

## Enhancing Accountability – A Hierarchy of Accountability

104. The Panel was keen to explore the impact of abolishing the Attendance Allowance. In particular, would the abolition of the Attendance Allowance cause some problems in that it could highlight inequitable workloads and become a 'Charter for lazy Councillors'? The Panel wanted to know if there was a need to ensure that Members are more accountable for their allowances in the future.
105. Generally speaking the evidence the Panel received indicated that the issue of Members being accountable for their allowances would not be a major issue in Dacorum. Members did not join the Council to make money and it was clear from the interviews (including both Members and Officers) that the vast majority of Councillors were diligent in the performance of their duties even to the point of personal cost at times. The £14 Attendance Allowance could hardly be considered a financial driver. Furthermore, the political mathematics of the authority meant that Members would not miss too many meetings lest their group lost a vote in committee. However, it would be remiss of the Panel to not account for potential problems by pointing out mechanisms of accountability are available and utilised elsewhere. Thus the Panel has laid out the range of mechanisms that are available if accountability became a more pressing issue in the future. It is presented as a hierarchy that the authority could plug into depending on the degree to which non-performance became an issue.
106. The Panel proposes that the adoption of its scheme could be dependent upon the adoption of mechanisms through which Councillors can properly be held to account. However, it will be up to the Council to decide which mechanism is appropriate in the particular circumstance it finds itself in.
107. At present, the Council is required to publish every year the total sum paid by it to each Councillor in respect of basic allowance, special responsibility allowance and attendance allowance. The Panel believes that enhanced remuneration could involve a degree of sharpened accountability. At the simplest level there could be included in the annual publication of allowances not only the remuneration paid, but also a report, in accordance with some appropriate indicators, on the contribution made by each Councillor to the effective operation of the council. The indicators could capture the qualities reflected in the old attendance allowance, such as the committee meetings that each Councillor could have attended and the actual rate of attendance. They could also include activities such as representing the council or their community on other bodies, and a note of other activities in the community.
108. A particular idea that had some support in interview was to publish attendance records against possible attendance in an appropriate forum on a regular basis. This should indicate the amount of meetings a Councillor should have attended against what that Member has attended. It could also include a column for excused absences.
109. Councillors could also submit their own statement of activities, and their own assessment of their effectiveness, as part of this annual publication. This could provide a sensible basis for informing electors what they are getting from their Councillor.
110. The Council could also develop Member Role Profiles that could form the basis of a role and accountability statement. In other words, members could be asked to sign these Member Role Accountability Statements. They are ultimately difficult to enforce but it makes an explicit link between allowances received and a specific set of tasks. Councillors cannot claim they did not know what they are supposed to do and moreover it provides moral leverage for the rest of the Council to utilise.
111. Next in the hierarchy would be a "clawback" scheme. For legal reasons it has to be adhered to voluntarily. However, it is utilised elsewhere, notably Leicester, and administered by the group whips. Essentially, this mechanism "fines" a member each time they miss an approved duty without good reason.
112. Finally, members' allowances and the issue of accountability for receiving them can be assigned to the Standards Committee to oversee. If members are abusing the allowances system the Standards Committee may be able to censure members, unless the abuse of the system is serious enough to warrant national attention.