

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES
Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel
to Oxfordshire County Council, December 2010

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The Local Government Act 2000 provides that before any new scheme of allowances is agreed, the Council is required to take into account the advice of its duly appointed Independent Remuneration Panel on the levels and types of allowances to be paid under that scheme.

The Independent Remuneration Panel for Oxfordshire County Council has now carried out a further review of the County Council's scheme and this report sets out the Panel's recommendations. The reasoning behind the recommendations which follow are set out in paragraphs 17-71 of the report.

Recommendations

- (a) that the Basic Allowance payable to all councillors remain at £8,295.
 (b) that, in addition to the Basic Allowance, a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) be paid as follows:-

	Allowance	Proposed Allowance	Current Allowance
(i)	Cabinet Members	No change (£12,442)	£12,442.32
(ii)	Leader of the Council	No change (£12,442)	£12,442.32 (in addition to the allowance as a Cabinet member)
(iii)	Deputy Leader of the Council	No change (£4,147)	£4,147.44 (in addition to the allowance as a Cabinet member)
(iv)	Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees	£5,000 (reduction)	£6,080.16
(v)	Deputy Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees	No allowance	£1,158.12
(vi)	Chairman of the Planning and Regulation Committee	No change (£2,702)	£2,701.92
(vii)	Deputy Chairman of the Planning and Regulation Committee	No allowance	£1,351.56
(viii)	Chairman of the Audit Committee	No change (£2,702)	£2,701.92
(ix)	Deputy Chairman of the Audit Committee	No allowance	£1,351.56
(x)	Chairman of the Pension Fund	No change (£2,702)	£2,701.92

	Committee		
(xi)	Deputy Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee	No allowance	£1,351.56
(xii)	Chairman of Democracy and Organisation Committee	No change (£2,702)	£2,701.92
(xiii)	Deputy Chairman of Democracy and Organisation Committee	No allowance	£1,351.56
(xiv)	Chairman of the Council	No change (£8,295)	£8,294.88
(xv)	Vice-Chairman of the Council	No change (£2,074)	£2,073.72
(xvi)	Leader of the Opposition	No change (£14,516)	£14,516.04
(xvii)	Other Shadow Cabinet Members	No change (£2,432)	£2,432.16
(xviii)	Oxfordshire Corporate Director on South East Fire & Rescue Control Centre Ltd	No change	£2,000

- (c) that the Council does not establish a general co-optees' allowance [no change]
- (d) the co-optee allowances to the Independent Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Standards Committee to be deleted [current allowances: Chairman - £1,158.12 and Deputy Chairman - £579.12]
- (e) the co-optees' allowance to be payable to an independent co-opted member of the Standards Committee when the co-opted member serves on a panel hearing investigating an allegation of a breach of the Code of Conduct to be continued until the Standards regime has been repealed [current allowance: equivalent to the financial loss half-day or day rate]
- (f) a co-optees' allowance to be payable to an independent co-opted member of the Audit Committee when the co-opted member serves as Chairman of the Audit Working Group [no change - £5,265]
- (g) that the Council's Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances and the Co-optees' Allowance to the Chairman of the Audit Working Group be amended annually by reference to the annual Local Government Pay Award for staff and that this should take effect from the date on which the award for staff similarly takes effect [same as current index which is frozen]
- (h) that Dependant's Carer's 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 - £6.00 per hour per child [No change]
 - Care for dependent relatives - £17.00 per hour [No change]
- (i) that the Council adopts, for members, the travel and subsistence scheme that is applicable to officers. Overnight accommodation to be booked by officers where possible; when alternative accommodation arrangements are to be used, this should be approved by the relevant officer and the South East Employers rate to be used [No change]
- (j) that claims made under the Council's travel and subsistence scheme be accompanied by receipts and/or any other relevant evidence of the costs incurred

- and that claims under the scheme be made, in writing, within two months of the relevant duty in respect of which the entitlement to the allowance arises [No change]
- (k) that the Council's list of Approved Duties for the purposes of travel, subsistence and dependant care allowances continue and be updated taking account of Council changes [No change]
- (l) that a review of ICT provision for county councillors (including the supply of broadband at a councillor's home) be undertaken by 31st March 2011 with a view to considering whether this should be deemed to be covered by the current Basic Allowance or within the Allowances Scheme generally.
- (m) that the amounts for Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowances and co-optees' allowances be rounded to the nearest pound.

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES
Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel
to Oxfordshire County Council, December 2010

Introduction

1. The Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances)(England) Regulations 2003 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 Consolidated Regulations on Local Authority Allowances" outlines the main statutory provisions and gives non-statutory guidance. In brief, the Regulations say 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 (SRA): 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.
 - Co-optees' allowance: each local authority *may* make provision for the payment of an allowance to co-optees' for attending meetings, conferences and seminars.
 - Childcare and dependant 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.
 - Travel and subsistence: each local authority *may* determine the levels of travel and subsistence allowances and the duties to which they should apply.
 - Pensions: each local authority *may* specify which councillors, if any, should be eligible for inclusion in the Local Government Pension Scheme and which

allowances (Basic and/or Special Responsibility) should be pensionable. [NB This is not an issue for this review as the decision on this matter was made at a previous review]

- Indexation: each local authority may determine that allowances should be increased in accordance with a specified index and can identify the index and set the number of years (not exceeding four) for which it should apply.
- Backdating: each local authority may determine that, where amendments are made to an allowances scheme, the allowances as amended may be backdated.

The Independent Remuneration Panel

2. The Independent Remuneration Panel for Oxfordshire County Council is:-
 - Ms Jenny Armitstead – the Voluntary Sector
 - Mr Ian Barry – the Not-for-Profit Sector
 - Mr Keith Cullup – the Business Sector
 - Mrs Olga Senior – the Public Sector
3. The Panel elected Mrs Olga Senior to be its Chairman and Mr Keith Cullup to be Vice-Chairman.

Terms of Reference

4. To make recommendations to Oxfordshire County Council on the allowances that should be payable to County Councillors in Oxfordshire, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances)(England) Regulations 2003 and to do so in the following circumstances:
 - annual recommendations on the Council's yearly scheme of allowances where the Council is minded to amend the scheme of allowances otherwise than by reference to a duly adopted index
 - when the Council proposes to revise or modify any aspect of an existing scheme or the Council requests a review
 - where required to do so by virtue of Regulations from the Government

The Panel's Work

5. We met as a Panel between September and December 2010 to carry out a review of the Council's allowances. At the conclusion of the Panel's partial review in 2009, we gave a view that a review of allowances should be undertaken in late 2010, which is nearly four years since the last full review and part way through the current term of office of the Council. This view was agreed by the Council in January 2010. The previous full review was held in 2007.
6. We met on three occasions – 27 September, 10 November and 24 November 2010 – to consider the issues and review the Council's allowances scheme generally. Mrs Olga Senior was unable to attend two of the meetings due to work and holiday commitments so on these occasions Mr Keith Cullup chaired the meetings.

7. In conducting our review, we had regard to a significant amount of information, which included the following:
 - The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 and of the Government's "Guidance on Consolidated Regulations on Members' Allowances for Local Authorities in England";
 - County Council allowances: details of the allowances of numerous County Councils, especially those comparative authorities adjacent to Oxfordshire and in the South East generally
 - Oxfordshire allowances: the allowances arrangements for Oxfordshire's District Councils (Cherwell, Oxford City, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire)
 - Basic Allowances: details of the Basic Allowance for various County Councils across England
 - An analysis of responses to a questionnaire to Oxfordshire County Councillors on the subject of the Council's allowances scheme
 - Responses to a questionnaire to Oxfordshire County Council's Co-opted Members on the subject of Co-optees' Allowances
 - The County Council's political management structure

8. We also interviewed eleven members of the Council, seeking in our selection of interviewees to obtain a sample which was representative of the various roles performed by members. The Panel also met with a couple of officers – the Assistant Head of Finance (Audit) and the Committee Services Manager – about the political management arrangements and the audit process. The Panel considered these interviews to be an important source of information additional to the written submissions. The following members were interviewed on 10 November:
 - Cllr Jim Couchman – Cabinet Member
 - Cllr Steve Hayward – Chairman of a Committee
 - Cllr Hilary Hibbert-Biles – Chairman of the Council
 - Cllr Neil Owen – Chairman of a Committee
 - Cllr Zoe Patrick – Leader of the Opposition
 - Cllr Rodney Rose – Cabinet Member and Corporate Director on South East Fire & Rescue Control Centre Ltd
 - Cllr Peter Skolar – Chairman of the Joint Scrutiny Committee
 - Cllr Lawrie Stratford – Chairman of a Scrutiny Committee
 - Cllr Nicholas Turner – Deputy Chairman of a Scrutiny Committee
 - Cllr David Wilmshurst – Chairman of a Committee

9. We were due to interview Cllr Liz Brighouse, the Leader of the Labour Group, but she was unable to attend on the day. However, Cllr Brighouse had responded to the questionnaire. We met Cllr Keith Mitchell, Leader of the Council, at our meeting on 24th November.

10. The Councillor Questionnaire on allowances was conducted via the Council's e-consult system and the link was sent to all 74 councillors by email. A paper

copy was also available. 43 responses (58%) were returned for our consideration.

11. The Co-opted Member Questionnaire on co-optees' allowances was circulated to 8 co-opted members who serve on Council Committees and two forms were returned for our consideration. Two other co-opted members saw their roles reducing over the next 18 months due to the proposed changes to the Standards regime and were waiving their responsibility allowances as Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Standards Committee from the end of 2010.

The Adopted Approach and Underlying Principles

12. Due to the current national financial climate and the budget situation faced by all local councils, we agreed at the outset of our review that our task in looking at members' allowances would need to take account of the national picture as well as a range of evidence about roles and responsibilities. We considered that it was the purpose of an *independent* panel to make recommendations for allowances appropriate to the role(s) performed by Oxfordshire's County Councillors and Co-opted Members within the Council's political management arrangements, but also appropriate for the current financial situation.
13. We are aware that the Government has been asking councils to show restraint in considering councillors allowances, to freeze their allowances in line with public sector workers, and suggesting that 'councillors must remain arms-length volunteers'.
14. We were concerned that the allowances recommended should have the following underlying principles:
 - That County Councillors and Co-opted Members in Oxfordshire should be remunerated fairly in proportion to the tasks that they perform within the political management arrangements operated under the Local Government Act 2000
 - That an element of a councillor's time should be deemed to be voluntary

Political Structure

15. We noted that the Council had operated a 'Leader and Executive Model' since 5 November 2001 and that the Council reinforced this commitment by adopting a Strong Leader model in August 2009. A Conservative administration was in place, operating a Cabinet system of decision-making, with a series of scrutiny committees providing challenge and policy focus. We noted that the Scrutiny function has changed over the last few years with the deletion of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Group and with committees operating more in select committee format rather than through formal scrutiny reviews. It was also anticipated that the Scrutiny function would continue to change over the next year or so. A number of more regulatory committees were also in operation to carry out statutory non-executive functions. All 74 members still met together as the Council to agree the budget and policy framework. All members were also involved in the important task of community representation within their own electoral divisions.

16. We were therefore concerned in the present review to see if roles and responsibilities have changed, to gauge the time-commitment involved and to assess the level of remuneration appropriate to the reality of the responsibilities and work done by members.

REVIEW OF ALLOWANCES

Basic Allowance

17. It is required under the relevant legislation that a Basic Allowance be provided to all members of the Council 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.

18. In determining an appropriate level of Basic Allowance, we had regard to:

- Oxfordshire County Councillors' own views as to the 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, principally those immediately adjacent to Oxfordshire and in the South East
- The relationship of the allowance per head of population
- The need to take into account a "voluntary service" principle
- Estimated councillor time commitments identified by Oxfordshire County Councillors Survey responses

What the Basic Allowance should cover

19. The Basic Allowance, in our view, is intended to recognise the many varying calls on councillors' time. It therefore covers the costs associated with general constituency work, including travel to meet constituents, use of a councillor's home, telephone and general stationery. It also covers work done by non-Cabinet councillors as members of Scrutiny and other committees and attendance at social/discretionary events where councillors are invited and attendance is discretionary. This includes travel for attendance at civic events arranged or hosted by the Chairman of the Council. We are aware that some members with the time and inclination may be more active in one aspect of Council work than others. We considered this was inevitable and could not in any case be accommodated in a variable Basic Allowance as the law forbids such an approach. In any case, while one councillor may devote a large amount of time to furthering constituents' interests by pursuing scrutiny work, another may do so directly by handling large amounts of casework.

Voluntary element

20. We still hold the view that a proportion of a councillor's time should continue to be voluntary and should not be remunerated. Since the Panel's first review

in 2001, it has been recommended that 40% of a member's time be deemed to be voluntary. The Councillor Questionnaire responses showed that all county councillors considered that there should be a voluntary-element "discount" and over half (25 responders) considered this should remain at 40%. We consider this value is still appropriate.

21. For the avoidance of doubt therefore, the Panel wishes the Council to recognise that the figure recommended as Basic Allowance is effectively a figure which has already been discounted by 40%.

Determination of the level of Basic Allowance

22. Our starting point was to look at the levels of Basic Allowance paid by comparator County Councils adjacent to Oxfordshire and those in the South East. This revealed that Oxfordshire's Basic Allowance was slightly lower than those adjacent to Oxfordshire and significantly lower than those in the South East. We also took note of the comparison with various County Councils across England which showed that there was a variance of £7,086 - £13,300.

23. We noted that 70% of Oxfordshire County Councillors who responded stated that the level of basic allowance should remain at the current amount. The view was also confirmed at the interviews, with many councillors stating that the allowance should not be increased in the current financial climate.

24. We noted that an increase to the Basic Allowance was recommended at the last review and that the Council implemented the increase in June 2009 following the County Council elections. We also noted that the Panel was asked in December 2009 to consider the freezing of allowances for 2010/11. This was duly recommended to and implemented by the Council.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Basic Allowance payable to all Members.

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 political management arrangements set out in the Council's Constitution, the responsibilities performed within that framework and the functions of the various roles.
- The range and levels of SRA proposed in the adjacent authorities and in the South East.
- Evidence from Oxfordshire County Councillors (in person and through responses to the questionnaire) as to whether current SRAs are appropriate and as to suggestions for additional SRAs.

27. The first point of concern to us was to determine whether the relationship between the individual levels of SRA, was still appropriate, taking account of the level of responsibility as well as time commitment.
28. We reviewed the status of the SRA that had been recommended by the Panel at the partial review in December 2009 for the Corporate Director on South East Fire & Rescue Control Centre Ltd. We had recommended this SRA with the proviso that it be reviewed for 2011/12. This had been approved by the Council in January 2010.
29. We considered whether there are any further roles or responsibilities that required an SRA. We have considered the following positions within the Council's structure:
- i. Cabinet Members
 - ii. Leader of the Council (in addition to the allowance as a Cabinet member)
 - iii. Deputy Leader of the Council (in addition to the allowance as a Cabinet member)
 - iv. Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees
 - v. Deputy Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees
 - vi. Chairman of the Planning and Regulation Committee
 - vii. Deputy Chairman of the Planning and Regulation Committee
 - viii. Chairman of the Audit Committee
 - ix. Deputy Chairman of the Audit Committee
 - x. Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee
 - xi. Deputy Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee
 - xii. Chairman of Democracy and Organisation Committee
 - xiii. Deputy Chairman of the Democracy & Organisation Committee
 - xiv. Chairman of the Council
 - xv. Vice-Chairman of the Council
 - xvi. Leader of the Opposition
 - xvii. Other Members of the Shadow Cabinet
 - xviii. Oxfordshire Corporate Director on South East Fire & Rescue Control Centre Ltd

Cabinet Members

30. We noted that no major changes have taken place since the last review in 2007, apart from changes to the portfolio areas. The Cabinet formally meet collectively once a month to take those decisions that cannot be taken by an individual member. Individual Cabinet Members meet once a month to take delegated decisions for their portfolio area. We noted that Cabinet also hold informal meetings collectively and also with the key senior officers for their portfolios.
31. Evidence from the responses to the Members' Allowances Questionnaire and from the interviews, indicated that the workload of Cabinet members continued to be heavy and the level of responsibility remained.
32. We noted that each portfolio had different requirements or ways of working i.e. some more centrally-office based dealing with the running and management of the Council and others required travelling around the County and more public-facing. We also

noted that it can be difficult for those councillors with a full-time career to take on the role of being a Cabinet Member and that the allowances should reflect the real demands of the role. However, based on the evidence put before us we do not believe that, on balance, the role has changed significantly; furthermore, we consider that these posts should not be treated as a source of paid employment.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance to all Cabinet Members.

Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council

33. The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council have a significant additional workload above their duties as ordinary members of the Council and as members of the Cabinet generally. They both carry portfolios in addition to their roles as Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet.

34. As previously, we continue in our view that, as the legislation intended, the Leader has a higher public profile, and that working with other organisations/bodies within the local area is becoming a vital part of service provision and local democracy. We also noted that as a consequence, the Deputy Leader's role is internally focused. We still consider that the Leader's role carries more responsibility than the Deputy Leader.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance to the Leader of the Council.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance to the Deputy Leader of the Council.

Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees

35. We noted that the Council has five Scrutiny Committees, and a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee for local health services, which vary slightly in membership in relation to the requisite number of councillors, co-opted members and representatives of other partners.

36. On the evidence we received, it seemed that the functioning of the Scrutiny process had changed since the last review in 2007 with the deletion of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Group and with Committees operating more in select committee format rather than through formal reviews requiring the formation of specific panels. We considered that this had changed the responsibilities for the Chairmen of the Scrutiny Committees and that the allowance should be reduced more closely to reflect the level of responsibility in relation to the Chairmen of the other Council Committees.

37. We consider the responsibilities of the Deputy Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees were not onerous and that the Deputy Chairman of any Committee is in training for a possible chairman role. We also noted that many other councils did not pay an SRA to deputy chairmen of scrutiny committees.

38. We also noted that the Scrutiny process was in a transitional period and that the Scrutiny function may look very different in the next year or so, and may need to be reviewed further following any significant changes.

We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance for each Chairman of a Scrutiny Committee be reduced to £5,000 [Previous allowance: £6,080.16].

We RECOMMEND that no Special Responsibility Allowance be paid to a Deputy Chairman of a Scrutiny Committee [Previous allowance: £1,158.12].

Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Planning and Regulation Committee

39. This 15 member committee deals with a range of quasi-judicial non-Executive regulatory functions. It meets every six weeks and carries a heavy workload requiring occasional site visits. There are specific requirements for the Chairman and members to be trained in the necessary law and regulations. We therefore recommend that the allowance for the Chairman of the Committee remain at the present level.

40. We considered that the responsibilities of the Deputy Chairman of this Committee were not onerous. We noted that several other councils did not pay an SRA to deputy chairmen of committees.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairman of the Planning and Regulation Committee.

We RECOMMEND that no Special Responsibility Allowance be paid to the Deputy Chairman of the Planning and Regulation Committee.

Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Audit Committee

41. We noted that the Committee provided a key role in the risk, control and governance arrangements within the Council. This role required the Chairman and members to be briefed on a range of issues concerning the processes of the Council. We recommend that the allowance for the Chairman remain at the present level.

42. We considered that the responsibilities of the Deputy Chairman of the Committee were not onerous. We noted that several other councils did not pay an SRA to deputy chairmen of committees.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairman of the Audit Committee.

We RECOMMEND that no Special Responsibility Allowance be paid to the Deputy Chairman of the Audit Committee.

Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee

43. The Pension Fund Committee is responsible for the management of Oxfordshire's pension fund, a not inconsiderable responsibility. We therefore recommend that the allowance to the Chairman of the Committee remain at the present level.
44. We considered that the responsibilities of the Deputy Chairman of the Committee were not onerous. We noted that several other councils did not pay an SRA to deputy chairmen of committees.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee.

We RECOMMEND that no Special Responsibility Allowance be paid to the Deputy Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee.

Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Democracy & Organisation Committee

45. We noted that although the Democracy & Organisation Committee did not meet as frequently as the other committees, the responsibilities of its sub-committees (i.e. Pension Benefits Sub Committee, Appeals Sub-Committee) needed to be taken into consideration. The Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Committee were also the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the sub committees.
46. We therefore recommend that the allowance to the Chairman of the Committee remain at the present level. We considered that the responsibilities of the Deputy Chairman of the Committee were not onerous. We noted that several other councils did not pay an SRA to deputy chairmen of committees.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairman of the Democracy and Organisation Committee.

We RECOMMEND that no Special Responsibility Allowance be paid to the Deputy Chairman of the Democracy and Organisation Committee.

Corporate Director on South East Fire & Rescue Control Centre Ltd

47. In December 2009 the Panel considered the role and responsibilities of this corporate directorship and recommended that an allowance of £2,000 (not index linked) be paid. We also recommended that this be reviewed for 2011/12 as the role would be changing over time and following the implementation of the regional control centre.
48. On the evidence we received, it seemed that the role and responsibility is the same as in December 2009. However, we noted that due to the national financial situation there was some uncertainty about the future of this national project. We therefore, recommend that the current allowance should continue and that the situation should be monitored and the matter be referred to the Panel if the project changes or responsibilities of the post change.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Corporate Director on South East Fire & Rescue Control Centre Ltd. However, the situation should be monitored and the matter referred to the Panel if the project changes or responsibilities of the post change.

Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council

49. We continue to acknowledge that the Chairman of the Council fulfils a central role within the Council. As well as chairing the formal Council meetings, the civic role continues to involve extensive civic/ceremonial duties. This latter element can take up a good degree of time. We also acknowledge that the Vice-Chairman deputises for the Chairman, especially attending civic engagements.

50. We therefore recommend that the allowances to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council remain at the present level.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairman of the Council.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Deputy Chairman of the Council.

Leader of the Opposition

51. We noted that the position of “Leader of the Opposition” continues to be an integral part of the Council’s political management structure. We remain of the view that, in the interests of democracy, the importance of this position should continue to be recognised. While the Scrutiny function performs the formal role of challenging the Cabinet, it is still right that the Leader of the main Opposition Party should provide a robust, comprehensive and well-informed counterpoint to the ruling administration.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Leader of the Opposition.

Other Members of the Shadow Cabinet

52. We remain of the view that there is public benefit in the contribution the Shadow Cabinet makes, as members of the formal Opposition Group, to the business of the authority. We recommend, therefore, that this allowance remains at the present level.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Members of the Shadow Cabinet.

Dependants’ Carers’ Allowances

53. The majority of Councillors' responses to the allowances questionnaire supported the continuation of allowances to cover the costs of childcare and the care of dependants. We heard that only a few Councillors had made use of these allowances since their inception. Nevertheless, we consider that the provision of childcare and dependant carers' allowances should continue at the current rates and will serve to encourage participation in the Council's activities from both existing and future councillors.
54. The requirement for the submission of claims for childcare and dependant carers' allowances to be made within two months, including the submission of receipts/evidence, should continue.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Childcare and Dependant Carers' Allowances.

Co-optees' Allowance

55. We continue in the view that there should not be a general co-optees allowance payable to all co-opted members on Council Committees. We also continue to endorse the principle that co-opted members should be able to claim travel and subsistence allowances, provided that these cannot be claimed legitimately from another body.
56. We noted that the positions of Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Standards Committee were held by independent co-opted members on the Standards Committee, in accordance with statutory requirements/best practice. The Government had indicated that the legal regime under which the Standards Committee operates was to be repealed and the work over the next year or so would reduce considerably. Subsequently, the independent members who hold the posts had decided to waive their allowances as Chairman and Deputy Chairman from the end of 2010. We consider, therefore, that these allowances should be deleted.
57. We noted that the Council's Standards Committee Panel Hearings will continue to investigate allegations of a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct until the Standards regime has been repealed. Therefore, we consider that the independent members on the Panel Hearings should continue to be able to claim an allowance equivalent to the financial loss half-day or day rate.
58. We remain of the view that the independent member of the Audit Committee should receive the allowance for carrying out the specific role of Chairman of the Council's Audit Working Group, which reports to the Audit Committee. We concluded that the Chairman of the Audit Working Group is a key role in the financial/business workings of the Council which should be remunerated.

We RECOMMEND that the Council does not establish a general co-opted members' allowance.

We RECOMMEND that no Co-optees' Allowance be paid to the Chairman of the Standards Committee.

We RECOMMEND that no Co-optees' Allowance be paid to the Deputy Chairman of the Standards Committee.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the arrangements when a co-opted member of the Standards Committee serves on a panel hearing or investigating an allegation of a breach of the Code of Conduct.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the co-optees' allowance to the independent co-opted member of the Audit Committee when the co-opted member serves as Chairman of the Audit Working Group.

Indexation

59. The Regulations permit Councils to determine whether adjustments to allowances should be made by reference to an index and, if so, to decide upon the index and the length of its application (up to a maximum of four years).

60. In December 2009, the Council asked the Panel to consider the freezing of councillors' allowances for 2010/11. Due to the current economic climate, we recommended that the current annual indexation arrangement for basic and special responsibility allowances of all councillors should be lifted for 2010/11 and reviewed again for the 2011/12 financial year. This was adopted by the Council in January 2010.

61. We still consider, in principle, that allowances should be linked to the annual national Local Government Pay Award for officers. We remain of the view that this was the most obvious and relevant index. We noted that this index (for officers) had been frozen due to the current economic climate. We consider that this indexation should be re-instated for 2011 onwards and that if the allowance is 'unfrozen', the Council should ask the Panel to consider the arrangements that should apply for members.

We RECOMMEND that the Council's Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances and the Co-optees' Allowance to the Chairman of the Audit Working Group be amended annually by reference to the annual pay settlement for local government staff.

Travelling and Subsistence Allowances

62. The majority of councillor responses to the questionnaire did not consider that the travel and subsistence allowances should be amended. We received a request for travel to be claimable for visiting constituents and for attending the Chairman's events. We also received an indication from the Leader of the Council that the terms and conditions for officers were being reviewed, and this included travel and subsistence.

63. We reviewed the current arrangements, including the conditions and limitations for claims and payments and the associated list of Approved Duties.

64. We remain of the view that the levels of travel and subsistence for members should be the same as for officers, especially if there were to be changes for officers. Therefore, we recommend that the levels for travel and subsistence allowances remain the same as those which apply to officers, with the exception of the tea allowance which should be deleted for members. We consider that the overnight accommodation should be booked by officers whenever possible or claimable at cost up to the South East Employers rates.
65. The Regulations set out when travel and subsistence allowances can be paid to members i.e. "Approved Duties". We considered the request for the inclusion of visiting constituents and attending Chairman's Events. However, we did not consider that these duties meet any of the categories set out in the Regulations and were not discharging specific functions of the Council. These travel costs are deemed to be included in the Basic Allowance. The Approved Duties shown in (l) – (y) of Schedule 2 of the Scheme should however be updated to reflect changes within the Council and local circumstances.
66. The majority of councillor responses to the questionnaire considered that the time limit for submitting claims should remain at two months. We have reviewed this arrangement and consider that this should remain at two months, especially as this was also the time limit used by the five Oxfordshire district councils.
67. The requirements for the submission of tickets/receipts for the use of public transport (2nd class) and for parking and, taxis where necessary, and for meals and accommodation should continue.

We RECOMMEND:

- **that the Council adopts, for members, the travel and subsistence scheme that is applicable to officers, excluding the tea allowance.**
- **overnight accommodation to be booked by officers where possible, or reimbursed at cost up to the South East Employers rates.**
- **that claims made under the Council's travel and subsistence scheme be accompanied by receipts and/or any other relevant evidence of the costs incurred and that claims under the scheme be made, in writing, within two months of the relevant duty in respect of which the entitlement to the allowance arises.**
- **that the Council's list of Approved Duties for the purposes of travel, subsistence and dependant care allowances continue, with the approved duties shown in (l) – (y) of Schedule 2 of the Scheme being updated to reflect changes within the Council and local circumstances.**

ICT Provision Review

68. Evidence provided by County Councillors during the interviews showed that there were varying levels of ICT provision for councillors, since provision began in 2002. About half of the councillors who responded to the questionnaire indicated that ICT equipment and ICT consumables should be included within the Basic Allowance. We consider that a review of ICT provision to county councillors should be undertaken to consider the arrangements for the provision of equipment, supplies

and support and the associated costs, to ensure a level playing field of possible provision. The review should take account of the requirements for councillors to use ICT in their role as a county councillor.

69. We would be interested to see the findings of the review and whether this would have any implications on the Members' Allowances Scheme. We recommend that the principle of the cost of broadband at a councillor's home being deemed to be covered by the current Basic Allowance should be included within the review. We also recommend that the Review be undertaken by 31st March 2011.

We RECOMMEND that a review of ICT provision for county councillors (including the supply of broadband at a councillor's home) be undertaken by 31st March 2011 with a view to considering whether this should be deemed to be covered by the current Basic Allowance or within the Allowances Scheme generally.

Amounts

70. We recommend that the basic allowance, special responsibility allowances and co-optees' allowances amounts be rounded to the nearest pound to make it easier and clearer to identify the allowances for each role. We also propose that this principle of rounding to the nearest pound be applied to any indexation increases in the future.

We RECOMMEND that the amounts for basic allowance, special responsibility allowances and co-optees' allowances be rounded to the nearest pound.

Conclusion

71. In making our present recommendations, we have taken into account the Council's political management arrangements as currently operated, and the roles and posts recognised within it. We have also taken into account the national financial situation and the budget pressures being faced by local government in Oxfordshire. The allowances we have recommended mean, in general terms, that Oxfordshire County Council's allowances would still be below the average for similar authorities. Clearly, if new posts are created within the management arrangements or if any significant alterations occur to the responsibilities of existing postholders, then we would want to meet to consider such matters. We would also be happy to meet to re-consider the indexation of allowances if the need arises.
72. We consider that the next review of allowances should look in depth at the voluntary element of the Basic Allowance, the specific roles and responsibilities of all positions within the political management arrangements and how the allowances relate to market pay rates in the area.
73. The Panel wishes to place on record its thanks to Rachel Dunn, the Independent Remuneration Panel Co-ordinator, for her research, the provision of readily intelligible information and for the structure thereby brought to our deliberations.

Mrs Olga Senior
Chairman
Independent Remuneration Panel for Oxfordshire County Council