

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel to Oxfordshire County Council, August 2003

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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are as follows:-

- (a) **that the Basic Allowance payable to all Members be £7000 [Previous allowance: £6,000]**
- (b) **that, in addition to the Basic Allowance, a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) be paid as follows:-**
 - (i) **Executive Members - £10,500 [Previous allowance: £6,000];**
 - (ii) **Leader of the Council - £7,000 (in addition to the allowance as an Executive member) [Previous allowance: £6,000];**
 - (iii) **Deputy Leader of the Council - £3,500 (in addition to the allowance as an Executive member) [Previous allowance: £4,000];**
 - (iv) **Chairs (Chairmen) of Scrutiny Committees - £5,250 [Previous allowance: £3,000];**
 - (v) **Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of Scrutiny Committees - £1,000 [Previous allowance: £2,000];**
 - (vi) **Chair(man) of the Planning & Regulation Committee - £2,333 [Previous allowance: £2,000];**
 - (vii) **Deputy Chair(man) of the Planning & Regulation Committee - £1,167 [Previous allowance: £1,000];**
 - (viii) **Chair(man) of the Best Value Committee - £2,333 [Previous allowance: £2,000];**
 - (ix) **Deputy Chair(man) of the Best Value Committee - £1,167 [Previous allowance: £1,000];**
 - (x) **Chair of the Pension Fund Committee - £2,333 [Previous allowance: £1,000];**
 - (xi) **Deputy Chair(man) of the Pension Fund Committee - £1,167 [Previous allowance: £500];**
 - (xii) **Chairs (Chairmen) of other Committees (Standards and Democracy & Organisation) - £1,000 [Previous allowance: £1,000];**
 - (xiii) **Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of other Committees - £500 [Previous allowance: £500];**
 - (xiv) **Third Party Spokespersons on committees – 50% of the relevant Deputy Chair(man)'s allowance [no previous allowance];**
 - (xv) **Chair(man) of the Council - £7,000 [Previous allowance: £2,000];**
 - (xvi) **Vice-Chair(man) of the Council - £1,750 [Previous allowance: £1,000];**
 - (xvii) **Leader of the Opposition - £10,500 [Previous allowance: £6,000];**
- (c) **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 - £5 per hour [no change]
Care for dependant relatives - £15 per hour. [no change];
- (d) that the Council does not establish a co-opted members' allowance;
- (e) that all members of the Council be made eligible for inclusion in the Local Government Pension Scheme and that both Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances be pensionable;
- (f) that the Council's Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances 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;
- (g) that the effect of the provision in (f) above be reviewed within three years of its introduction;
- (h) that the Council adopts role descriptions describing all of the roles that County Councillors perform within the authority;
- (i) that the Council adopts the practice of annual reporting by each member of the Council on their Council year and that such reports be published;
- (j) that the Council adopts, for members, the travel and subsistence scheme that is applicable to officers;
- (k) 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;
- (l) that the Council's list of Eligible Duties for the purposes of travel and subsistence allowances continue as existing with the following amendments:
 1. the addition of:
 - (i) attendance by a member at parish and town council meetings within the relevant member's division;
 - (ii) activities undertaken by the twelve Public Service Agreement Champions in pursuance of the tasks described in the relevant role profiles;
 - (iii) meetings with officers undertaken by members in pursuance of bona fide constituency business, subject to detailed definition and provided only that open, accountable and simple administrative procedures can be established;
 - (iv) attendance at duly authorised seminars and training events;
 - (v) attendance at other meetings/interviews which members are specifically invited or requested to attend by officers in connection with Council business;
 2. the deletion of attendance at political group meetings;
- (m) that the revised allowances and rates be effective from 1 October 2003 or as soon as administratively practicable thereafter.

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel to Oxfordshire County Council, August 2003

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 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.
 - 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.
 - 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:-

- Dr Graham Curtis Chairman of the Independent Advice Centre, Wantage
- Mike Fleming Director of Human Resources & Corporate Services, John Radcliffe NHS Trust
- Linda Lloyd Commercial Manager – ASDA Stores Ltd
- Bruce Moore Deputy Chief Executive of the Anchor Trust
- Sir Peter North Principal of Jesus College, Oxford.

3. **The Panel elected Sir Peter North to be its Chairman and Bruce Moore 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;
 - where required to do so by virtue of Regulations from the Government.

The Panel's Work

5. We met as a Panel over the summer of 2003 to carry out a review of the Council's allowances. The 2003 Regulations brought into effect certain changes to the scope of allowances and we needed to take account of these provisions. At the conclusion of the Panel's previous review in Autumn 2001, we stated that we would wish to undertake a comprehensive review of allowances once the Council's political management arrangements had been in place for some time. We therefore wished to take the opportunity to review the whole of the Council's allowances scheme. We met on four occasions –7 July, 16 July, 4 August and 13 August 2003 – to consider the new regulations and review the Council's allowances scheme generally.
6. In conducting our review, we had regard to a significant amount of information, which included the following:
- Copies of 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";
 - 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, especially those comparative authorities adjacent to Oxfordshire and in the South East generally;
 - An analysis of responses to a questionnaire to Oxfordshire County Councillors on the subject of the Council's allowances scheme and the potential changes made possible by the new Regulations;
 - 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;
 - The County Council's political management structure and details of the numbers of formal meetings held during the period 1 January – 1 June 2003;
 - Information from the Council's Social & Health Care Directorate concerning approximate costs per hour for childcare and the care of dependants.

7. We also interviewed ten members of the Council, seeking in our selection of interviewees to obtain a sample which was representative of the various roles performed by members and representative also of political affiliation. The Panel considered 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 question and answer session with the Panel. The following members were interviewed on 4 August:
 - Conservative:
 - Cllr Keith Mitchell – Leader of the Council
 - Cllr David Robertson – Executive Member for Transport
 - Cllr Charles Shouler
 - Labour
 - Cllr Liz Brighouse – Leader of the Opposition
 - Cllr Robert Evans – Chair of the Learning & Culture Scrutiny Committee
 - Cllr Ken Harper – Chair of the Corporate Governance Scrutiny Committee
 - Cllr Christine Witcher
 - Liberal Democrat
 - Cllr Margaret Godden – Deputy Leader of the Council
 - Cllr Zoé Patrick
 - Cllr Dermot Roaf
8. The Questionnaire on allowances was circulated to all 70 members of the Council and 28 forms (40%) were returned in time for our consideration. Several additional written submissions were also received.
9. Our recommendations were finalised at our meeting on 13 August, having considered all the evidence submitted to us.

The Adopted Approach and Underlying Principles

10. We agreed at the outset of our review 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) performed by Oxfordshire's County Councillors within its political management arrangements.
11. 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 political management arrangements operated under 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 the allowances should provide another mechanism whereby members' performance in their roles could be made more open and publicly accountable.

Political Structure

12. We noted that the Council had operated its current political management structure since 5 November 2001. A joint Conservative-Liberal Democrat administration was in place, operating an Executive system of decision-making with a series of scrutiny committees providing challenge and policy focus. A number of more regulatory committees were also in operation to carry out statutory non-executive functions. All 70 members still met together as the Council to agree the budget and policy. All members were also involved in the important task of community representation within their own electoral divisions.
13. The Panel's previous recommendations of Autumn 2001 were made before these political arrangements came into effect. We were therefore concerned in the present review to see how far the various roles had developed, to gauge the time-commitment involved and to assess the level of remuneration appropriate to the reality of the work done by members.

REVIEW OF ALLOWANCES

Basic Allowance

14. 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.
15. 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 in the South East and immediately adjacent to Oxfordshire) and by Oxfordshire's District Councils;
 - 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 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 Oxfordshire and the South East;
 - 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);
 - examples of potential indices by which allowances might be uprated each year.
16. 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 and the work done by non-Executive councillors as members of Scrutiny and other committees. We would also expect that the Council would normally wish to share out such committee responsibilities so that the general burden of formal Council duties was fairly apportioned. Of course, some members with the time and inclination may be more active in one aspect of Council work than others may be. We considered that 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.

17. We are, however, sympathetic to the view that Councillors' performance in their roles does need to be more open. We have recommended elsewhere in this report that each Councillor publish an annual report of their activities. This would, we believe, give due recognition to the work done by all members as well as providing a further mechanism against which the appropriateness of the Basic Allowance could be measured. Similarly we have also recommended that formal role descriptions be adopted to state the basic duties expected of councillors in their non-executive roles.

Voluntary element

18. We noted the view expressed in the Government 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. In our review in 2001, we recommended that 40% of a member's time be deemed to be voluntary and the amount of the Basic Allowance was discounted accordingly to £6,000.
19. In our present review, we were keen to see whether there were grounds for amending this voluntary element "discount". We therefore looked at the rates applied by other County Councils in the South East region and adjacent to Oxfordshire. The most commonly applied value was 33%, although it was 50% in the District Councils in Oxfordshire. We also noted that questionnaire responses from Oxfordshire County Councillors supported, in the main, the 40% figure. We therefore saw no pressing reason to amend our previous value which was broadly in line with practice elsewhere and not questioned by Oxfordshire's County Councillors.
20. 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 which has already been discounted by 40%.

Determination of the level of Basic Allowance

21. The Panel was concerned to determine whether the £6,000 Basic Allowance previously recommended was now appropriate. Our starting point was to recognise that this level had not been reviewed or increased (not even by reference to an index) since Autumn 2001; there were therefore *prima facie* grounds for increasing the Basic Allowance to compensate for the 'stand-still' of the past two years. We then decided to look at the levels of Basic Allowance paid by comparator County Councils in the South East and those adjacent to Oxfordshire. This revealed that Oxfordshire's Basic Allowance was certainly low (if not exactly the lowest) of these authorities. We then decided to compare the present allowance against an average figure having applied to it our own 40% discount. This revealed an average allowance from our "family" of county councils of £7,500. This indicated to us that Oxfordshire's current Basic Allowance was still low on this basis in comparison with similar authorities. We also took note of the fact that Oxfordshire County Councillors themselves were not wholly dissatisfied with the present amounts and their suggestions for increase were modest (e.g. an additional £1,000). We have therefore chosen to exercise our judgement directly in determining the Basic Allowance figure having regard to all the evidence and viewpoints placed before us, as well as our judgement as to the extent of the voluntary element to be taken into consideration. The Panel's recommendation would therefore represent a modest increase that brings the Council more into line with similar authorities. If the Council does not wish to endorse this modest increase, then the Council should be aware that its Basic Allowance will remain significantly out of step with other authorities.

We RECOMMEND that a Basic Allowance of £7,000 be payable to each County Councillor. [Previous allowance: £6,000]

Special responsibility allowance (SRA)

22. We then considered which posts should qualify for a Special Responsibility Allowance and the appropriate level at which each allowance should be set.
23. We had regard to:
- the political management arrangements set out in the Council's Constitution and the responsibilities performed within that framework;
 - the range and levels of SRA proposed in other authorities particularly those in the South East and those adjacent to Oxfordshire;
 - 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.
24. The first point of concern to us was to determine whether the relationship between the Basic Allowance and the range of SRAs, and between the individual levels of SRAs, was still appropriate. Previously, given that the political management arrangements were then untried, we had adopted a simple ratio approach, calculating SRAs by reference to the Basic Allowance. In doing so, we felt it right that there should not at that stage be too great a difference between the Basic Allowance and the largest Special Responsibility Allowances. We wished in the present review to consider whether the evolution of the roles since that time merited the same or a differing approach. We wished therefore to look at the varied time commitments and burdens of responsibility under each role. Consequently, we took evidence from a Time Commitments Survey (2002) of County Councillors as to the hours being worked on average. We would also have found it very useful in this exercise if we had had access to formal role descriptions which adequately described the roles that currently attract SRAs.
25. We considered that the most open and intelligible rationale for calculating SRAs would be to continue to use the Basic Allowance as the building block and then apply multipliers to it for each SRA. We noted that this was also the approach commended in the Government's "Guidance on Consolidated Regulations for Local Authority Allowances" (paragraph 76).
26. We then reassessed the duties currently recognised with SRAs and considered additional duties suggested by some members as meriting SRAs. We also wish to make it clear that we have considered again the issue put to us on one or two occasions that SRAs should be paid to "shadow" members of the Executive. While the Opposition Group operates a shadow executive, which is undoubtedly time-consuming for those members, these positions have not been established, formally, as part of the Council's new structure. They are, essentially, voluntary positions, adopted for party political purposes. We would, however, point to our Recommendation in paragraph 61 for the payment of a SRA to the Leader of the Opposition. We do not consider it appropriate to provide allowances for positions that are adopted largely for party political purposes. We also note that the clear majority of comparable authorities take a similar view and do not recognise an allowance for Shadow Executives.
27. We identified the following positions within the Council's proposed structure as meriting a SRA (in addition to Basic Allowance):
- (i) Executive Members
 - (ii) Leader of the Council (in addition to the allowance as an Executive member);
 - (iii) Deputy Leader of the Council (in addition to the allowance as an Executive member);
 - (iv) Chairs (Chairmen) of Scrutiny Committees
 - (v) Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of Scrutiny Committees
 - (vi) Chair(man) of the Planning & Regulation Committee
 - (vii) Deputy Chair(man) of the Planning & Regulation Committee
 - (viii) Chair(man) of the Best Value Committee
 - (ix) Deputy Chair(man) of the Best Value Committee
 - (x) Chair(man) of the Pension Fund Committee
 - (xi) Deputy Chair(man) of the Pension Fund Committee

- (xii) Chairs (Chairmen) of other Committees (Standards, Democracy & Organisation)
- (xiii) Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of other Committees
- (xiv) Third Party Spokespersons on committees
- (xv) Chair(men) of the Council
- (xvi) Vice-Chair(men) of the Council
- (xvii) Leader of the Opposition

Executive Members

28. We noted that under the Council's new structure the Executive, as presently operated, consists of nine members (including the Leader and Deputy Leader). We also noted that decisions of the Executive are collective although each member carries a portfolio responsibility in which they specialise.
29. The Executive meets fortnightly and, as expected, Executive Members work very closely with senior officers. This results in regular informal meetings and discussions in addition to the more formal meetings when executive decisions are made. We also heard evidence from the responses to the Time Commitments Questionnaire (2002) and the Members' Allowances Questionnaire (2003) and from interviews, that the workload of Executive members is heavy. Some said it was effectively a full-time job, others that it was difficult to hold down a full-time job while also serving as Executive members on the Council. We noted that there was no formal arrangement for providing dedicated assistance to each member of the Executive, although a part-time paid Assistant to the Executive had recently been employed to carry out aspects of research and co-ordination. There was therefore still a heavy burden on Executive members.
30. We also considered the responsibilities and allowances attaching to Executive members from the "family" of County Councils in the South East and adjacent to Oxfordshire. It was clear that Oxfordshire's allowance was low in comparison. Not counting Basic Allowance, the next nearest Executive allowances to Oxfordshire were £8,500 (Wiltshire) and £9,000 (Warwickshire). The average allowance from the family of authorities was £12,948 – double that for Oxfordshire.
31. Since our last review, the Executive had created a Transport Implementation Committee, a committee of the Executive dealing with certain transport issues. This Committee comprises the Executive Members for Transport and for Strategic Planning & Waste Management. The Committee had been set up in the interests of efficiency to deal with work that had previously been dealt with by the Executive as a whole. We considered whether this would mean additional work for the two Executive members involved, or significantly less work for their Executive colleagues. On balance we thought that it would not, and this was endorsed by the Executive Member for Transport himself and by other members of the Executive whom we interviewed. We did not see any reason, therefore, to adopt a variable approach to Executive allowances and have decided to recommend one value for all.
32. We were, however, convinced that the level of allowances for Executive members was in need of revision. We considered that it was still appropriate to link the level of allowance by ratio to the Basic Allowance but decided that the previous rationale of adding a value equivalent to a further Basic Allowance was not sufficient. We regarded that a more appropriate and equitable ratio, and one which would bring the Executive SRA allowance closer to those of Oxfordshire's peers, would be to allow Executive members one and a half times the Basic Allowance on top of the Basic Allowance itself. We make this recommendation believing it to accord with a key principle – that in the interests of democracy people should not be deterred from serving as members of the Executive through concerns over financial loss and that the allowance should reflect the real demands of the role. However, we were also concerned that these posts should not be treated as a source of paid employment as this would call into question the "voluntary element" of Council service.

We RECOMMEND that a Special Responsibility Allowance of £10,500 be paid to all Executive Members in addition to their Basic Allowance. [Previous allowance: £6,000]

Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council

33. As we expected, it has proved to be the case that the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council have had a significant additional workload above their duties as ordinary members of the Council and as members of the Executive generally. They both carry portfolios in addition to their roles as Chair(man) and Deputy Chair(man) of the Executive. The Executive continues to meet fortnightly, more frequently than any other meeting within the new structure.
34. We looked at the time-commitment given by the Leader and Deputy Leader. We also looked at the comparative information from the family of County Councils in the South East and adjacent to Oxfordshire as to the allowances available to these positions. This showed Oxfordshire clearly to be low. Not counting Basic Allowance, Wiltshire County Council (£11,500) was roughly equivalent to Oxfordshire (£12,000); the next lowest Leader's allowance was that of Warwickshire County Council (£18,800) with the remainder providing a Leader's allowance in excess of £20,000. Not counting the outlier of Kent County Council, the highest of the comparators was Buckinghamshire County Council (£33,906). A similar pattern emerged in relation to the allowance for the Deputy Leader. Given these considerations, we were of the view that the SRAs for the Leader and Deputy Leader were in need of increase.
35. As previously, we continued in our view that, as the legislation intended, the Leader has a higher public profile and consequently carries more responsibility than the Deputy Leader and we reflected this in our recommendation. We therefore considered that the Leader should receive an allowance (on top of Basic and Executive allowances) equivalent to 100% of the Basic Allowance. We considered, on balance, that the Deputy Leader should receive half that amount. The effect of our recommendations in relation to the Leader's allowance would, in terms of the comparisons made in Paragraph 34, see Oxfordshire's figure raised from £12,000 to £17,500.

We RECOMMEND that a Special Responsibility Allowance of £7,000 should be paid to the Leader (this to be in addition to the Executive members' allowance and the Basic Allowance). [Previous allowance: £6,000]

We RECOMMEND that a Special Responsibility Allowance of £3,500 should be paid to the Deputy Leader of the Council (this to be in addition to the Executive members' allowance and the Basic Allowance). [Previous allowance: £4,000]

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

36. When we previously made recommendations in 2001, the Council had five 15-councillor Scrutiny Committees. More recently, a sixth scrutiny committee, the Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee, has come into operation to oversee the scrutiny of local health services. This latter committee has seven councillors and eight co-opted members. The frequency of the five original scrutiny committees, as expected, was six meetings per year. The Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee is likely to meet with similar frequency.
37. As anticipated, the Scrutiny Committees have performed a key function within the political management arrangements. They scrutinise Executive decisions and the authority's performance generally and also assist in the formulation of policy. We accept, however, that scrutiny committees do not have to make executive decisions.
38. We heard evidence, in questionnaire responses and interviews, from Chairs (Chairmen) and Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) as to the demands of the respective roles. It emerged from Councillor responses that the Chairs (Chairmen) of Scrutiny had a significant role, given that the scrutiny function is integral to the operation of the management arrangements under the legislation. However, we also learned that much of the work of scrutiny committees is being done in Scrutiny Review Panels made up of members of the Committees themselves. These Panels undertake specific research into service areas and make recommendations upon them. The Chairs (Chairmen) of Scrutiny Committees may or may not be members of the

panels. Chairs do have a formal role however in co-ordinating the work of their own committees and in their capacity as members of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Group of scrutiny committee chairs and deputy chairs. This latter Group plans and monitors the development of scrutiny generally and meets monthly. Evidence from other similar authorities showed Oxfordshire's allowance for Scrutiny Chairs (Chairmen) to be the lowest. The average from the family of similar authorities was £6,973 (double that for Oxfordshire).

39. The role of Deputy Scrutiny Chairs (Chairmen) was much more difficult to assess. Some Councillors voiced concern that the work of Deputy Scrutiny Chairs (Chairmen) was not onerous enough to merit a special responsibility allowance. We pursued this further in interviews. It appeared that the degree to which Chairs relied on their Deputies varied. Some Councillors said that the role of Deputies was not so different from that of Third Party Spokespersons, who up to now have not received an allowance. Again, we believe that we would have been aided considerably in our assessment of this matter if there had been a role description stating the Council's understanding as to the function of Deputy Chairs (Chairmen). In the absence of such a description, we are faced with conflicting views as to the significance of this position and have made our own assessment of the demands of the job. We have nevertheless recommended elsewhere in this report that such a profile be adopted at the earliest opportunity. Of nine other authorities within the "family" of similar County Councils, five did not give an allowance to the position of Deputy Scrutiny Chairs and one did not have such a position at all. Oxfordshire is therefore somewhat unusual in having a payment for this position.
40. From the evidence we have considered, we are clear that Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) do have a function within the Constitution of the Council for aiding the Chair in determining the business for, and chairing, meetings: the position is therefore significant enough to merit a SRA. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, however, (e.g from role descriptions and annual reporting on performance), we believe that the significance of the role is not so great as we had previously judged.
41. It remains our view that a well-managed and effective scrutiny function is essential to the good performance of the Council. The Chairs of scrutiny committees – within their own meetings and as part of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Group – have an important role to play. We consider that the Scrutiny function in Oxfordshire County Council is still evolving and we will want to revisit any allowances we recommend to ensure that remuneration continues to be applied where the burdens most clearly fall.
42. Our recommendation for Scrutiny Chairs (Chairmen) is therefore that the SRA be increased to a value equivalent to three-quarters of a Basic Allowance: this would represent an uplift in real terms (based on an uplifted Basic Allowance) and would bring this allowance into line with regional comparators. Our recommendation for Deputy Scrutiny Chairs (Chairmen) is that the allowance should be reduced and that it should represent one-seventh of a Basic Allowance.

We RECOMMEND that each Chair(man) of a Scrutiny Committee should receive a Special Responsibility Allowance of £5,250. [Previous allowance: £3,000]

We RECOMMEND that each Deputy Chair(man) of the six Scrutiny Committees be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1,000. [Previous allowance: £2,000]

Chair(man) of the Planning & Regulation Committee

43. The Planning & Regulation Committee is a 15 member committee dealing with a range of quasi-judicial non-Executive regulatory functions. It meets every six weeks and carries a heavy workload requiring occasional site visits (of, possibly, a day's duration). There are specific requirements for the Chairman and members to be trained 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 had previously equated the allowances for this committee to those of a Deputy Scrutiny Chair. Having assessed the work of the Chair/Deputy of this Committee and having revised our view of the role of Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of Scrutiny, we have now departed from this view: the demands of this Committee are clearly greater than our previous linkage allowed. We considered it appropriate that the SRA for the Chair(man) of this Committee should be one-third of a Basic Allowance and that for the Deputy Chair(man) should be one-sixth of a Basic Allowance.

We RECOMMEND that the Chair(man) of the Planning & Regulation Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £2,333. [Previous allowance: £2,000]

We RECOMMEND that the Deputy Chair(man) of the Planning & Regulation Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1,167. [Previous allowance: £1,000]

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

46. We noted that, as with the Planning & Regulation Committee, the Best Value Committee meets on a six-weekly basis. It comprises nine members and three co-opted members and has 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. Previously we equated the overall burdens on the Chair(man) and Deputy Chair(man) of this Committee with those of their colleagues in the chair of the Planning & Regulation Committee. We believe that this continues to be the case.

We RECOMMEND that the Chair(man) of the Best Value Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £2,333. [Previous allowance: £2,000]

We RECOMMEND that the Deputy Chair(man) of the Best Value Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1,167. [Previous allowance: £1,000]

Chair (Chairman) of the Pension Fund Committee

49. The Pension Fund Committee is responsible for the management of Oxfordshire's pension fund, a not inconsiderable responsibility. We received evidence that this Committee has in fact met with the same frequency as the Best Value and Planning & Regulation Committees and has similarly performed an important non-executive responsibility. We considered that the current SRAs for the Chair(man) and Deputy Chair(man) should be increased accordingly and that they should equate to our recommended SRAs for the Best Value and Planning & Regulation Committees.
50. We did consider whether there should be a separate SRA for the role of Chairing the Pension Benefits Sub-Committee. We decided against this as it was our view that the responsibilities in connection with the Sub-Committee flowed from the Pension Fund Committee itself.

We RECOMMEND that the Chair(man) of the Pension Fund Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £2,333. [Previous allowance: £1,000]

We RECOMMEND that the Deputy Chair(man) of the Pension Fund Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1,167. [Previous allowance: £500]

Chair (Chairman) of the Standards Committee and the Democracy & Organisation Committee

51. We noted the work of these committees whose purpose was to deal with matters that fall outside the remit of the Executive:
- **Standards Committee:** the Council's Standards Committee comprises six councillors plus two co-opted members; its function is to exercise the statutory functions relating to the local Code of Conduct and related issues. We note that it meets twice a year unless occasion demands that it meet to consider a particular case or issue in the meantime.
 - **Democracy & Organisation Committee:** this Committee exercises functions relating to the electoral process, personnel and (through panels and sub-committees) appeals and appointments. It meets twice yearly and additionally as required.

52. Given that these committees carry out specific functions of the County Council we consider that it is appropriate that the chairing of them should merit SRAs. However, as their frequency has not been great, we judge that there is no compelling reason to amend the existing level of allowances. We therefore recommend that the SRAs for the Chairs (Chairmen) and Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of these committees remain at their present levels.

We RECOMMEND that the Chairs (Chairmen) of the Standards Committee and the Democracy & Organisation Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1,000 each. [Previous allowance: £1,000]

We RECOMMEND that Deputy Chairs(men) of these committees be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £500 each. [Previous allowance: £500]

Third Party Spokespersons

53. It is a feature of this Council's political management that each of the Committees mentioned in this report is organised through an informal "tripartite" arrangement. That is to say, each Committee has a Chair (Chairman), a Deputy Chair (Chairman) and a Third Party Spokesperson. This latter position is not specified in the Council's Constitution and has not been previously considered by this Panel. The Third Party Spokesperson is nominated by the party which does not hold either the Chair or Deputy Chair of the particular committee.
54. We learned that Chairs of Committees often consult their Deputies and the Spokespersons about issues of agenda and meeting management or issues likely to be of political concern. Political Groups might then expect to receive a report from their Spokespersons about the work of the committee. Apart from these general observations, however, we received no clear impressions about the workload involved although several of the interviewees were disposed to approve an allowance for this role. Again, there was no role description to aid our consideration. It was evident, however, that Third Party Spokespersons did perform a role of greater significance than that of ordinary members of the committees. We therefore decided that it would be unfair not to recognise the commitment required in this position. Clearly the role was not equivalent to that of the Deputy Chair (Chairman) as the Third Party Spokesperson would not be required to chair the meeting. The allowance would therefore need to be lower than that for Deputy Chairs (Chairmen). We considered that, in any case, it was appropriate to offer only a nominal allowance at this stage. We have therefore recommended that Third Party Spokespersons receive a SRA amounting to a half of that afforded to the Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of the relevant committee. With the adoption of role descriptions and annual reporting, we would hope that any need to revise the allowance would become apparent.

We RECOMMEND that Third Party Spokespersons of Council committees be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of one-half of that provided to the Deputy Chairs (Chairmen) of the relevant committees in addition to their Basic Allowance. [No previous allowance]

Chair(man) of the Council

55. The Chairman of the Council fulfils a central role within the Council. As Chair of the formal Council meetings, the Chairman presides over budget-setting and policy discussions. Council still continues to meet six times a year and more frequently as necessary. In addition the role continues to involve extensive civic/ceremonial duties. This latter element can take up a good degree of time. This was borne out by the diary of events undertaken by the Chairman of the Council throughout 2002.
56. We found it significant that all of the interviewees (albeit including a former Chairman of the Council) expressed the view that the current Chairman's allowances was low. We looked at the allowances paid to Chairmen by the family of similar authorities. Again Oxfordshire's allowance (£2,000) was by far the lowest. The nearest was £6,000 (Wiltshire), the highest £20,441 (West Sussex). The average was £10,241 – five times that of Oxfordshire. Against this, we again 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. Also, it is the case that while the civic/ceremonial role does usually involve numerous engagements, these can provide a degree of social reward.
57. We noted in our original recommendations of 2001 that we wished to review the allowance made to the Chairman in the light of actual experience under the new arrangements. We consider that it would have helped us understand more fully the Council's expectations of the Chairman of the Council if there had been an agreed profile of the role itself. Nevertheless, from the evidence available to date it is our view that the Chairman's allowance is in need of a significant increase. We have therefore recommended that the Chair (Chairman) receive a SRA equivalent to a Basic Allowance.
58. We considered that the Vice-Chair(man)'s allowance also needed revision, although for differing reasons. Vice-Chairs (Chairmen) deputise for the Chairman both in terms of chairing meetings of Council and in attending civic engagements. It is also the case that past chairs (chairmen) are called upon to attend certain civic engagements. We believed that the allowance for the Vice-Chair (Chairman) should therefore be reduced to one quarter of a Basic Allowance i.e. a quarter of that provided to the Chair (Chairman).

We RECOMMEND that the Vice-Chair(man) of the Council be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £7,000. [Previous allowance: £2,000]

We RECOMMEND that the Vice-Chair(man) of the Council be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1,750. [Previous allowance: £1,000]

Leader of the Opposition

59. We noted that 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 (as it is in Parliament). While the Scrutiny function performs the formal role of challenging the Executive, 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 saw no reason to alter our view that an effective Leader of the Opposition needs 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.
60. As in 2001, we received comments from some members that the position of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition should also be remunerated. We have not been convinced by this.

61. We further considered that the role of Leader of the Opposition was wholly distinct from the 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 and should not therefore be remunerated. This includes, in our view, the position of Deputy Leader of the Opposition. It remains our view that without any compelling evidence to the contrary it would be inappropriate to allow a further SRA in addition to that already afforded to the Leader of the Opposition.

We RECOMMEND that the Leader of the Opposition be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance, in addition to the Basic Allowance, of £10,500. [Previous allowance: £6,000]

General matters

62. 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.
63. 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.

Dependants' Carers' Allowances

64. Councillors’ responses to the questionnaire on allowances unanimously supported the continuation of the allowances to cover the costs of childcare and the care of dependants. We heard that only one Councillor had made use of these allowances since their inception. Nevertheless, we remain of the view that the provision of childcare and dependant carers’ allowances is right 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.
65. We looked at the rates agreed by the county’s five District Councils. These were roughly equivalent to those we recommended in 2001. Opinion from County Councillors showed satisfaction with the existing levels. We also received information from the Council’s Social & Health Care Directorate as to the rates that the authority expected to pay locally - £3 per hour (Childcare) and an average of £14.85 for the care of dependants. We therefore considered it appropriate to leave the present levels unchanged.

We RECOMMEND

- (1) **that Childcare and Dependant 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 Dependant 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 [Previous allowance: £5]

Dependant Care - £15 per hour [Previous allowance: £15]

Co-optees’ allowance

66. The Regulations also introduced the possibility for Council’s to provide the co-opted members of its committees with an allowance for attendance at “conferences and meetings”. We were provided with information as to the number of co-opted members and the bodies/organisations (if any) which they represented. It was the Panel’s role to determine

whether such an allowance should be payable and, if so, the level of the allowance. The Government's Guidance (paragraph 81) indicated that "some element of the contribution...should be voluntary". The over-riding concern in the Guidance was that non-councillors should be encouraged to participate in local government and that they should not be financially disadvantaged by their civic activity. We expressed the concern that some co-optees would probably already get payment for their service on the committee from the body/organisation that they represented. In the end, we were not persuaded that there was any clear case for establishing a co-optees' allowance.

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

Pensions

67. The new Regulations introduced the potential for councillors' allowances to be pensionable through the Local Government Pension Scheme. The Panel's role was to make recommendations as to which members should be entitled to pensions and whether Basic Allowance and/or Special Responsibility Allowances should be pensionable. The Regulations made it clear that councils could not allow entry to the pension scheme to anyone who had not first been recommended by the Panel. We therefore considered the subject very carefully.
68. The majority of those members giving a view on the subject said that all members should be eligible for pensions on the grounds of equity. In interviews, some members expressed the view that the provision of pensions could also be an encouragement to younger people to consider standing as councillors.
69. On balance, we decided that all members should be eligible for entry into the Local Government Pension Scheme and that this should be on the basis of both their Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances. It would then be for each member to decide whether or not it was personally advantageous to join.

We RECOMMEND that all members of the Council be made eligible for inclusion in the Local Government Pension Scheme and that both Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances be pensionable.

Indexation

70. 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). We therefore looked at information as to the indices that might be appropriate to members' allowance, including the Retail Price Index, the Average Earnings Index and the percentage increase to local government officers' pay. We also received information as to the index (if any) that had been adopted by the family of similar authorities. In the latter case, it appeared that most had opted to link allowances to the percentage increase in local government officers' pay. We too were of the view that this was the most obvious and relevant index.

We RECOMMEND:

- (1) **that the Council's Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances 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;**
- (2) **that the effect of the provision in (1) above be reviewed within three years of its introduction.**

Backdating of allowances

71. The Regulations also made it possible for Councils to decide whether, if amendments were made to a scheme of allowances, the payment of the amended allowances should be backdated.
72. We could see no reason for adopting such an arrangement with regard to the allowances and rates recommended in this report. We therefore point to our recommendation at Paragraph 84 concerning the date upon which we believe the revised rates and allowances should become effective.

Travelling and Subsistence Allowances

73. Since we last considered allowances in 2001, the law has changed to make councils responsible for determining the levels of travel and subsistence allowances and the duties for which they should be applicable. Previously the levels were set by the relevant Secretary of State. The Panel therefore had the role of making recommendations to the Council on both these matters.
74. We specifically looked at the travel and subsistence arrangements adopted in the five Oxfordshire District Councils (this gave a local overview and was also pertinent given that a number of County Councillors are also District Council members) and those adopted by the family of similar county councils. We were also conscious from our previous review that many members had concerns about travel within their own divisions, particularly to parish and town council meetings. We therefore obtained the advice of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and were informed that it would be in order for constituency travel to parish and town council meetings to be included within the Council's scheme of allowances.
75. We also considered whether several other duties performed by Councillors should be eligible for travel and subsistence allowances. We shared members' views that some flexibility was required in the scheme of allowances to match the flexibility that the political management arrangements require Councillors themselves to exhibit. We therefore took note of the following activities:
 - (a) **Attendance at parish and town council meetings:** we were convinced that attendance at parish/town council meetings was virtually expected of those members who had such councils in their divisions. It seemed to us right that members should be able to claim travel and subsistence allowances for such journeys.
 - (b) **Meetings with officers for bona fide constituency business:** we learned that members often need to meet officers in order to resolve aspects of members' casework and constituency business. We believed that, subject to detailed definition, members should be able to claim travel allowances for these purposes
 - (c) **Attendance at duly authorised seminars and events:** the Council provides members with a programme of development opportunities and facilitates attendance at seminars and conferences. In our view it is important that members develop their skills and that they are encouraged to do so. Extending travel and subsistence allowances for this purpose is wholly appropriate.
 - (d) **Meetings/interviews to which members are specifically invited:** members are occasionally asked by officers to take part in interviews for the purpose of reviewing aspects of the political management arrangements or indeed during such reviews as the present. They are also invited to specific meetings or occasions for the purpose of eliciting their comments or views. It seems to us only fair that members are not left out of pocket as a result of such exercises and that travel and subsistence allowances should be available for these purposes.
 - (e) **Activities of Public Service Agreement (PSA) Champions:** we learned that the Council has appointed twelve non-Executive members to be "PSA Champions" to be responsible for the various "Public Service Agreements" that the Council has entered into with the Government. Under these agreements, the Council has committed itself to meeting certain service targets in return for which the Council has been provided with pump priming money with the added incentive of receiving up to £11 million

further funding if the targets are met. Job descriptions had been agreed for these roles but the positions have yet to be developed. We did not have sufficient evidence to warrant recommending SRAs for these posts at this time. We did wish however to recognise the potential importance of the Champions' activities by including them within the scope of travel and subsistence allowances. The Champions will need to meet officers and Executive colleagues in pursuance of their work and we felt it appropriate that this should be recompensed.

76. We did have concerns that one particular activity should no longer be allowed to attract a travel allowance; namely, attendance at political group meetings. Currently, the Council allows each member to claim travel (not subsistence) allowances for attendance at up to sixteen political group meetings per year. It is our understanding that the relevant Regulations do not in fact permit the continued payment of travel allowances for this purpose. Even if they did, it is our firm view that the payment of travel allowances for the attendance of political group meetings is wholly inappropriate. Some may argue that political group meetings are an integral mechanism through which the Council manages its business. It has been our consistent view, however - expressed elsewhere in this report (Paragraph 61) - that the organisation of party politics comes within the voluntary aspect of a member's service and should not be remunerated by the public. Our reading of the Regulations and our view on the organisation of party politics therefore leads us to recommend that attendance at political group meetings should no longer be regarded as an approved duty for the purposes of travel allowances.
77. In determining the levels of allowances to be paid, we considered options for banding the travel allowances - dividing the county into "zones" - but found it difficult to determine a formula that would continue to provide equitable, across-the-board remuneration. We therefore came to the conclusion that a system based on 'per mile' rates and claims was the best way forward. It appeared to us that the most sensible solution would be to apply to members the same travel and subsistence levels that currently apply to officers. This would also include travel by bicycle.
78. We were however very mindful that any system of travel and subsistence allowances should be open, accountable and also simple to administer. We heard that the County Treasurer's staff had often had difficulty in assessing whether claims submitted by members were in fact "approved duties" under the terms of the scheme and had spent a disproportionate amount of time seeking confirmation of actual attendance at the relevant events. We trust that our recommendations for additional approved duties in Paragraph 75 can be so defined in the actual scheme of allowances that the task of assessing claims becomes easier. Greater clarity will help both members and officers. Indeed, it is our view that claims for allowances should only be entertained if the Council can ensure that eligibility is sufficiently defined and that audit trails are sufficiently established. It seems to us quite clear that if members forget to submit their claims, do not submit them in the relevant manner or do not provide the relevant receipts, then payments should not be made.
79. We are therefore of the view that members themselves need to be prompt and well-organised in respect of submitting their claims. We think it would be beneficial to introduce a time limit within which such claims must be made. This is currently the case for carers' allowances, which must be claimed within two months of the expenditure having been incurred. We recommend that this provision be extended to cover travel and subsistence allowances generally.

We RECOMMEND:

- (1) **that the Council adopts, for members, the travel and subsistence scheme that is applicable to officers;**
- (2) **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;**

(3) that the Council's list of Eligible Duties for the purposes of travel and subsistence allowances continue as existing with the following amendments:

(i) the addition of:

- (a) attendance by a member at parish and town council meetings within the relevant member's divisions;
- (b) activities undertaken by the twelve Public Service Agreement Champions in pursuance of the tasks described in the relevant role profiles;
- (c) meetings with officers undertaken by members in pursuance of bona fide constituency business, subject to detailed definition and provided only that open, accountable and simple administrative procedures can be established;
- (d) attendance at duly authorised seminars and training events;
- (e) attendance at other meetings/interviews which members are specifically invited or requested to attend by officers in connection with Council business;

(ii) the deletion of attendance at political group meetings.

Accountability – role descriptions and annual reports

80. Independent Remuneration Panels exist to help give greater transparency and accountability to local government. In assessing the appropriate level of allowances, Panels must consider the roles that councillors perform. Panels must therefore make a judgement as to whether the roles and activities are real and whether the remuneration recommended is appropriate. It is legitimate for Panels to be concerned that information on councillors' roles, and members' performance of them, is available.
81. We have made our view clear at various points in this report that the adoption by the Council of role descriptions describing the work of councillors would be very beneficial: it would certainly assist us in our work and we consider this to be a sufficient reason for their adoption. However, we also believe that they would give members themselves, and the public they serve, much greater clarity as to what is expected of them and so would contribute to openness and accountability generally. They would also provide prospective councillors with a clearer understanding of what becoming a County Councillor in Oxfordshire would involve. This can only be good for local democracy.
82. We are also of the view that the Council should adopt the practice of annual reporting by all members of Council on their activities. This would give a much clearer picture of the roles members perform and would provide a further means by which the outworking of the Council's political management and community representation could be assessed, by this Panel and by the public. These could be in a standard format and could then be published, for example on the Council's website. We have seen examples of such reports from other authorities and note that other Independent Remuneration Panels have similarly requested that such report-making be adopted.
83. We are therefore very clear in our view that the Council should adopt both role descriptions and the practice of publishing annual reports and would hope that this can be done within the current Council year.

We RECOMMEND

- (1) that the Council adopts role profiles describing all the roles that County Councillors perform within this authority;
- (2) that the Council adopts the practice of annual reporting by each member of Council on their Council year and that such reports are published.

Commencement

84. It is our view that, if practical administratively, the revised rates and allowances recommended in this report be adopted from 1 October 2003.

We RECOMMEND that the revised rates and allowances recommended in this report be effective from 1 October 2003 or as soon as administratively practicable thereafter.

Conclusion

85. 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 not taken account of any political or budgetary considerations. The allowances we have recommended represent, in general terms, an increase on previous years yet they are not high. Members in similar authorities in the South East have afforded themselves much higher remuneration. By contrast Oxfordshire County Council has for many years set a low level of allowances. In our present review we believe we have begun to address this disparity. Under our recommendations, Oxfordshire County Council's allowances would still be below the average for similar authorities and the Council does need to consider our present and future recommendations in this context.
86. Nevertheless, we do believe that the allowances we have recommended represent a better standard of remuneration for the roles members currently perform in Oxfordshire. The adoption of role descriptions and annual reporting would assist us in keeping track of members' workloads and their performance. It is important that these are monitored to ensure that remuneration continues to be fair. Clearly, if new posts are created within the management arrangements or if any significant alterations occur to the workload of existing postholders, then we would want to meet to consider such matters. We would be happy to do so should the occasion arise.

SIR PETER NORTH
Chairman
Independent Remuneration Panel for Oxfordshire County Council.