

Report to the Member Remuneration Panel

Date of meeting: 2 November 2023

Subject: Members' Allowances Scheme – Annual Review 2024/25

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That the Panel consider the issues set out in this report and agree any recommendations to be made to the Council in connection with its review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2024/25; and

(2) That the Panel agree arrangements for the presentation of its report and recommendations regarding the review of the Members' Allowances Scheme to the Council, at its meeting to be held on 19 December 2023.

Report:

1. The Panel undertakes a review of Epping Forest District Council's Members' Allowances Scheme each year, to ensure that any recommendations for revision to elements of the Scheme can be considered alongside the preparation of the authority's budget for the following financial year. The current Members' Allowances Scheme, for the 2023/24 municipal year, was adopted by the Council at its meeting on 20 December 2022 and is attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

Members' Allowances Scheme

2. In considering the recommendations of the Panel in December 2022, the Council agreed that no change be made to the payment of the full amount of Basic Allowance of £4,300 per member per annum to be included in the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2023/24. An increase in Basic Allowance was introduced from 2016/17 in line with the recommendations of the Panel over several years, that the authority should implement 100% of the amount of Basic Allowance for each member, rather than the level of 80% previously applied.

3. The Council also agreed in December 2015 that, from the 2016/17 municipal year, consideration of the amount of Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) applied to the positions of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council be added to the responsibilities of the Remuneration Panel. Whilst no recommendations to increase this allowance were made for 2023/24, the level of such SRA should be considered as part of the Panel's review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2024/25.

4. As part of the review process for 2024/25, a general invitation was extended to all members of the Council on behalf of the Panel, to express any suggestions or concerns about the current operation of the Members' Allowances Scheme. At the time of the preparation of this report, no representations arising from this invitation have been received from members. Any representations received after the publication of the agenda for this meeting will be reported to the Panel at the meeting.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Restructure

5. Following the Panel's review of the Member Allowance Scheme for 2023/24, the Council reviewed the current structure of its Overview & Scrutiny Function. The Council had

had a main Overview & Scrutiny Committee and three Scrutiny Select Committees corresponding to the three themes within the Council's Corporate Plan of Stronger Communities, Stronger Place and Stronger Council. However, it was felt that there was a significant degree of overlap between the main Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Stronger Council Select Committee.

6. At its meeting on 4 April 2023, the Council resolved to amalgamate the Stronger Council Select Committee with the main Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and to rename the remaining two Select Committees as the Communities Scrutiny Committee and the Place Scrutiny Committee. This has resulted in an overall reduction in the number of Scrutiny Committees from 4 to 3.

7. The current Members' Allowances Scheme provides that an annual SRA of £2,150.00 be applied to the positions of the chairmen of the select committees. The reduction of the Overview and Scrutiny framework from three Select Committees to two Scrutiny Committees did generate a small saving to the previous budget provision for Members' Allowances.

Other Matters

8. The Council has been subject to an Electoral Review, which has resulted in the total number of District Councillors reducing from the current 58 to 54. This will generate a small saving of £17,200 in the budget provision for Members' Allowances, based on the current Basic Allowance of £4,200 per member.

Benchmarking

9. At its meeting on 29 November 2018, the Panel requested that a comprehensive benchmarking exercise amongst comparable local authorities be undertaken as part of future reviews by the Panel of the Members' Allowances Scheme. This enables the Panel to assess whether an inflationary increase in the level of Basic Allowance should be considered. The results of the benchmarking exercise have been prepared and are attached at Appendix 2 of this report.

10. In addition, the Panel requested information regarding certain indices such as the rate of growth of earnings, and the current rate of inflation amongst others. This information has again been provided for the Panel and is attached at Appendix 3 of this report.

Recommendations

11. The Panel is requested to consider the issues set out in this report and to agree the general matters to be subject of its recommendations to the Council in connection with the review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2024/25.

12. It is intended that the report of the Panel will be made to the Council at its meeting on 19 December 2023. The Panel is also therefore requested to agree which of its membership will present the report to the Council.