

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Independent Remuneration Panel

REPORT NUMBER: **H202**

TO: COUNCIL

DATE OF MEETING: 24 February 2008

**REPORT TO BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL FROM THE INDEPENDENT
REMUNERATION PANEL (IRP) - FEBRUARY 2009**

Chairman of the Panel:-

Dr Alan Lower – Retired GP; former Suffolk County Councillor

Members:-

Mrs Penny Austen-Brown – Retired business person

Professor David Muller – Principal of Suffolk New College

1. INTRODUCTION

Panel

- 1.1 Dr Lower, Mrs Austen-Brown and Professor Muller were members of the Panel that reviewed the Council's Allowances Scheme in 2007. All three of us have considerable expertise and experience of Allowances Schemes in Suffolk.

Role of the Panel

- 1.2 In accordance with the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) England Regulations 2003 (as amended) we were tasked with making recommendations to the Council on whether there should be any change to the current Scheme for an interim period from 1 May 2009, taking into account the continuing uncertainty about the outcome of Local Government Review in Suffolk.

Considerations

- 1.3 In reviewing the current scheme we noted that the Council's structure remains unchanged. We had before us the following information:-

- Babergh Members' Allowances Scheme approved by the Council on 26 February 2007 as revised to show the level of Allowances payable from 1 May 2008. Travel and subsistence rates remain in line with those payable to staff.
- Details of the Council decision to pay a proportion of the Member Champion Special Responsibility Allowance previously recommended by us.
- Information relating to the workload of the Licensing and Appeals Committee, which shows a considerable reduction since the initial introduction of the Licensing Act provisions.

- Information relating to the workload of the Standards Committee, which has not yet had a significant volume of complaint assessments. However we noted the change to the role of the 3 Independent members on the Committee since Apr/May 2008 who now provide the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee, and chair the Assessment, Review, and Hearings Sub-Committees.
- Relevant information on the RPI headline rate of inflation, as referred to in paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3 of the Scheme.

2. **FINDINGS OF THE IRP**

- 2.1 We consider that a major review of the Scheme is not appropriate at this time because of the current situation with regard to LGR, together with the fact that the Council's structure has not changed since the review of the Scheme in 2007. However, we are aware that a more fundamental review of allowances would be required in the event of LGR resulting in the status quo, particularly in the light of any Council decision to appoint a Leader, or to adopt a revised structure.
- 2.2 In the circumstances, we consider that the provisions of the current Scheme should continue in force for a further period, with the exception of the arrangements relating to the RPI headline rate of inflation, which have now expired. Our view is that this element should also continue, with an appropriate recommendation in the event that the March 2009 RPI falls below 0%.
- 2.3 The Council is asked to note that we have identified the following two areas for specific inclusion in any major review of the Scheme (as referred to in 2.1 above):-
- Member Allowances role
 - Relationship between the allowances of the Chairmen of the Standards and the Licensing and Appeals Committees.

3 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Our recommendations for the period from 1 May 2009 are set out below:

- (1) That subject to recommendation (3) below (concerning inflation) the base rate for the following allowances (adopted by the Council in 2007) remains the same:
 - (a) Basic Allowance
 - (b) Special Responsibility Allowances
 - (c) Dependants' Carers' Allowance
 - (d) Co-optees' Allowances
- (2) That the Childcare Allowance continues to coincide with the SCC Childminder Rate.
- (3) That all Allowances payable under the Scheme be revised in line with changes in the RPI headline rate of inflation, being the RPI as for the month of March immediately preceding the relevant review date, until the Scheme is next reviewed or until 30 April 2011, whichever is the earlier, subject to there being no reduction in the rates current at the relevant date in the event that the March RPI for the year in question falls below 0%.

- (4) That Travel and Subsistence Allowances continue to be revised to accord with those payable to Council employees from time to time with the exception of overnight absences which increase in line with RPI in accordance with (3) above.
- (5) That all other aspects of the 2007 Allowances Scheme be continued.
- (6) That, subject to the outcome of LGR, any future major review of the Scheme takes into account the aspects raised in paragraph 2.3 above in addition to other issues which may be identified, including the appointment of a Leader, or the adoption of a revised structure for the Council.

CONTACT: Linda Sheppard

EMAIL: linda.sheppard@babergh.gov.uk