

INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ROSSENDALE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

Date of Meeting: 4th December 2006

PRESENT: Ms G Oates (Chair)
Mr N Davies
Mr P V Morris

In attendance: Julian Joinson, Democratic Services Manager
Heather Moore, Committee Services Manager

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

Mrs G Oates was appointed Chair of the Panel for the remainder of the municipal year 2006/07.

2. NOTES OF LAST MEETING HELD ON 25TH SEPTEMBER 2006

Resolved:

That the notes of the informal meeting held on 25th September 2006 be agreed as a correct record and that the recommendations contained therein be ratified by the full Panel.

3. TIME WORKED SURVEY

The Panel was reminded that at its last meeting it had requested officers to undertake a survey of hours spent by Members on Council business and to provide a further report. Panel Members were informed that a survey of elected Members' time had been undertaken by Democratic Services officers in November 2006 by means of a questionnaire.

Respondents to the survey had provided information about the number of hours spent on a wide range of duties that a councillor would normally be expected to perform, including preparation for and attendance at Council and Committee meetings, ward work, surgeries and partnership/outside body activities. The survey had shown that Members on average carried out approximately 18 hours' work per week. An survey undertaken some years previously had captured information that Members worked for approximately 12 hours per week. The Panel was satisfied that the figure of 18 hours accurately reflected the amount of time currently spent by Members on Council business.

The Panel was reminded that the rate of Basic Allowance was calculated by means of the following formula, which discounted the hours worked to 2/3 of the actual total, to take account of the public service aspect of a councillor's role:-

(Average hours spent on Council duties per week x 2/3) x hourly rate x 48 weeks

The Panel noted that an increase in the approved figure for hours worked from 12 to 18 would lead to a consequential increase in the level of Basic Allowance. In addition, the Panel noted that the hourly rate set was that of the National Minimum Wage, which had increased to £5.35/hour on 1st October 2006.

The Panel was reminded that at the last meeting they had resolved to consider the implications of any proposed increase in Basic Allowance on the total amount of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) payable.

Resolved:

1. To agree that the figure for the number of hours spent by Members on Council duties is 18.
2. To agree that the current link between Basic Allowance and SRAs payable is retained, so that SRAs are a multiple of Basic Allowance.

4. TRAVEL AND SUBSISTENCE GUIDELINES

The Panel was reminded that at its last meeting it had resolved to request officers to include a schedule within the Scheme, setting out locally determined rates of travel and subsistence allowance and the criteria for an 'approved duty'.

A copy of the travel and subsistence guidelines applicable to Rossendale Borough Council staff had been circulated with the agenda. The Panel considered that the rates and guidelines applicable to Members should, in so far as possible, correspond to those within the staff guidelines.

The Panel considered that the schedule of in respect of 'approved duties' should include attendance at any formal meetings, including Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings, meetings of outside bodies and member development/training sessions.

Resolved:

That officers have regard to the above recommendations when drafting the schedule of rates of travel and subsistence allowance and the 'approved duties' criteria.

5. DRAFT MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME FOR 2007/08

The Panel considered its provisional recommendations made on 25th September 2006 regarding the Scheme of Members' Allowances for 2007/08 in relation to the following matters :-

- Basic Allowance;
- Special Responsibility Allowance;
- Travel and Subsistence Allowance;
- Co-optees Allowance;
- Dependants' Carers' Allowance
- Backdating of Allowances
- Use of an Index;
- Pensions;
- Suspension of Payments
- Mayor's Allowance
- ICT Allowances.

The Panel was informed that the Mayor received an small allowance to cover necessary expenses, which was not part of the formal Members' Allowance Scheme. It was not proposed to incorporate this into the Scheme. The Panel also clarified that their rationale for deciding not to recommend a voluntary scheme for the suspension of payments to elected Members on the basis of poor attendance, which was based in part upon a view that such a scheme would be unenforceable.

Resolved:

That the Council be recommended to approve a Scheme of Members' Allowances for 2007/08 based upon the Panel's recommendations dated 25th September and 4th December 2006.

(The meeting started at 3.30 pm and concluded at 4.00 pm)