

**SEFTON METROPOLITAN COUNCIL**  
**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL**  
**NOVEMBER 2009**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 We last met as a panel in December 2008 when we made a number of recommendations in relation to the level of special responsibility allowances and the payment of travelling expenses to those members who undertake statutory visits to children's homes. Our report made the following recommendations:-
- 1.1.1 That the Special Responsibility Allowance for Overview & Scrutiny Chairs should be increased to a multiplier of 100% of the basic allowance ie £8,860 with effect from the new civic year in 2009.
- 1.1.2 The current link that the Special Responsibility Allowance payable to the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee is the same as that to Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committees be severed; and that the SRA for the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee remain as a multiplier of 50% of the Basic Allowances.
- 1.1.3. That we do not consider that it is appropriate to pay travelling expenses to those Members who undertake statutory visits to children's homes.
- 1.2 Our report was submitted to the Standards Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2009 (with a view to making recommendations to full Council on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2009). However, after some discussion at the Standards Committee we understand it was resolved that the report of the Panel be deferred to enable the views of the three Political Groups to be sought on the Members Travel and Subsistence Scheme with a possible referral back to the Panel for our views and consideration. Eventually it was agreed not to refer the issue back to us and accordingly the report was re-submitted to the Standards Committee to consider the report and make recommendations to the meeting of full Council on 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2009.
- 1.3 At the Council Meeting Members attention was drawn to the cost of implementing the changes which was an additional £19,900 in 2009/10 (full year costs £22,150). After lengthy debate the Council Meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> July passed the following resolution:-

RESOLVED: That

- (1) The IRP recommendations be noted and, while supportive of the principles, this Council believes that the overall Councillors Allowances Budget should be capped at the present level; and
- (2) accordingly, this matter be referred back to the IRP to consider how the IRP principles can be achieved whilst staying within the overall Councillors Allowances budget and IRP be asked to examine the overall Councillors Allowances budget in the light of the current financial climate with a view to possible reductions in the budget.

- 1.4 We met again on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2009, to discuss the recommendation. The three Leaders of the Council had been invited to attend and make representations to us or send a nominee. We therefore had the opportunity to hear directly from Councillor T Robertson, Leader of the Liberal Democratic Group and Councillor P Dowd Leader of the Labour Group. Councillor I Maher, Deputy Leader of the Labour Group was also in attendance and also offered the opportunity to comment. Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs Parry, Leader of the Conservative Group. We were advised by Mr L Green (Senior Assistant Director Finance and Information Services Department), Mrs C Elwood (Legal Director) and Ms V Swale (Insurance and Administration Manager Finance & Information Services Department).

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Having heard from the Leaders and having discussed the issues our recommendations to the Council are as follows:-
  - 2.1.1 We note the Council's concerns regarding the affordability of our proposals given the current economic situation generally and the difficult financial challenges the Council itself faces. Nevertheless our proposals were made after careful consideration of the report and information before us and we have not received any further information or evidence which would cause us to revise our original recommendations to the Council.
  - 2.1.2 In those circumstances whilst the Council's concerns are both recognised and indeed to be applauded, we are firmly of the view that it is for the Council itself to make decisions on the budgetary implications of any change to the Members Allowances Scheme. Although we would recommend that should the Council approve any increase to the Special Responsibility Allowance of Overview & Scrutiny Chairs then this should not be backdated beyond the date of the Council's formal approval.

2.1.3 In the light of Members concerns we would respectfully draw Members' attention to the current under spend in the Members Allowance Scheme for this financial year and to the provisions within Section 5 of the Scheme itself which does allow Members to give notice in writing to the Finance Director and elect to forgo any part of their entitlement to an allowance under the Scheme.

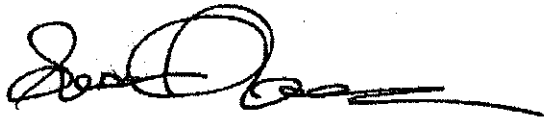
2.1.4 Finally, it was recommended in our report of 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2007, that there should be a full review of the Members' Allowance Scheme prior to the beginning of the municipal year 2010/11. This recommendation was accepted by the meeting of the Council of 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2007. We have therefore requested that the Legal Director and Finance Director facilitate a further meeting of the panel in early April 2010 to progress this review.

7 December 2009

Canon R Driver (Chair)



Mrs S Lowe



Mr S Dickson

