

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES
Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel
to Oxfordshire County Council, December 2014

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

- A. The Independent Remuneration Panel has now carried out a full review of the County Council's scheme of members' allowances and this report sets out the Panel's recommendations. The reasoning behind the recommendations is set out in the subsequent paragraphs of this report.
- B. 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.
- C. In summary, our view is that the current levels of allowances are, in the main, too low having regard both to the time and workload involved and, crucially, as a means of encouraging a more diverse range of people to consider becoming county councillors in Oxfordshire. Clearly, allowances cannot be the only means of overcoming obstacles to wider democratic representation; however, they are an element. We consider our recommendations to be appropriate to the roles actually performed by county councillors in the service of the people of Oxfordshire.

Principles Adopted

- D. This was the first full review since January 2011 and as such we considered this to be an opportunity to reset the entire scheme by looking at each element afresh. We were aware that, over recent years, Oxfordshire has fallen significantly behind comparator councils, indicating that general levels of allowances are too low having regard to the nature of the roles, workloads and responsibilities of members. We were also aware that over a number of years, in the light of financial constraints, allowances had been delivered largely within the same budgetary amount.
- E. We were also particularly mindful, and heard from many councillors, that part of the purpose of an allowances scheme is to encourage a diverse range of people to consider standing as councillors and undertaking responsible positions once elected. This is in the interests of a healthy democracy.
- F. On this occasion, therefore, we decided to look objectively at the appropriate level for allowances with affordability being only one element of that decision rather than an overriding concern and one which is primarily for the Council to consider.
- G. The Panel's focus has been on reviewing the *roles* in question, within the Council's governance structure, and not on the persons occupying those roles.

- H. We decided against using the Basic Allowance as a multiplier in determining Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs). We heard and noted that the roles of chairmen of main committees should be regarded equally, as needing the same skill set and carrying an equivalent workload.
- I. We were also of the view, having heard comments and received feedback, that it is right that where a person is undertaking two or more distinct responsibilities, then he/she should receive each of the allowances for those roles. This is a significant change and differs from existing and previous practice. Where an individual is serving in more than one role, it is the Panel's view that he/she should receive the allowance for each role.

Recommendations

- (a) that the Basic Allowance payable to all councillors increase from £8,376 to £10,000;
- (b) that, in addition to the Basic Allowance, a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) be paid as follows:-

	Allowance	Proposed Allowance	Current Allowance
(i)	Leader of the Council	£29,000	£25,131
(ii)	Deputy Leader of the Council	£20,000	£16,754
(iii)	Cabinet Members	£16,000	£12,565
(iv)	Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees	£6,000	£5,050
(v)	Deputy Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees	No SRA	-
(vi)	Chairman of the Planning and Regulation Committee	£6,000	£5,050
(vii)	Deputy Chairman of the Planning and Regulation Committee	No SRA	£2,729
(viii)	Chairman of the Audit Committee	£6,000	£5,050
(ix)	Deputy Chairman of the Audit Committee	No SRA	-
(x)	Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee	£6,000	£5,050
(xi)	Deputy Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee	No SRA	-

(xii)	Chairman of Remuneration Committee	No SRA	-
(xiii)	Deputy Chairman of Remuneration Committee	No SRA	-
(xiv)	Chairman of the Council	£8,500	£8,377
(xv)	Vice-Chairman of the Council	£2,125	£2,094
(xvi)	Leader of the Opposition	£8,000	£12,565
(xvii)	Other Shadow Cabinet Members	£2,500	-
(xviii)	Third Party Leader	No SRA	-
(xix)	Locality Meeting Chairman	No change	£500
(xx)	Police and Crime Panel Member	No change	£1,515
(xxi)	Police and Crime Panel Chairman	No change	£3,500
(xxii)	Police and Crime Panel Vice-Chairman	No change	£3,030

- (c) the Council does not establish a general Co-optees' Allowance;
- (d) a Co-optees' Allowance continues to be payable to an independent co-opted member of the Audit & Governance Committee when the co-opted member serves as Chairman of the Audit Working Group;
- (e) 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;
- (f) that Child and Dependant Carer's Allowances be paid on the basis that:-
Members with care responsibilities in respect of dependent children under 16: or dependent adults certified by a doctor or social worker as needing attendance, will be reimbursed, on production of valid receipts, for actual payments to a carer while the member is on Council duties, up to a maximum of £6 per hour for each dependent child or £17 per hour for an adult. Money paid to a member of the claimant member's household will not be reimbursed;
- (g) the Council retains, 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;
- (h) 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;

- (i) list of Approved Duties include the capacity for leaders of a political group to claim for attending formal meetings of the Council, Cabinet and Committees for the purpose of keeping themselves informed of business;
- (j) the list of Approved Duties for the purpose of travel, subsistence and dependent care allowances continue and be agreed as set out in the attached Annex;
- (k) the amounts for Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowances and Co-optees' Allowances be rounded to the nearest pound following the application of any index.

THE PANEL'S REPORT

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 SRAs 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.
- 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
 - Mrs Olga Senior – the Public Sector
3. The Panel elected Mrs Olga Senior to be its 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
5. The County Council wished the Panel to undertake a comprehensive review of the Council's Scheme of Members' Allowances. This last occurred in 2010 and then, prior to that, in 2007. In short, it is a back-to-basics review of the basis of each strand of the Scheme as referred to in the introduction above.

The Panel's Work

6. We met as a Panel between August and November 2014 to carry out a review of the Council's allowances.
7. We met on three occasions – 26 August, 1 October and 8 October 2014 – to consider the issues and review the Council's allowances scheme generally. We met virtually on 22 October to agree a draft report and finally on 5 November to consider feedback from councillors on the draft recommendations.
8. 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
 - Responses to a questionnaire to Oxfordshire County Councillors seeking comments on the Council's allowances scheme
 - The County Council's political management structure
9. We also interviewed 17 members of the Council, seeking in our selection of interviewees to obtain a sample which was representative of the various roles performed by members. For the first time since 2003 this included backbench councillors to learn firsthand of their roles and experiences as councillors. The Panel also met with the Chief Executive and the County Solicitor & Monitoring Officer. The Panel considered these interviews to be an important source of information additional to the written submissions. The following members were interviewed on 1 October:
- Cllr David Bartholomew – backbench councillor
 - Cllr Liz Brighthouse – Opposition Leader and Chairman of Performance Scrutiny Committee
 - Cllr John Christie – Locality Chairman
 - Cllr Mrs Catherine Fulljames – Chairman of Planning & Regulation Committee
 - Cllr Mark Gray – Chairman of a Scrutiny Committee and Locality Chairman
 - Cllr Patrick Greene – Deputy Chairman of Pension Fund Committee
 - Cllr Peter Handley – backbench councillor and Military Champion
 - Cllr Zoé Patrick – Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group
 - Cllr Laura Price – backbench councillor
 - Cllr Rodney Rose – Deputy Leader of the Council
 - Cllr Roz Smith – backbench councillor
 - Cllr Lawrie Stratford – in his role as a former Chairman of a Scrutiny Committee
 - Cllr John Tanner – Locality Chairman
 - Cllr Michael Waine – Locality Chairman
10. The following members were interviewed on 8 October:
- Cllr Neville Harris – backbench councillor (Non-aligned Independent)
 - Cllr Ian Hudspeth – Leader of the Council
 - Cllr Charles Mathew – Locality Chairman
11. The questionnaire on members' allowances was sent to all 63 councillors by email. A paper copy was also available and 26 responses were returned for our consideration.
12. In addition we felt it important to attend a number of meetings in person to see how they worked in practice:
- Performance Scrutiny Committee - 26 September (Olga Senior)

- Locality Meeting (Oxford) – 13 October (Ian Barry)
- Locality Meeting (Wheatley) – 13 October (Jenny Armitstead)
- Locality Meeting (Abingdon) – 14 October (Olga Senior)
- Planning & Regulation Committee – 20 October (Jenny Armitstead)

Political Structure

13. 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 Independent Alliance 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 had changed with effect from May 2013, together with other changes to the governance arrangements such as the introduction of locality meetings. A number of more regulatory committees were also in operation to carry out statutory non-executive functions. All 63 members still met together as the Full 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.
14. We were therefore concerned in the current review to see if roles and responsibilities had changed, to gauge the time-commitment involved and to assess the level of remuneration appropriate to the responsibilities and work done by members.

REVIEW OF ALLOWANCES

Basic Allowance

15. 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.
16. 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 need to take into account the voluntary service principle as recommended in the statutory guidance.

What the Basic Allowance should cover

17. The Basic Allowance, in our view, is intended to recognise the many calls on a councillor's time including the costs associated with general constituency work. This includes the use of a councillor's home, telephone and household stationery (i.e. not that supplied by the Council) and travel to meet constituents and officers. In our view, it also covers attendance by members at political group meetings as well as the time commitment integral to serving as an ordinary member (or substitute) of a formal meeting of the Council. We noted that some members were unaware that they can claim for attendance at Parish Council meetings in their Division and suggest this be publicised.

Voluntary element

18. We still hold the view that a proportion of a councillor's time should continue to be voluntary and should not be remunerated. This view was overwhelmingly supported by the evidence from councillors. Since the Panel's first Review in 2001 it had been recommended that 40% of a member's time be considered voluntary and this was based on member's own views. However we found that this figure had effectively lost its meaning since that time. It is our view that while the role of county councillor contains an element of voluntary activity – such as the aspiration to serve and represent constituents in the community – it is no longer appropriate or feasible to try to quantify this. The pace of change and the immediacy of contemporary communication means that the demands of the role are ever more present. Consequently, no deduction has been used in the calculation of the allowances arrived at here or elsewhere in the report.

Determination of the level of Basic Allowance

19. Our starting point was to consider the evidence received from councillors in relation to the Basic Allowance. We heard from councillors across the board that the Basic Allowance was too low, principally in that it did not encourage people of working age to come forward as councillors and did not sufficiently recognize the potential implication that some people may need to reduce working hours in order to undertake the role of councillor. The role therefore currently attracted retired older people. This was evidenced by the average age of the Cabinet being 64.7 years. Addressing this democratic imbalance is, we feel, essential and realistic allowances are one way of doing so.
20. We next considered what changes had occurred since the last full review and the impact on councillors. Since January 2011 there were fewer councillors and there had been a considerable amount of change. The current website suggested that a councillor would work the equivalent of one day per week. We heard that 2 days would be a more realistic, basic representation of the time commitment. Several councillors in preparation for the review had kept a diary of hours worked and this ranged from 20 hours per week to 45 hours per week. Whilst accepting that there is an element of personal choice about the time commitment and even accepting that there is a public service element we are persuaded that the demands on councillors have grown since the last full review.

21. We then looked at the levels of Basic Allowance paid by comparator County Councils (in accordance with the principle at paragraph D on page 1), primarily in the South East but also other comparable County Councils across England. We found that Oxfordshire County Council had fallen behind the average and that an increase was essential to rebalance the allowance in order to attract a diverse range of people better reflecting Oxfordshire as a whole. We deemed that a Basic Allowance of £10,000 was closer to this average and was an appropriate increase sending a clear message about the importance of their work and an encouragement to a potential wider range of representation.

We RECOMMEND that the Basic Allowance payable to all councillors increase to £10,000.

Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA)

22. We then considered which posts should qualify for a SRA 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, 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.
24. We have considered the following positions within the Council's structure:
- i. Leader of the Council
 - ii. Deputy Leader of the Council
 - iii. Cabinet Members
 - iv. Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees
 - v. Deputy Chairman of Scrutiny Committees
 - vi. Chairman of the Planning & Regulation Committee
 - vii. Deputy Chairman of the Planning & Regulation Committee
 - viii. Chairman of the Audit & Governance Committee
 - ix. Deputy Chairman of the Audit & Governance Committee
 - x. Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee
 - xi. Deputy Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee
 - xii. Chairman of Remuneration Committee
 - xiii. Deputy Chairman of Remuneration Committee
 - xiv. Chairman of the Council
 - xv. Vice-Chairman of the Council
 - xvi. Leader of the Opposition
 - xvii. Other Shadow Cabinet Members
 - xviii. Third Party Leader
 - xix. Locality Meeting Chairman

- xx. Police and Crime Panel member
- xxi. Police and Crime Panel chairman
- xxii. Police and Crime Panel vice-chairman

Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council

25. We considered changes to the roles and responsibilities of the Leader and Deputy Leader since the last full review. We confirmed that they continued to hold their own portfolio responsibilities alongside the additional duties of a Leader and Deputy Leader. We heard from the Chief Executive about the changing face of local government and the growth of partnership working. An example was the significant spending with the National Health Service through pooled budgets. This increases the level of complexity involved and the roles of Leader and Deputy Leader are similar in terms of workload to those of senior management. We recognise that the complexity and work load means that these roles are, in practice, only capable of being carried out effectively on a full time basis. Whilst clear that the allowance is not a wage, we are concerned that the allowance paid should not be a barrier to attracting people to the role. Currently only those who are retired or able to afford it can take on these roles and this limits an already limited pool.
26. We considered the differential allowances paid to the Leader and the Deputy Leader and we continue to be of the view that the Leader's role carries more responsibility than that of the Deputy Leader and this is reflected in our recommendations.
27. We then looked at the levels of SRA paid to Leader and Deputy Leader by comparator County Councils primarily in the South East but also other comparable County Councils across England. We found that as with the Basic Allowance, Oxfordshire County Council was below the average. With the aim of resetting these allowances to reflect current workload and responsibilities, and with the objective of providing an allowance that encouraged progression to senior roles, we deemed that this average allowance was an appropriate level of remuneration.

We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance to the Leader of the Council be increased to £29,000;

We RECOMMEND that Special Responsibility Allowance to the Deputy Leader of the Council be increased to £20,000.

Other Cabinet Members

28. The consideration given to the Leader and Deputy Leader applied similarly to the role of Cabinet Members. We noted that it was difficult for any councillor in full time employment to take on a cabinet member role as evidenced by a recent resignation of a member of the cabinet. Again, although we consider that these posts should not be treated as a source of paid employment (a view supported by councillors) there is none the less a need to rebalance the

amount paid better to reflect the time commitment, workload and level of responsibility.

29. As with other posts we found that the SRA for Cabinet Members lagged below the county council comparator average and, as a starting point, considered an increase to that level. We also considered the level of the SRA against that of the Leader and Deputy Leader. In order to recognize the difference in workload and responsibility between the Leader and Deputy Leader and Cabinet Members, we have suggested an allowance slightly below the average.

We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance to Cabinet members be increased to £16,000.

Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees

30. We noted that the new arrangements had been in place since May 2013 with two Scrutiny Committees and a Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. I attended the meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee on 26 September and noted the breadth of the agenda covered and the considerable skills shown by the Chairman to make best use of the time at her disposal, drawing out individual views whilst focusing the Committee on the main business.
31. We interviewed two Scrutiny Chairmen and a former Scrutiny Chairman and heard that all three meetings now had a considerable outside focus given the changed working environment of local government. We heard for example that much of the service provision is delivered by outside contractors and additional time and effort is required to ensure that they can be scrutinised effectively. All three councillors stressed that planning with officers was key to the successful meetings.
32. We confirm our previous view that Scrutiny Chairman should receive a SRA and we considered the comparator information and in common with the posts above consider that the allowance should be increased in line with the comparator average.
33. In our previous review we recommended that where the Chairman of the Performance Scrutiny Committee was also the Leader of the Opposition, only the highest allowance be paid as the two roles were seen as complementary. Having seen the role of Chairman in action, we appreciate the two distinct roles and in line with principle of paying an allowance for each separate responsibility undertaken (see paragraph 1 on page 2), we are recommending that the allowance to the Chairman of the Performance Scrutiny Committee be paid in addition to any allowance for the post of Opposition Leader.
34. We received no representations that an additional allowance be paid to the Deputy Chairman of Scrutiny Committees. We consider that the responsibilities of the Deputy Chairmen of the Committee are not onerous and that no SRA is needed.

We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance for each Chairman of a Scrutiny Committee be increased to £6,000.

Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Planning and Regulation Committee

35. This 12 member committee deals with a range of quasi-judicial non-Executive regulatory functions. It meets every six weeks and in addition there are site visits. We interviewed the Chairman of the Planning & Regulation Committee. We note that the post of the Chairman of the Planning & Regulation Committee needs to be knowledgeable on technical issues, and able to deal with contentious issues. The Chairman expressed satisfaction with the current allowance and as someone who had previously been a Deputy Chairman commented that in her view the role of Deputy Chairman was not particularly onerous, being a support role to the Chairman; and that the Deputy Chairman had only infrequently needed to take the chair. We heard that there was very little additional preparation needed by the Deputy Chairman over and above that as a Committee member. No strong views were expressed by the current Deputy Chairman over the continued existence of the allowance.
36. We considered whether the responsibilities and workload of the post of Chairman required a different allowance to that of the Scrutiny Chairmen and we consider the two posts to be comparable and therefore recommend that the same allowance be paid.
37. We looked at the comparator information and noted that of 10 other authorities 7 did not give an allowance to the Deputy Chairman. In light of this, and with the views of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman, we consider that no allowance is required for this post.

We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairman of the Planning & Regulation Committee be increased to £6,000;

We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Deputy Chairman of Planning & Regulation Committee be removed and no allowance paid.

Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Audit & Governance Committee

38. This 10 member committee (including a co-opted representative of the business community) is responsible for seeing that good governance is maintained, with a strong system of internal control and risk management through the audit function. It meets 6 times a year and there is required training for all members throughout the year. In addition to the meetings there are monthly Audit Working Group meetings.

39. In the last review we considered the changes to the scope of the Committee with the addition of governance functions and also noted that its work was complementary to that of the Performance Scrutiny Committee. We still consider that the work of the Chairman of the Audit & Governance Committee is comparable with that of a Scrutiny Chairman and therefore recommend that the same allowance be paid.
40. No representations were received that the duties of the Deputy Chairman are onerous and we consider that that no allowance is required for this post.

We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairman of the Audit & Governance Committee be increased to £6,000;

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

Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee

41. This 11 member committee including two district councillors deals with matters relating to the local government pension scheme Pension Fund. It meets 4 times per year and there is required training for members throughout the year.
42. We are still of the view that due to the specialist nature of the work involved in chairing this meeting and in keeping abreast of pension issues, that the role of the Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee is comparable with that of a Scrutiny Chairman and therefore recommend that the same SRA be paid.
43. We next considered whether it was appropriate for there to be an allowance to the Deputy Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee. We received written representations and interviewed the current Deputy Chairman. The argument was made strongly that the role of the Deputy Chairman involved the same level of work as that of the Chairman as he had to be prepared to stand in for the Chairman at any time. The Deputy Chairman attended various briefings and training to fulfill the role and had to read all the considerable papers.
44. We are not convinced that it requires a similar time commitment to that of the Chairman although we fully accept that the individual councillor concerned chooses to put in a great deal of effort. We do note that all members should be reading the papers prior to the meeting and that, in practice, the Deputy Chairman has not had to take the chair. We consider that the role of the Deputy Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee is comparable to that of the Deputy Chairman of Scrutiny and other Committees and so do not recommend that an allowance be paid.

We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee be increased to £6,000;

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

Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council

45. We noted that there had been no change to the roles and responsibilities of these posts. We received no representations about the level of the allowance for these roles and saw no logic to maintaining the previous link to the Basic Allowance. We consider that the current allowance is appropriate and therefore are recommending only a minor uplift to round the figure.
46. The Deputy Chairman's previous allowance was also linked to Basic Allowance and we consider it makes more sense to link it to the allowance paid to the Chairman. We established that the Deputy Chairman acts in a support capacity covering those duties that the Chairman is unable to attend and may attend events on 2 or 3 days per week, less than the Chairman who may have daily duties. We consider an allowance set at a quarter of the Chairman's allowance to be appropriate.

We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairman of the Council be increased to £8,500;

We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Deputy Chairman of the Council be increased to £2,125.

Other meetings – Remuneration Committee, Health and Wellbeing Board, Cabinet Advisory Groups, Transport Advisory Panel

47. For the avoidance of doubt, it is our view that as the chairmanship of these bodies is carried out by either the Leader or a relevant Cabinet Member, no specific SRA is necessary as the performance of these roles, not significant in themselves, is covered within the existing SRAs for the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Members. We saw no evidence or call for this to be changed.

Leader of the Opposition

48. We still consider that an effective Leader of the Opposition is essential to the democratic accountability of the Council. As such, the Leader of the Opposition needs to invest significant time and effort in keeping abreast of the work of Cabinet, Scrutiny and the Council as a whole, which has a public benefit. The role is significant, constitutional and integral to the democratic checks and balances within the Council. We noted as part of the last review that governance arrangements are now of a more consensual and partnership-led nature and recognise that this also makes demands on the Leader of the Opposition.
49. Previously we considered that the allowance be set at the same level as that of the Cabinet Member. Having regard to the demands of the role, we consider that it does not carry the equivalent responsibility of a Cabinet

Member and that there should be a differential between the allowances relevant to each position. In addition, we have reconsidered the involvement and support provided by Shadow Cabinet Members (see paragraphs 51 and 52 below) and we have taken this into account when setting an appropriate level. We have also been mindful that in recent years, the SRA for the Leader of the Opposition has been higher than average against comparator authorities. As such we recommend that a SRA for the Leader of the Opposition be £8,000 which is in line with the average allowance paid by comparable county councils.

50. However, in our previous review, we stipulated that where the role of Chairman of the Performance Scrutiny Committee is carried out by the Opposition Leader as an integral part of that role, the Opposition Leader should receive only the higher allowance. We have reconsidered this position in line with our principle at paragraph 1 on page 2, and believe that it is fairer to consider and remunerate the two posts separately. Elsewhere we have recommended an allowance for the Chairman of Performance Scrutiny Committee of £6,000 and therefore, to take account of this in the workload and responsibility of the Opposition Leader when he/she acts as Chairman of this Committee, we recommend that he/she receives both.

We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Leader of the Opposition be £8,000

Other Members of the Shadow Cabinet

51. We received a number of representations in writing and in person asking that we reconsider the recommendation made in the last review to remove the allowance to the Shadow Cabinet Members. It was strongly argued that consensual politics did not reduce the amount of work and the significant role of the opposition but rather increased the responsibility on them to be a strong and well informed opposition.
52. We recognise the formal constitutional role played by Shadow Cabinet Members and accept the argument that, together with the Leader of the Opposition, they are an important part of the democratic checks and balances within the Council. We recommend that the allowance be restored at its previous level.

We RECOMMEND that a Special Responsibility allowance be paid for Shadow Cabinet Members of £2,500.

Locality Meeting Chairman

53. We interviewed six locality chairmen and we each attended a locality meeting. We accept the post is seen as an important role by councillors. We do not yet consider it to be comparable in terms of responsibility with other Chairman roles as it is not a decision making body. We consider that the current allowance is appropriate but note that this is an area where the roles and

responsibilities may develop further in the next few years and that the effort and commitment of the locality chairmen will be important in developing the work of these meetings. As such, you may wish to ask us to consider this again in the future.

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Locality Meeting Chairman.

Police and Crime Panel

54. We noted that there had been no changes to the roles and responsibilities for these posts and received no representations that the level of allowance was not appropriate.
55. In making the recommendations below we consider that only one of the allowances should be payable at any one time on the understanding that the person appointed as the Council's representative on the Police and Crime Panel will only serve in one capacity (i.e. as an ordinary member or as vice-chairman or as chairman).

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Council member on the Police & Crime Panel;

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance if the Council Member is appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Police & Crime Panel;

We RECOMMEND that no change be made to the Special Responsibility Allowance if the Council Member is appointed as Chairman of the Police & Crime Panel.

Third Party Leader

56. Currently no allowance is paid for the role of leader of the third party group. We considered whether this should change. We noted that the role, unlike that of Leader of the Opposition, does not have a formal basis in the Council's Constitution; we consider that to be significant. We heard from the current holder of this role, in writing and in person. We noted that the Leader of the Council involves the Third Party Leader in informal, regular meetings with the two other main party leaders. We note, too, that some comparator authorities have begun to pay SRAs for the third party group leader role; this is not yet widespread.
57. We also heard that the Third Party Group Leader, currently overseeing a group of 11 members, acquaints herself with the business of the Council in order to ensure informed and targeted contributions from her members, in addition to the perspective gained by them as members of committees. We do recognise that there is a democratic legitimacy to any group leader within the Council informing his/herself by attending (as an observer) formal meetings of the Council to keep abreast of issues and debates.

58. However, we consider that to be different from the formal constitutional responsibility to hold the administration to account which falls to the Opposition. As such, we are not convinced that the role of a Third Party Leader is sufficiently constitutionally embedded to warrant a formal SRA and that the day to day management of a political group is not itself a matter requiring remuneration. We are of the mind, though, that it is important to democracy that any political group leader should receive travel and subsistence allowances for attending formal meetings to keep themselves informed. We address that point below in paragraphs 65-68.
59. For now, we recommend that a SRA is not appropriate for the Third Party Group Leader.

We RECOMMEND that no Special Responsibility Allowances be paid for the role of the Third Party Group Leader.

Child and Dependants' Carers' Allowances

60. We noted that very few claims are made for these allowances but see the continuation of the allowance as part of a package of measures (including the increase in the basic allowance), to encourage younger people and those with young families or care responsibilities to come forward. We suggest that the Council consider publicising the measures prior to the next council elections and also consider how the business of the Council is conducted to try to remove other barriers to participation. For example we heard from some councillors that the timing of all meetings during the day creates problems.
61. We looked at information on the cost of child care and adult care and the level is set so as not to deter people from claiming. We continue to be of the view that claims should be accompanied by receipts.

We RECOMMEND that Child and Dependant Carer's Allowances continue to be paid on the basis that:-

Members with care responsibilities in respect of dependent children under 16: or dependent adults certified by a doctor or social worker as needing attendance, will be reimbursed, on production of valid receipts, for actual payments to a carer while the Member is on Council duties, up to a maximum of £6 per hour for each dependent child or £17 per hour for an adult. Money paid to a member of the claimant Member's household will not be reimbursed.

Co-optees' Allowance

62. 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.

63. We remain of the view that the independent member of the Audit & Governance 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 & Governance 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 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 be increased to £6,000.

Indexation

64. A council can apply an index to their allowances and in such a circumstance, if the only change each year is the application of the index then the Council does not formally need to adopt a scheme of allowances each year. We have for some years recommended linking members' allowances to the local government pay award for Oxfordshire County Council staff. We believe this is still appropriate particularly in the current economic climate.

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 Local Government Pay Award for staff and that this should take effect from the date on which the award for staff similarly takes effect.

Travelling and Subsistence Allowances

65. The Panel did not receive any strong views that the current basis of travel and subsistence allowances should change. We noted that the list of 'Approved Duties' (duties for which claims can be made) could be made clearer. We noted that some members were not aware that they can claim for attendance at Parish Council meetings in their Division. We suggest that the Council reviews its list of Approved Duties to improve their clarity and publicises these afresh to members.
66. We also considered that group leaders should legitimately be able to claim for attending formal meetings of the Council, as observers. We believe there is a democratic legitimacy to this and that group leaders should not be out of pocket for undertaking an activity that logically flows from their role.
67. We noted that there is support to maintain the link between the officer and member schemes i.e. the values for travel and the circumstances in which subsistence should be payable. In the current climate it is both fair and administratively sensible that this should continue.

68. There was no significant disagreement with the current two-month deadline for submitting expenses claims. The statutory guidance says that a deadline must be applied and we continue to believe that two months is fair and administratively appropriate and assists in maintaining good audit practices.

We RECOMMEND 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;

We RECOMMEND the Council retains, 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;

We RECOMMEND that the Council reviews the list of Approved Duties to improve their clarity and publicises these afresh to members;

We RECOMMEND that the list of Approved Duties include the capacity for leaders of a political group to claim for attending formal meetings of the Council, Cabinet and Committees for the purpose of keeping themselves informed of business;

We RECOMMEND that the list of Approved Duties for the purpose of travel, subsistence, child and dependent care allowances continue and be agreed as set out in the attached Annex.

Amounts

69. We recommend that the Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowances and Co-optees' Allowance 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

70. In conclusion, the Panel considers the current levels of allowances to be, in the main, too low having regard both to the time and workload involved and, crucially, as a means of encouraging a more diverse range of people to consider becoming county councillors in Oxfordshire. Clearly, allowances cannot be the only means of overcoming obstacles to wider democratic representation however they are an element. We consider our recommendations to be appropriate to the roles actually performed by county councillors in the service of the people of Oxfordshire.

Mrs Olga Senior
Chairman
Independent Remuneration Panel