

Report of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel for the period to 31 March 2023

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the conclusions and recommendations from a second light touch review of the Somerset County Council Scheme of Members' Allowances carried out by the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel in December 2021 and January 2022.

It builds on the previous reports submitted by the Panel, the most recent fundamental review having taken place in 2017 and considered on 19 July that year by Full Council. So the role of this report, is to:-

1. revisit the report submitted in February and May 2021; and
2. produce an allowances scheme which will run for the last year of the County's existence, that is, 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

In this report Somerset County Council is referred to as SCC, the Basic Allowance is referred to as BA and the Special Responsibility Allowances are referred to as SRAs. From May 2023 a new unitary council will be created combining the work of SCC with that of the four District Councils and replacing all five councils. For the purpose of this report, and to avoid confusion with SCC, this new council is called the Unitary Council.

The Panel wishes to thank members for their time and open engagement with the process, and staff at SCC for their invaluable assistance in this and all the reviews carried out by the Panel.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report revisits the report submitted to Full Council in February and May 2021 (and which is largely included as an annex to this report) and makes recommendations for the two year period ending in 31 March 2023. In doing so it explains how the Panel arrived at a light touch report covering two financial years. Because elections are to be held in May 2022, the Panel has made assumptions about SRAs in the second of the two years, principally that use of a cabinet system will not change and roles will remain as at present. Consequently, nothing over and above the Panel's recommendations on SRAs last year has been suggested, with the exception of the co-optee issue.

Co-optees at SCC are paid an allowance if a member of the Constitution and Standards Committee, but not otherwise, and the Panel was asked to look specifically at this.

- 2.2 For the BA, the report discusses in some depth the fact that at the election the number of councillors will double, but, for the first eleven months of a five year term, will carry out the normal duties of a county councillor, only becoming councillors for the fully fledged new Unitary Council on 1 April 2023. This will occur without further elections taking place. The Panel has looked to see what has happened elsewhere in the country when unitary councils have been formed and various examples are given. Specifically, the Panel has looked to see whether the BA has been reduced in any interim period, mindful that doubling the number of councillors implies a reduction in the level of casework that individual councillors might be expected to undertake.

The Panel took evidence from most existing Group Leaders to ascertain their predictions of expected workload for members in this interim period. Consideration was particularly given to the training needs of members as not only will the majority of newly elected members be new to the County Council in the first period but then all will be taking on a wider range of statutory responsibilities and powers as the Unitary commences operation in April 2023.

- 2.3 The Panel was set up as a joint panel serving three councils. From 1 April 2023 there will only be one council covering Somerset and it is the responsibility of SCC to prepare for this. Part of this role will be to appoint a new Panel to advise on allowances from that date. This current Panel has made some suggestions from their experience as to how the appointment might be arranged.
- 2.4 The Panel's conclusions are given in section 6 of the report with the recommendations in section 6.4.

3. Members' Allowances and Remuneration Panels – the legal position and methodology

- 3.1 By way of an introduction the legal provisions in relation to members' allowances are set out in the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (SI 1021) and subsequent amendments to the regulations (SI 2003/1022 and SI 2003/1692) ["the Regulations"]. Under the Regulations each Council has to appoint an Independent Panel to make recommendations on its Scheme of Members' Allowances. The Council must have due regard to the recommendations of the Panel before it makes any decisions in relation to its Members' Allowances Scheme but it may accept, reject, or amend any of the Panel's recommendations. The Regulations provide for a single panel to advise more than one Council [see 3.4 below].
- 3.2 The regulations define a number of basic requirements for allowances schemes but also give considerable scope to allow a council to adopt local provisions according to their circumstances. The only mandatory element provided for, in the Regulations, is the payment of a Basic Allowance to all members of a Council. All the other elements that are currently paid under the scheme, that is, Special Responsibility, Travel, Subsistence and Carers' allowances are discretionary.
- 3.3 The basic principles on which Remuneration Panels work are not set out in statute but there is guidance from the government. On a regional basis South West Councils has also produced a guide aimed at filling a gap in supportive material for the work of Panels. The guide is currently undergoing revision having been produced in 2015 but sets out a number of commonly adopted principles used by Panels. The Somerset Panel has considered these and concluded that the following principles should guide their considerations:
- the 50% rule (an expectation that no more than 50% of members of any individual Council should receive an SRA. Government guidance states that "If the majority of members of a council receive a special responsibility allowance the local electorate may rightly question whether this was justified"¹);
 - an individual Member should only receive one SRA at any one time;
 - BA payments should take into account a discretionary voluntary time contribution, as set out in guidance to reflect the community-minded nature of the commitment and maintain the difference between a salary and an allowance. The calculation of this varies but in the past, in line with a number of other Panels, 33%² has been used;
 - when considering the payment of an SRA, clarity is needed by both Council and the Panel as to explicit criteria used by the Panel when considering each specific position and whether it qualifies for an SRA, for example, is the position one which requires judgment and responsibility or is it much more of a supporting role but based on substantial additional time and effort; and

¹ "New Council Constitutions - Guidance on Consolidated Regulations for Local Authority Allowances, 2003", published by ODPM

² The Council, in the past, has used, 33%. This discount on hours 'worked' by councillors reinforces that the BA payment is not a salary paid for employment.

- the need to ensure that the level of allowance does not deter potential candidates from standing for election.

The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 state that where allowances are adjusted annually by reference to an index "it may not rely on that index for longer than four years".

3.4 Joint Independent Remuneration Panel: SCC is a member of a Joint Independent Remuneration Panel alongside Mendip District Council and Somerset West and Taunton Council. The Panel's membership comprises three independent representatives appointed by Somerset and one each by the District Councils. All of the members of the Panel are residents of Somerset. The current Panel membership is outlined in brief below for information:

Panel members:

John Thomson (Chair)

From a housing background, initially worked for local authorities and then was Chief Executive of SHAL Housing, a Bridgwater-based housing association, for 20 years, and now retired. John was originally appointed to the Panel by the former Taunton Deane Borough Council and is now the representative of Somerset West & Taunton, the district where he lives.

John Dodson

MA in Ceramic Design and Technology from Royal College of Art London. 40 years in Design, Marketing and Sales, UK, all Europe, USSR, Mid East and North America. Last 14 years Director of J. Wedgwood & sons. Retirement 10 years Chair of Shropshire Seniors Association. John was recently appointed to the Panel by Mendip District Council the district where he lives.

Bryony Houlden

Chief Executive of South West Councils, a membership organisation of all 33 local authorities in the South West. Formerly a senior civil servant. Serves as a Chair/member or advisor to nine other Independent Remuneration Panels. Bryony has also acted as the independent advisor to the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service and the Avon Fire Authority on their allowances scheme. Bryony was appointed to the Panel by Somerset County Council and lives in the current district of Somerset West and Taunton.

Colin McDonald

Semi-retired after over 30 years full-time employment in social housing, 25 (in total) of these at South Somerset District Council (over two occasions) including several years as Head of Housing & Welfare. Colin was appointed to the Panel by Somerset County Council and lives in the current district of South Somerset.

Alan Wells

39 years' experience in financial services. Specialist in benefit and remuneration structures. Alan was appointed to the Panel by Somerset County Council and lives in the current district of Sedgemoor.

Technical Advisers to the Panel:

Scott Wooldridge, Monitoring Officer, Somerset County Council

Julia Jones, Service Manager, Democratic Services, Somerset County Council

Laura Rose, Senior Democratic Service Officer, Somerset County Council

- 3.5 The last fundamental review on SCC allowances was carried out in 2017 and was considered by SCC on 19 July that year. Accordingly, the Panel set in motion a fundamental review to be completed in 2021 and covering the next four years. On 30 October 2020 the Leader of SCC, Cllr. Fothergill, wrote to the Panel's Chair to inform the Panel that due to a possible local government re-organisation, the elections in May 2021 may be delayed. As a consequence, he suggested that a "light touch review" be carried out with a report to the February 2021 meeting.

This report was produced but on 17 February 2021 SCC resolved to defer consideration until the next meeting. On 5 May 2021 (being the next meeting) Full Council thanked the Panel for its comprehensive work ahead of what was the scheduled elections in May 2021 and requested that the Panel report back to the Council following the (newly instigated) elections to be held in May 2022 for the creation of a new unitary authority and in the meantime for the Council to agree to maintain the current scheme of members' allowances for 2021/22.

The Panel understands that the 2022 elections will see members elected, initially, as County Councillors who then, from 1 April 2023, take on full statutory powers and responsibilities as the Unitary Council. This will mean that initially they will fulfil the same functions as the current county members, but will assume a wider breadth of responsibilities as the Unitary merges county and district functions.

The 2017 report, and resolutions by Full Council, set in place a four year scheme with indexing to inflation (this is the maximum indexing period allowed by Regulation 10). This expired on 31 March 2021 and there has been no increase in BA since. Any backdating can only take place in (and for) the current financial year (also Regulation 10).

So the role of the Panel, is to:-

1. revisit the report submitted in February and May 2021; and
2. produce an allowances scheme which will run for the last year of the County's existence in its current form, that is, 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. This will enable the basics of a scheme to be in place for the annual meeting of Council after the election and hence allow potential candidates for election know how their income will be affected. As part of this the Panel has been asked to look specifically at allowances for co-optees.

It should be noted that with regard to 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, this report, apart from co-optees, looks primarily at the BA. As will be understood, with an election pending in May it is not possible to be predict which Group will control SCC for most of that year and hence who will be Leader of the Council. Consequently, the Panel does not know how the council is to be organised, politically, nor what responsibilities will be entitled to an SRA. As a result, the Panel has assumed that current SRA roles and responsibilities will remain unchanged.

- 3.6 The Panel's 2021 report is (largely) attached as an annex to this report. It has been before Full Council twice and the Panel did not think it necessary to rehearse all the arguments

again, but it is available for reference.

4 Basic Allowance (BA)

4.1 The purpose of the BA is:-

“.....to recognise the time commitment of all councillors, including such inevitable calls on their time at meetings with officers and constituents and attendance at political group meetings. It is also intended to cover incidental costs such as the use of their homes, [...telephone calls and visiting constituents]”³. It is also expected to cover the occasional chairing of meetings, routine monitoring of services and budgets and taking part in performance management and training.

The BA is not a payment for a job, nor a wage or salary. However, as can be seen from the Annexe to this report, elected members can devote a substantial time to the role, and this will inevitably mean that they cannot spend **that** time on other pursuits. It is for this reason that the Panel believe that the BA is an important factor in decisions by an individual as to whether to stand for election and, once elected, being able to afford to live. It follows that indexing of allowances to account for inflation is important - this means both the BA and travel and expense allowances – and explains why there was a recommendation in 2021 for surveying people considering standing for election.

4.2 However, the issue of forthcoming elections does cloud matters as it is proposed that, following the election, the current 55 member council will expand to 110, yet until 1 April 2023 the work undertaken by the newly elected members will be that of a county councillor albeit with a degree of additional work planning the details of the new unitary prior to inception, only taking on the extra statutory powers and responsibilities that were previously vested in the former Districts from that date. As can be imagined, doubling of the number of councillors would result in a doubling of the total cost of the BA (if it remains same per member from May 2022) and hence a doubling of expenditure. It is true that it is **not** the role of the Panel to consider budgets as that is a political decision, but the Panel is expected to consider workload.

It can be seen that some work will remain unchanged no matter how many councillors are elected – attendance at Full Council is a case in point as all members are expected to attend. Similarly, visiting Parish Councils, for example might also require both councillors representing a division to attend. However, work dealing with electors in the division might be expected to be reduced. So, the Panel has looked elsewhere to see what other councils have experienced.

4.3 As members will realise from last year’s report, the Panel does look at comparable authorities to see what they do to ensure that a council is not regarded as an “outlier” – out of step with similar authorities. The “peer” councils listed in table 1 of the Annex are county councils and so not appropriate for a unitary council, but the CIPFA software that produced that list has suggested the following comparators for a unitary Somerset:-

Table 1

³ From “Guidance on Members' Allowances for Local Authorities in England”, 2001, published by ODPM

	“Top nearest neighbour” Unitary councils	Cabinet?
1	Cornwall	Y
2	Shropshire	Y
3	Wiltshire	Y
4	Dorset	Y
5	Cheshire East	N
6	Herefordshire	Y
7	North Somerset	Y
8	East Riding of Yorkshire	Y
9	Northumberland	Y
10	Central Bedfordshire	Y
11	Cheshire West & Chester	Y

It is assumed, but not certain, that the new Unitary Council will adopt a cabinet style of government as that is most common, and the list in Table 1, above, shows the top 11 nearest neighbour unitary councils, only one of which does not operate a cabinet system.

Cornwall, Shropshire and Northumberland Councils were created in 2009. Herefordshire was established when the county of Hereford and Worcester was abolished in 1998 and Herefordshire became a unitary council. North Somerset and East Riding of Yorkshire Councils came into being in April 1996. None of these councils have provided access to minutes prior to their creation on their websites.

Wiltshire Council was also created in 2009, and they held elections for members of the new authority on 4 June that year. There was an interim period when the previously elected councillors were still in post but the new council came into being on 1 April – leading to an interim period where previously elected **district** councillors were co-opted to the new unitary council to enable the continuation of some services. During this short period special allowances were paid to these co-optees by the new unitary council – as an example, District Council Members of the Area Planning Committees were paid £380.

Central Bedfordshire Council was another created in 2009 and a Shadow Authority was in place from 28 March 2008 until 31 March 2009. This was formed from members of two district councils and the county council. It was decided that no BA would be paid for this year as members were still in receipt of a BA from their existing authority, but SRAs would be paid.

The situation with Cheshire West & Chester appears different from the others in the list in Table 1 as there were elections for a shadow authority on 1 May 2008 with three members per division, whilst the council came into being the following April. Some of those elected were new to politics altogether, whilst some were serving members of the existing authorities. Here it was decided that a BA of £4,800 a year was payable for the 11 months of the shadow arrangements, compared with an increased recommendation from the Council’s own panel to £11,458 once the council became “live”.

In the case of Dorset Council, which came into being on 1 April 2019, the 206 councillors of

the predecessor district and county councils continued in office on 1 April 2019 until 6 May 2019, but as new Dorset Councillors. After the election, 82 councillors formed Dorset Council. During the interim period all 206 councillors were paid a BA of £360 on top of their BA for their "home" council. After the election the 82 councillors were paid a BA of £13,000 a year.

It would seem that the Cheshire and Dorset examples establish a precedent of differing levels of BA during an interim period.

It is interesting to note that North Yorkshire County Council is facing the same reorganisation issue as SCC as the government has decided that the current 7 district councils and the county are to be replaced by a unitary council on 1 April 2023. As with Somerset, elections are to be held in May 2022 with those elected being county councillors until 31 March 2023, and then becoming councillors for the new authority. This mirrors exactly the position at SCC. The big difference, though, is that the existing number of 72 councillors will grow to (only) 90 at the election. In a report considered by North Yorkshire County Council on 17 November 2021 the Independent Remuneration Panel for North Yorkshire recommended no change in BA between the time of the election and 31 March 2023, although noting the cost would grow by £185,668 due to the additional councillors.

The Monitoring Officer has pointed out that after the election in May 2022 those elected will:-

- be in place for five years and so for more than four of which they will be running the Unitary Council; and
- during the interim period to 31 March 2023 they will be doing more than running SCC; they will be preparing for the new system, including the creation of new Local Community Networks.

4.4 The Panel asked Group Leaders for assistance to help the Panel understand the work envisaged for the period from May 2022 to 31 March 2023. Interviews were held between 13 and 20 December 2021 with four Group Leaders. Due to time constraints, we were unable to include the Leader of the Green Group. At times two members of the Panel took part, at others, three.

A pertinent point raised by party leaders on having two councillors per division is that casework is not necessarily halved. Several factors including political allegiance and perceived personal effectiveness can skew the number of enquiries and workload between councillors.

As is mentioned in 4.1 above, the BA is expected to cover "a wide range of sins" including training. Some Group Leaders have pointed out that councillors need to gain a full understanding of the role and responsibilities that they will be wholly responsible for from April 2023, particularly in areas such as Planning and Licensing (pointing out that the Glastonbury Festival is a unique event). Furthermore, they felt that the establishment and brokering of partnerships within the Community Networks may well prove to be a large task.

The Panel understands the major changes that will take place from May. With any election there is a turnover in members. Some people choose not to stand again and some, although standing, are not re-elected. By the very nature of things some new people will become members. And in May the number of members is to double, meaning that, at the very least, half of the members will be new to the council, let alone those already

mentioned above. Consequently, the Panel can see the need for up-skilling and training for members. Some of those elected will be new to elected office, some will have previous district council experience, and some will have SCC experience but no knowledge of district council work. And yet, within 11 months, whilst running normal SCC services this body of people must forge a new Unitary Council system including new community networks. Group Leaders agreed, on the whole, with this analysis.

5 Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)

5.1 Section 5 of the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 states that an authority "may provide" for the payment of an SRA to members of the authority in one of a number of defined categories. They are listed in detail in section 5.1 of the 2021 report (in the Annex) whilst sections 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 explain the Panel's approach to determining whether an SRA is justified in any particular case. Section 3.3 of the Annex also sets out other guiding principles used by the Panel. It is the firm belief of the Panel that SRAs are justified for the principal roles at the council in view of the responsibilities involved and the time and effort required in carrying them out. And no doubt the pressures will grow following the election in May.

5.2 The Panel's report in 2021 included five recommendations relating to SRAs. These recommendations arose largely as a result of comparison with similar county councils elsewhere in the country, but, to an extent, the Panel's view was reinforced by the breach of the "50% rule". Government guidance on SRAs includes "if the majority of members of a council receive a special responsibility allowance the local electorate may rightly question whether this was justified. Local authorities will wish to consider very carefully the additional roles of members and the significance of these roles, both in terms of responsibility and real time commitment before deciding which will warrant the payment of a special responsibility allowance." The Panel's "rule of thumb" is that 50% is the tipping point and, at the time the 2021 report was written, SCC had 39 SRA positions (34 paid) and 55 members, or 61% paid, which just reinforced the Panel's view. A commentary on the recommendations is given below. The Panel can see no reason to change its view.

Table 2

	Recommendation in 2021 report	Commentary
4	If the roles of Junior Cabinet Members/Cabinet Support Members are to remain as detailed in the constitution, they should be moved to Band 7;	Only two of our peer councils had such roles and the role description on the Council's website makes it clear these are not decision-making roles.
5	The role of Opposition Group Spokesperson should no longer benefit from an SRA;	Only three of our peer councils had such roles even though councillors said to us that the roles were important. It suggests they are, but not enough to justify SRAs.
6	The roles of Vice-Chair of Regulation and Audit Committees should no longer benefit from an SRA;	Our report pointed out that SRAs for Vice Chairs were rare in the peer group.
7	The role of Vice-Chair of Scrutiny should be moved into Band 6.	The exception to not paying vice chairs in the peer group was vice chair of scrutiny, and yet SCC is an outlier in

		paying less than all the peer councils. Agreeing this recommendation would double this SRA.
8	The Council consider removing the payment of an SRA to Opposition Group Leaders whose membership is below a certain level.	We had 10 peers in the report, four of which have minimum numbers of members of a political group required to warrant paying an SRA, ranging from 2 to 9. It is the Panel's view that this suggestion is worth discussion, even if, with only a little over a year to go, it may seem unnecessary. Given that the Unitary Council will have 110 members, it seems sensible to have a minimum set, for example, 5. Views of members will help inform a future Panel advising the Unitary Council.

5.3 The eleven months between elections in May 2022 and 31 March 2023 will, of course, give a much larger group of members and it may be argued that 34 paid SRAs out of 110 looks well within the 50% limit, but the Panel would repeat that the 50% rule only reinforced its view.

As has been mentioned in 3.5, above, as part of this light touch review we have been specifically asked to comment upon allowances for co-optees at SCC. Regulation 9 of the 2003 Regulations allows the payment of an allowance to “a person who is not a member of the authority but who is a member of a committee or sub-committee of an authority”. Currently co-opted members of the Constitution and Standards Committee receive a Co-opted Members Allowance of £577 p.a., which equates to Basic Allowance x 0.05, but co-optees on other committees and Partnership Boards receive no allowance although all are entitled to claim expenses. The Panel is advised that the workload for all co-optees is similar, requiring attendance at training, briefings and meetings on a similar cycle.

As with councillors, the Panel is concerned that the demands placed upon co-optees may take up significant time such that alternative uses of that time (such as work or family activities) may suffer, and this may, in turn, impact upon the keenness of people to volunteer. And it seems equitable that if one group of people who have volunteered are paid an allowance, then all should be paid that allowance.

In the review brought before the council in February 2021 there were a number of comparisons made with peer authorities – those county councils with similar characteristics with SCC. Reviewing co-optee allowances from the information obtained for that report shows the following:-

Table 3
Co-optee allowances at peer authorities

“Top ten nearest neighbour” County councils	No. Of Members	Co-optee allowance	
1 North Yorkshire	72	£1,697	£1,697
2 Suffolk	75	£70 per 4 hours period	
3 Worcestershire	57	N	
4 Gloucestershire	53	N	
5 Norfolk	84	£1,040	£1,040
6 Warwickshire	57	£1,238	£1,238
7 Devon	60	£500	£500
8 Lincolnshire	70	£801	£801
9 Cumbria	84	N	
10 Leicestershire	55	N	
Average (of those councils with an annual allowance)			£1,055.00
Median (of those councils with an annual allowance)			£1,040.00
SCC			£577.00

It can be seen that not all authorities in the benchmark group pay co-optees but where they do the SCC allowance falls at the bottom of the range in contrast with, say, the BA which is a little above the peer council average (see section 4.2 of the Annex to this report).

- 5.4 This discussion has brought to light the issue of allowances for members of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel itself! As is mentioned in 3.4, above, the Panel consists of SCC, Mendip and Somerset West and Taunton. SCC has an allowance for Panel members equivalent to the co-optee figure. The other two local authorities do not, although all three councils meet reasonable travel expense claims.

Under the 2003 Regulations a local authority may “pay the members of the panel such allowances or expenses as the authority or authorities for which it makes recommendations may determine” (regulation 20(3)) and so the position for **this** Panel is quite rational bearing in mind the decisions are made by each of the three councils. Figures from the benchmark group have not been obtained but we are aware that whilst the majority of Councils across the South West do not pay Panel members both County Councils in the South West pay [Devon: Chair £3,200, Panel member £2,200; Gloucestershire: Chair £1,000, Panel Member £250]. In the same way that the Panel views co-optees doing the same work should have the same allowances it also feels that the same should apply to members of the Panel. The Panel does feel that it is difficult to make recommendations that have a direct financial impact on them (recognising that this is the same issue faced by Members voting for their allowances, although at least this is based on independent advice).

- 5.5 As the Council knows, the current Panel advises three councils and consists of five members, all of whom reside in Somerset. The 2003 Regulations (regulation 20) state:-
 “An independent remuneration panel shall consist of at least three members none of whom—
 (a) is also a member of an authority in respect of which it makes recommendations or is a member of a committee or sub-committee of such an authority; or

(b) is disqualified from being or becoming a member of an authority.”

From the point of view of members of the existing joint panel, a membership of five has worked well. Even with an occasional absence it is always quorate, an odd number removes the possibility of deadlock (although in this Panels’ experience conclusions have always been reached by consensus) and it is not too cumbersome with only five people involved. Being all from Somerset gives everyone an interest, and residence across the county also ensures that occasional, more local, issues can be included in the discussion.

Members of the current Panel are aware that Sedgemoor has a panel of four, two of whom are fairly recent appointees, and it is understood that there is no panel in South Somerset at present. This summer the council will be looking for a Panel which can “hit the ground running” in order to produce a scheme of allowances in time for the operation of the Unitary Council in April 2023 and a new Panel, drawn from within the existing Panels, would seem to recommend itself. All nine existing members could be appointed with terms of office staggered to take into account existing service, but on balance the Panel feel starting with five members would be most efficient. It is important, however, to ensure that all those appointed **do not** have terms of office that expire at the same time!

6 Conclusions and recommendations

- 6.1 Somerset is due for considerable change and there is a lot of work to be carried out to achieve it. But the key date for the Panel is that of the elections due in May, after which the number of councillors will change dramatically, but the day-to-day work of SCC and the Districts will continue as normal as far as members of the public are concerned.

Consequently, the Panel see a need for recommendations for the current financial year and the period to the election, and for after the election.

- 6.2 Mention was made in 4.4 above of the workload envisaged for the 110 members elected in May 2022. The Panel can understand that people may consider that twice the number of councillors may reduce the workload by half. But the Panel is not persuaded by this argument, aware that much work will remain the same per member whether a division has one member or two (such as attendance at Full Council), that experience indicates that multi-member areas may give rise to a similar amount of work per member with the public as single member areas, and there is much to be done, not least creating a new council from scratch. In addition, as mentioned in 4.3 above, members are to be elected for five years, of which this eleven month period forms but a minor part. It is true that doubling the number of members will double the cost, but SCC must be aware that budget considerations are outside the Panel’s remit and concern about attracting suitable councillor applicants necessitates the current BA level.

With regard to SRAs, as is noted in 3.5, above, the Panel has assumed that the situation remains unchanged pending the outcome of elections, subject to the issue of co-optees, mentioned below. If there are any changes to roles with special responsibilities in the period to the election, the Panel will be happy to advise, but changes after the election will be the responsibility of a new Panel.

With regard to co-optee allowances the Panel note that currently some are paid £577, but not all. The Panel believe it would be more equitable to reward all such volunteers equally. It could be that all are paid £577 but, in view of the Council’s position within the peer group, something closer to the peer average would be more appropriate, in addition to payment of expenses.

The position of allowances for members of the Panel is similar in that members are not all treated the same. However, with three councils involved and this being a report to only one of them it is inappropriate to make changes at the present time.

6.3 Looking to the future the council will need a new Panel to advise on allowances from 1 April 2023 when the new Unitary Council takes effect. The Panel has considered alternative approaches but believes creating a Panel from within the existing bodies of experience will serve the council best.

6.4 For the current year the Panel recommend that:-

1. the level of BA be increased by inflation from April 2021 as determined by CPIH published in April 2021 (rather than a rise linked to officer pay levels);
2. travel allowances for 2021/22 be adjusted in accordance with rates set by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) from time to time and subsistence allowances to remain linked to increases (or decreases) in staff subsistence rate.

The Panel also recommend that:-

3. if the roles of Deputy Cabinet Members are to remain as detailed in the constitution, they should be moved to Band 7;
4. the role of Opposition Spokesperson should no longer benefit from an SRA;
5. the roles of Vice-Chair of Regulation and Audit Committees should no longer benefit from an SRA;
6. the role of Vice-Chair of Scrutiny should be moved into Band 6;
7. with regard to co-optee payments
 - a. All people co-opted to SCC Committees and/or Partnership Boards be entitled to be paid an allowance and reasonable expenses, and that the allowance be set at £1,000 a year for the current year; and
 - b. No changes be made at the current time to the allowance paid by SCC to members of the Panel, that it be kept at the current level of £577, plus payment of reasonable expenses
8. the level of BA be increased by inflation from April 2022 as determined by CPIH published in April 2022 (rather than a rise linked to officer pay levels); and
9. travel allowances for 2022/23 be adjusted in accordance with rates set by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) from time to time and subsistence allowances to remain linked to increases (or decreases) in staff subsistence rate.

The Panel ask the Council to consider:-

10. the way in which information is provided to help potential candidates decide whether to stand for election and survey such potential candidates, to include finding out through a questionnaire how important the level of BA is to their decision together with working patterns, geographic location, travel time to meetings and socio-economic background;
11. undertaking exit interviews with members leaving office which would include identifying if they are in need of advice or support in returning to pre-councillor life; and
12. removing the payment of an SRA to Opposition Group Leaders whose membership is below a certain level, for example, 5.

For the period after the election in May 2022, the Panel recommend that:-

- 13. the BA after the election remain unchanged from that determined in recommendation 8, above;**
- 14. a thorough review of the role and responsibilities of co-optees is undertaken by the new Panel set up to advise on allowances for the new Unitary Council;**
- 15. the payment of allowances to Panel members forming the Panel set up to advise the Council on allowances for the new Unitary Authority is considered and agreed on by members and/or officers outside of the current or future Panel.**

It is for SCC to appoint a new panel to advise on allowances in due course but, in view of the experience requirements outlined above, the Panel recommend that, in creating a new panel:-

- 16. SCC look for:-**
 - a. people who reside in Somerset and drawn from the two existing panels operative in the county at present;**
 - b. a wide geographical spread of members from across the county; and**
 - c. a membership of five.**

John Thomson
Chair

21 January 2022