

Update report of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel 2024/25 in respect of the Scheme of Councillor Allowances for Guildford Borough Council

The Panel met at the Guildford Council Offices on Tuesday 1st October 2024 and remotely on Friday 11th October 2024 to review the outstanding issues from its 23/24 report. The Panel noted that the Council considered its original report on 5th December 2023 resulting in the following resolution: -

RESOLVED: That the Council:

- (1) defers consideration of the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel on the review of councillors' allowances for a period of 12 months.
- (2) retains the current scheme of allowances without indexation, which effectively freezes councillors' allowances at their current level for the 2024-25 budget year; and
- (3) thanks the Independent Remuneration Panel for its work.

Within the 23/24 report, the Panel had recommended that it should conduct a 12-month review of the Mayor's Allowance to cover the incidental expenses of this role. Although the Council had decided to defer consideration of all recommendations including this one, the Panel had concluded that reviewing this would still be beneficial.

Having reviewed the expenditure incurred within 2023/24, the Panel now recommends that:

Recommendation 1: The Mayor's Allowance should be kept at £8,000 p.a. and no further review is required.

The Panel received a verbal update from officers within the Democratic Services Team at Guildford on committee changes that had either had been made or are to be considered by the Council since its last report.

The Panel has noted that the Executive Advisory Boards are no longer in place resulting in the two Special Responsibility Allowances of the respective Chairperson's being removed from the scheme. This has resulted in a saving of £4,174 for each role with an overall saving of £8,352. Consequently, the Panel has agreed that these roles should now be deleted from its 2023 report.

Recommendation 2: The saving of £8,352 should be highlighted to Councillors.

The Panel has been informed that the Council implemented changes to the Overview and Scrutiny function from the start of the 2024/25 municipal year following consideration of the SOLACE report, which now mirrored the Waverley Borough Council model of two Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Panel consider that this is a notable change to the role of Chairperson of Overview and Scrutiny Committees since its report was submitted last year. The Panel considered whether these roles should be upgraded to Tier 3 from its 2023 report rather than Tier 4. However, on balance, the Panel has decided to recommend that it is too early to assess any impact and that it is important for the Council to initially consider and come to a resolution on the wider IRP recommendations from 2023.

Recommendation 3: Therefore, it is recommended to the Council that the Panel be requested to undertake a further mini review of the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Chairpersons during the coming year and submit a further short report for the 26/27 financial year.

The Panel also considered whether the removal of the Executive Advisory Boards and the changes to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees would change the formula for working out the allowances through changing the average weekly time commitment of 14 hours for Guildford Councillors contained within its previous recommendations. However, the Panel perceived that any net changes in the average weekly time commitment was likely to be insignificant and has decided not to amend its 2023 report.

The Panel has been informed of potential changes to the Corporate Governance & Standards Committee and that separate committees for Standards and for Audit & Risk are to be considered. The Panel noted that the Council was likely to decide on these proposals in the coming months and that roles arising from any such changes would not sit within the current Allowances Scheme. The Panel has concluded that any such changes would need to be formally agreed before it can consider the potential impact to allowances. However, the Panel reiterates that it would be happy to meet on an ad-hoc basis as required to consider possible special responsibility allowances arising from the changes to committees that the Council wishes to establish.

Finally, the Panel wished to reiterate to councillors that the role of the Joint IRP is to establish a framework in recommending the maximum allowances that would be payable for each role and that we were not judging the

individuals undertaking any given role. The Panel also wish to make it explicitly clear that it is an entirely personal decision for each councillor to decide whether they choose to claim all or some of the maximum allowances to which they are entitled and that the Panel's role is to recommend maximum levels that are neither an incentive nor a barrier to all that may serve public office and not just the wealthy or retired.

The Panel therefore agrees to update its previous report as follows: -

- 1) The Mayor's Allowance should be kept at £8,000 and no further review is required.
- 2) That Chairpersons of the two Executive Advisory Boards be removed from the list of Special Responsibility Allowances resulting in a saving of £8,352.
- 3) That, with the approval of Council, a further mini review be undertaken by the Panel over the next 12 months of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairpersons' role and that in the event of any changes being recommended, a further update report with recommendations will be presented to the Council.

And asks the Council to note,

- 4) That the Panel would be happy to review any new or significantly changed roles as they arise and to make any further recommendations to the Council.

With the above minor exceptions, the Panel agree that there are no further areas that it wishes to change from its 2023 report at this time.

Dennis Frost

Chairperson of the Guildford Independent Remuneration Panel

11th October 2024