

Report of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel

Cabinet Member:

Division and Local Member: All

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1. Summary/link to the Corporate Plan

- 1.1.** This report sets out the report and recommendations of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel (“the Panel”) following their ‘light touch’ review of the Scheme of Member’s Allowances.
- 1.2.** The arrangements for determining allowances for elected members are set down in statutory regulations - the Local Authorities (Members’ Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (SI 1021) and subsequent amendments to the regulations (SI 2003/1022 and SI 2003/1692). Each local authority is required to appoint and maintain an Independent Panel to make recommendations to the Council on members’ allowances. The County Council, Somerset West and Taunton Council and Mendip District Council established a joint panel to advise the councils’ on their respective Schemes. The Council must have regard to the Panel’s recommendations before making decisions in relation to members’ allowances but doesn’t have to accept them. Where the Council doesn’t accept the Panel’s recommendations it should give reasons for not doing so.
- 1.3** All Members have a personal and prejudicial interest in the receipt of allowances, but the Council’s Code of Conduct includes a dispensation allowing members to attend relevant meetings and vote on this matter. This paragraph has the effect of declaring this interest by all Members at this meeting of Council. Members do not need therefore to make a verbal declaration at the Council meeting.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Council is recommended to:

- (a) Consider the Panel’s nine recommendations set out in the Panel’s report attached as the Annex to this report and set out in paragraph 6.6 (a proposed SRA banding system is shown at Appendix C) and decide accordingly.**

- (b) Authorise the Monitoring Officer to make any amendments to the Scheme of Members' Allowances for 2021-22 required as a result of the Council's decisions in (a) above.**

3 Background

- 3.1** In July 2017 the Council considered a report from the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel after it had carried out a fundamental review and agreed a revised Scheme of Member Allowances for 2017-21.

With the advent of County Council elections in 2021 the Panel would usually undertake another fundamental review ahead of this for consideration by the County Council. However with the possibility of reorganisation of Local Government in Somerset, the Panel sought the Leader's opinion about the type of review it was thought prudent to proceed with and it was agreed a 'light touch' review should be carried out.

The Panel has held virtual meetings on many occasions in recent months and most recently on the 11th January. The culmination of that work is set out in the report of the Panel attached as the Annex to this paper which includes recommendations for changes to the Scheme of Members' Allowances. The proposed SRA banding system which reflects the Panel's recommendations is attached to the Panel's report as Appendix C.

The Panel's recommendations are intended to provide guidance for the forthcoming year, with a more fundamental review to be planned ahead of the next Council year.

4. Implications

- 4.1** Financial: The full year impact of applying the Panel's recommendations in full would see an overall reduction in the cost of the SRA structure of £23,262 pa (a reduction from a total cost of £309,288 to £286,026) over a full financial year. An illustration of this is provided in Appendix D.
- 4.2** Legal: The legal requirements are set out in the report.
- 4.3** Risk: The risks are reputational rather than legal. The Council does not have to accept the Panel's recommendations but where it chooses not to do so it should give reasons that can be part of the record of the meeting. The Council is required to give reasons where it chooses not to accept Panel recommendations on allowances.
- 4.4** Impact Assessment: There are no direct equalities implications arising from any of the proposals in this report. There are also no sustainability or community safety implications.

5. Background papers

- 5.1** Joint Independent Remuneration Panel – fundamental review
Scheme of Member Allowances 2020/21
(both available at on the following link [SCC allowances and expenses](#))