



CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 18 April 2002

Title: REVIEW OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME

Report of: The City Treasurer

Report reference: Financial Memo 2002/03 No 3

Summary:

The Independent Remuneration Panel was established by the Council to advise on and review the scheme of Members' Allowances, and has recently reviewed the 2001/02 scheme introduced on 12th September 2001. Members are reminded that the Council should have regard to the recommendations that have been made by the Panel prior to any amendment being made to the scheme.

The recommendations of the Panel, as set out in the report, are principally that there should be no changes to the current scheme. The Chairman of the Panel, Bill Swarbrick, will be available at the meeting to answer Members' questions.

Recommendations:

Members of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked if they have any comments on the Panel recommendations, which can be considered by full Council alongside the Panel report on 30 April 2002.

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

CARLISLE CITY COUNCIL

MEMBERS ALLOWANCES

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

10TH APRIL 2002

1. Recommendations

Following consideration by the Panel of the current Members Allowances Scheme as detailed below, the following recommendations are made:

- 1.1 That there be no change to the Basic Allowance which shall remain at £3,700* (including £200* telephone allowance).
- 1.2 That there should be no changes to the current Special Responsibility Allowances* as set out in the existing 2001/02 scheme.
- 1.3 That there be no change to the Dependent Carer's Allowance of up to £4.50* per hour.
- 1.4 That the City Council should consider the issue of the provision of information to Members and particularly whether a second telephone line should be provided.
- 1.5 That it be noted that the issue of Travel and Subsistence, other Allowances and Pensions is awaiting Government legislation and is not currently a matter that the Panel can advise on.

* As previously determined by the Panel all of the allowance will be index linked to the Council's annual salary increase for staff in any given financial year.

2. Background

The Panel made recommendations to the Council on 11th September 2001 regarding a new Members' Allowances Scheme and this was duly adopted by the Council and introduced from 12th September 2001. The Panel at that time remained cautious regarding the allowances proposed, as the new Constitutional arrangements were not at that time in place. Consequently, the Panel recommended that a review be carried out early in 2002 so that any adjustments could be made prior to the new municipal year in May 2002.

3. Review of 2001/02 Members' Allowances Scheme

The Panel have recently carried out a review of the scheme, principally by interviewing the three Group Leaders and the Chief Executive to determine their views on the new scheme. The main issues arising from the interviews were as follows:

3.1 Telephone Allowance

All Group Leaders felt that the current allowance of £200 included within the Basic Allowance of £3,700 was insufficient to cover the cost of telephone rental plus an element to cover call charges. Following detailed consideration of this issue, the Panel expressed some sympathy with the situation, but felt that the main issue was in fact the extension of E-Government and the way in which the Council intended to issue information to members in future (i.e. on-line). The Panel therefore recommended that the telephone allowance within the Members Allowances Scheme remain at £200 which was considered a sufficient amount, (particularly given the extent of the Council's Allowances in comparison with other authorities (see item 4 below)). However the Panel also recommended that the City Council consider the issue of provision of information to Members, and particularly whether a second telephone line should be provided.

3.2 Overall View of Current Scheme

The general consensus from the Group Leaders and Chief Executive appeared to be that, apart from the telephone issue, the allowances were generally satisfactory. However it was acknowledged that it was in many respects still early days and the new Constitutional system was still in the process of bedding down. The Panel determined that a full review of the scheme would be carried out early in 2003, when a full review of the new Constitutional arrangements was scheduled. At this point the Panel will require more evidence placed before it concerning the amount of time and duties that individual members were undertaking.

4. Comparison with other Authorities Allowances

In addition to the above interviews, the Panel considered results of a national survey into Members Allowances carried out by the Improvement and Development Agency in October 2001. The results of this survey, whilst only providing an average comparison, show that the City Council's allowances are at about the right level, and possibly slightly generous in comparison with comparable authorities.

5. Travel and Subsistence, Other Allowances and Pensions

The Panel noted that the DTLR have indicated that they intend to consolidate all of the Members' Allowances legislation together, and that detailed legislation on the above issues would not therefore be available until October 2002 at the earliest.

6. Conclusions

The Panel has made its recommendations for no change to the existing scheme of allowances in the light of information before it from the Group Leaders and the Chief Executive, plus information available on the level of allowances nationally.

Bill Swarbrick

Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel

10th April 2002

**EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE
CORPORATE RESOURCES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 18 APRIL 2002**

CROS.47/02 REVIEW OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME

The City Treasurer submitted Financial Memo 2002/03 No. 3 setting out the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel, which had been established by the Council to advise on and review the scheme of Members' Allowances. Mr Bill Swarbrick, Chairman of the Panel, attended the meeting and outlined the following recommendations of the Panel:

- (a) That there be no change to the Basic Allowance which shall remain at £3,700* (including £200* telephone allowance).
- (b) That there should be no changes to the current Special Responsibility Allowances* as set out in the existing 2001/02 Scheme.
- (c) That there be no change to the Dependant Carer's Allowance of up to £4.50* per hour.
- (d) That the City Council consider the issue of provision of information to Members and particularly whether a second telephone line should be provided.
- (e) That it be noted that the issue of travel and subsistence, other allowances and pensions is awaiting Government legislation and is not currently a matter that the Panel can advise on.

*As previously determined by the Panel all of the allowance will be index-linked to the Council's annual salary increase for staff in any given financial year.

Mr Swarbrick advised that the Panel had met with Group Leaders and the Town Clerk and Chief Executive in relation to the recommendations and that the main focus of the debate had been over telephone allowances. The Panel were recommending that the Council carry out a comprehensive review of the provision of telephone lines.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive added that a comprehensive review would be undertaken of telephones and the electronic transmission of information and that if there were implications for telephone allowances, they could be examined as part of that report. He concurred with the recommendation that until this comprehensive review is undertaken, telephone allowances should remain as at present.

Members commented that the issue of particular concern to Members in relation to telephone allowances was the fact that they were now being taxed on this allowance and therefore the allowance was not covering the cost of line rental. They suggested that this should be examined as part of the comprehensive review. In addition, the review should also look at the Council having ownership of any second lines and therefore meeting installation or de-installation costs.

The Chairman then thanked Mr Swarbrick for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the following comments of the Committee on the Panel's recommendations be passed on to the City Council:

"It was noted that the City Treasurer would be carrying out a comprehensive review of telephones and the electronic transmission of information. Allowances should be looked at as part of this comprehensive review, in particular, implications for Members of taxation on the telephone allowance and the Council having ownership of any second lines installed".