

INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

MEETING HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, BOOTLE ON MONDAY 14TH OCTOBER, 2013

PRESENT: Canon Roger Driver, (in the Chair)
Mr. J. Fraser and Mrs. S. Lowe

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED:

That Canon Roger Driver be appointed Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel for the 2013 -2014 Municipal Year.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.

4. COUNCIL'S CURRENT FINANCIAL POSITION

The Panel received a presentation from Margaret Rawding, Head of Corporate Finance and ICT Strategy on the Council's budget 2013/14 and 2014/15 and future years' budget forecasts.

Mrs. Rawding detailed the major budget reductions and in particular referred to cuts in social care and highway maintenance; indicated that the June Comprehensive Spending Review and subsequent announcements presented a challenging picture in 2015/16 including a reduction in Government grants of £19m and inflationary pressures of £8.7m; and that for 2015/16 onwards, information was still unknown on the Council Tax referendum rules and levels, the national distribution of 10% cut in government funding of local government services, the number of Council Tax Reduction Scheme claimants, the level of business rates and the level of social care required.

Mrs. Rawding also detailed that a pay award of 1% had been made for staff in 2013/14 but that increments had been frozen for the third year running; that the pay award for 2014/15 was still unknown; and identified issues associated with the pension deficit and that from 2014/15 a new career average pension is being introduced. Other factors referred to related to budget reductions going deeper into services resulting in the reduction or cessation of such services; and adult social care funding pressures which included the potential for the Council having to pick up far

more care costs when the the “cap” (as suggested in the Dilnot report) is reached.

Mrs. Rawding concluded by indicating that the anticipated savings to be made by the Council in 2015/16 and 2016/17 were £28m and £22m respectively;

A Panel member asked whether Sefton would enter into partnership arrangements for services with other local authorities and officers responded by detailing current partnerships relating to:-

- Finance/audit services with Warrington
- Insurance services with Wirral
- The private sector partnership with arvato
- Election services across the 5 Merseyside authorities

Furthermore, partnership arrangements relating to procurement services and shared financial management systems were being investigated.

RESOLVED:

That Margaret be thanked for her informative presentation.

5. REVIEW THE DEPENDENT'S CARERS' ALLOWANCE

Further to Minute No. 17 (4)(ii) of the meeting held on 21 January 2013 the Panel considered the report of the Head of Governance and Civic Services that provided data from other local authorities on their dependent carers' allowances (DCA) schemes.

The report indicated that the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 provided for the payment to Members of an authority of a DCA; that Sefton's Scheme of Allowances currently provided for this as follows:

“8. Dependents' Carers' Allowance

Members who incur additional expenses in order to arrange care for dependents may claim these expenses. This rate is based on the National Minimum Wage up to a maximum of £60 per week”;

and that one Councillor currently claimed this Allowance and the published table of allowances paid showed that this amounted to £1,263.85 in 2012/13 (equivalent to 0.16% of the total amount paid to Members).

Attached as an Appendix to the report was a table providing information on the levels of DCA in place across Merseyside and other neighbouring local authorities; and that the most recent survey of 386 local authorities in England, conducted by the Local Government Association in winter 2008, showed that a total of 324 authorities responded (83.9%) and that 89.5% of authorities offered a DCA at an average hourly rate of £7.83.

The Panel also considered correspondence received from an elected Member on this matter that stated that “the Carers’ allowance should be addressed as it’s not the tax payers responsibility to pay for Councillor child care”

The report concluded by requesting that the Panel review the information provided and determine whether any recommendations to Council should be made on this matter.

It was noted that the principle behind the payment of Dependent Carer’s allowance generally was to ensure equality in terms of candidates seeking election and that no-one felt unable to stand for election due to their caring responsibilities.

The Head of Governance and Civic Services reported that in reviewing the Dependent Carer’s Allowance payable within neighbouring authorities, it was intended that the guidance to Members be reviewed to bring this in line with others. This would not affect the published Scheme of Members Allowances or the amount payable.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the principle of the payment of the Dependent Carers’ Allowance be asserted; and
- (2) due to the increase in the minimum wage to £6.31 per hour and in order to maintain the payable allowance of 10 hours per week, the maximum Dependent Carers’ Allowance be amended to be based on a maximum of 10 hours a week rather than the current financial limit.

6. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED RELATING TO MEMBERS’ ALLOWANCES

The Panel considered the report of the Head of Governance and Civic Services detailing items of correspondence relating to the payment of attendance allowances, the payment of dependant carers’ allowances and elected Members’ membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme, that had been received since the Panel last met.

A response had been sent to the member of the public regarding information on the payment of attendance allowances and the issue relating to the payment of dependant carers’ allowances had been dealt with earlier in the meeting (Minute No. 5 refers). The report advised that in relation to the final issue (elected Members’ membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme) a written Ministerial Statement to Parliament had been made setting out Government proposals to remove access by Councillors to the taxpayer-funded Local Government Pension Scheme in England from April 2014 and the outcome of consultation on

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this proposal was awaited. The cost to Sefton in terms of 'employer's contributions' came to £49,773.73 in 2012/13.

The actual comments made and responses received were provided in the Appendix attached to the report.

The report concluded by requesting that the Panel review the information provided and determine whether any recommendations to Council should be made on these matters.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the correspondence relating to the payment of attendance allowances be noted;
- (2) in connection with the issue relating to elected Members' membership of the Local Government Pension:-
 - (i) the Panel considers that it is reasonable to defer a decision on this matter bearing in mind that the outcome of the national consultation exercise is still awaited; and
 - (ii) the Head of Governance and Civic Services be requested to consult with the Cabinet Member – Corporate Services and Performance on whether Sefton's elected Members should be consulted on this issue; and
- (3) in relation to the issue of the payment of dependant carers' allowances the Head of Governance and Civic Services refer Councillor Jones to the information contained in the report with a request that if he has any further comments/questions then he submit them for consideration to the next meeting of the Panel.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting be held in late January 2014.