the earliest opportunity with a view to widening its application to cover travel within members' divisions. We are also aware that the Government is presently consulting authorities on proposals for Travel and Subsistence Allowances. We are happy to consider the issue of Travel and Subsistence Allowances either as a part of a separate review or whenever allowances are again considered.

Expenses

71. A number of members, during interviews and in their written submissions, expressed concern at the level of personal expenditure which they had had to make to provide their own support services (ranging from secretarial help to computer equipment and stationery etc.). Time spent in driving to Oxford to use the Members' Resource Centre was also an additional cost. We again had much sympathy with these concerns.
72. We heard that the Chief Executive, Dr Richard Shaw, has proposed that support for members should be a priority within the new arrangements. We also heard that a project was in hand to provide a dedicated Members' Intranet and to provide members with home-based IT equipment, both of which would reduce the need for members to journey to County Hall. Furthermore, such assistance "in kind" would relieve Councillors of some actual financial expenditure.
73. We considered that our assessment of the appropriate level of the Basic Allowance would address some of the financial concerns of members. Given the need, however, to set the Basic Allowance at a level which may make it possible for a wider cross section of the community to put themselves forward for election as councillors, we do not believe that the level of the Basic Allowance which we have proposed should be seen as the main means of addressing the issue of financial expenditure by members on the activities expected of a county councillor. However, we did not believe it appropriate to make further recommendations arising from comments about incidental expenses without securing proper detailed evidence of the nature, extent and purpose of individual members' personal expenditure.
74. We do however recommend that the Council review its support for members at the earliest opportunity with a view to minimising the need for members to depend on their own personal financial circumstances. We would be willing to play a part in such a review if called upon to do so.

Future Reviews

75. We consider that a further review of the level of allowances should be taken in the light of experience in operating the new political management structure. Such experience will indicate whether the actual burdens that fall on councillors will be greater or lesser than we have anticipated in our present recommendations. We would therefore wish to monitor the commitments made by councillors to all aspects of the new arrangements and would ask the Council to employ suitable methods of recording such information.
76. In making our present recommendations, we have taken into account the Council's proposed constitution for the new political management arrangements and of the posts recognised in it. We consider that any new posts created within the new management arrangements should also be assessed by the Panel to see whether they should attract any Special Responsibility Allowance and we will therefore do so should the occasion arise.

Sir Peter North
Chairman
Independent Remuneration Panel for Oxfordshire County Council.