



**Report of the
Independent Remuneration Panel
appointed to make recommendations
on the Scheme of
Members' Allowances for
Breckland Council
2020 - 2023**

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Breckland Council has appointed an Independent Remuneration Panel to consider and recommend a scheme of allowances that complies with the requirements of the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.

1.2 The Independent Remuneration Panel is in the second year of its four-year term and Membership is as follows:

- Andrew Egerton-Smith (Chairman)
- Jonathan Rogers
- Alistair Skipper
- Les Spillman
- Sam Watts

1.3 The Panel is supported by Rory Ringer, Democratic Services Manager, and Teresa Smith, Democratic Services Team Leader.

1.4 The Panel considered all areas within its remit under the regulations, which ask that recommendations be made to Council:

- On the amount of basic allowance that should be payable to its Elected Members
- About the responsibilities or duties which should lead to the payment of a special responsibility allowance and the amount of such an allowance
- About the duties for which a travelling and subsistence allowance can be paid and the amount of this allowance
- As to the amount of any co-optees' allowance
- As to whether the authority's scheme should include an allowance for the expense of arranging for dependant and childcare, the amount of such allowance and the means by which it is determined
- On whether any allowance should be backdated to the beginning of the financial year in the event of a scheme being amended
- As to whether annual adjustments of allowance levels may be made by reference to an index and, if so, how long such a measure should run
- On allowances for Town and Parish Councils

2. DOCUMENTATION, EVIDENCE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

2.1 The Panel met on two occasions, on 28 January 2020 and 10 February 2020 and took account of the following documentation:

- The Panel's previous report (March 2019),
- Details of the existing scheme of allowances and comments made by the Council when adopting it,

- Information gathered during meetings with members
- Comparative information from other Councils.

2.2 The Panel interviewed Councillor Sam Chapman-Allen Leader of the Council, and Councillor Nigel Wilkin and were grateful to them for the information they provided.

3. CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW

3.1 The Independent Remuneration Panel recommended an increase to all allowances in line with the locally agreed Breckland staff pay settlement with effect from 1st April 2019, this was approved by full Council on 16 May 2019 and was effective from 1 April 2019.

3.2 The Panel are familiar with the culture of Breckland and had previously made it clear what was expected in terms of performance in recognition of the levels of allowance recommended.

4. GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND OBSERVATIONS

4.1 The panel had previously reviewed allowances year on year as part of a rolling review programme intended to focus specifically on any new roles or areas of concern raised by the Council.

4.2 In general, the panel recognised that there were no specific issues raised in relation to allowances that had not previously been considered by the panel, and therefore the panel are minded to recommend the level of allowances through to 31 March 2023, with the understanding that the panel would reconvene at any stage should there be an significant changes to the roles and responsibilities undertaken by Councillors.

4.3 The Panel were very pleased to see that the Council continue to focus on generating income rather than cutting public services, and were pleased to see that the continued entrepreneurial nature of the Council and in particular the Council's significant property portfolio which continues to contribute greatly to the council continuing to have the lowest district council tax in the country

4.4 The panel were also impressed with the continued work on developing Breckland's market towns. Evidence was also given to highlight the work the Council continues to undertake with its partner organisations to create employment opportunities along the A11 Cambridge-Norwich Technology Corridor.

4.5 Taking into account comparators and the current economic situation, the Panel were minded to recommend to the Council that all allowances which were not subject to change as a consequence of amendments to roles and responsibilities should be subject to an annual increase in line with the staff pay award as an equitable way of ensuring that allowances are uplifted annually.

4.6 That should the Council decide to apply such an increase in basic and special responsibility allowances, such an increase be applied annually until the end of the financial year in 2023.

4.7 The Panel acknowledged that the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council were rewarded in accordance with their roles and responsibilities.

5 BASIC ALLOWANCE

5.1 The basic allowance is intended to recognise the time commitment of all councillors, including such inevitable calls on their time as meetings with officers and constituents and attendance at political group meetings. It is also intended to cover incidental costs such as the use of their homes. (Government Guidance on Consolidated Regulations for Local Authority Allowances).

5.1 The panel were keen for the basic allowance not to hinder or be a barrier for those wishing to become Councillors in the future, and in particular were keen to encourage ‘younger’ members of society to consider standing for election. However, it was accepted that an element of the work of a Councillor should remain voluntary.

5.3 The Panel believed that using the basic allowance as a “building block”, was the best way to continue to construct the scheme.

5.4 The Panel recommend that the Basic Allowance is increased in line with the locally agreed annual Breckland staff pay settlement until 31st March 2023.

6 SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY ALLOWANCES

6.1 The Panel were in agreement to recommend an increase in the special responsibility allowances in line with the locally agreed annual Breckland staff pay settlement until 31st March 2023.

7 CO-OPTED MEMBERS AND SPECIALIST ADVISERS

7.1 Regulations permit provision within schemes of allowances for payments to co-opted members. Whereas the basic allowance for Elected Members was intended to acknowledge their wider duties, payments to co-optees are designed to cover the costs of attendances at meetings and conferences. Government guidance says that an element of the contribution of co-opted Members, like that of elected councillors, should be considered voluntary.

Governance & Audit Committee

7.2 The Panel propose an increase in line with the locally agreed annual Breckland staff pay settlement until 31st March 2023.

Independent Person – Standards

7.3 The Panel propose an increase in line with the locally agreed annual Breckland staff pay settlement until 31st March 2023.

8 TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

8.1 Although the regulations do not provide for performance related pay for members, the Panel continues to view training and development for elected members as very important.

8.2 The Panel strongly encourage all members to continue to attend all training offered to them.

9 CHILDCARE AND CARERS' ALLOWANCES

9.1 The Panel agreed to recommend an increase in the Carer's allowance on an annual basis in line with 'Real living Wage' which from 1st April 2020 is £9.30 per hour.

9.2 As far as specialist care was concerned, it can vary in scope and nature and it should be left to the Council to pay an appropriate rate upon application to ensure reasonable costs were reimbursed, rather than trying to set a standard rate.

9.3 The Panel were anxious to support carer's allowances and would not wish anyone to be deprived of the opportunity to serve as result of inadequate recompense of care charges.

10 TRAVEL AND SUBSISTENCE

10.1 The Panel considered the list of approved duties, (i.e. those activities in respect of which travel and subsistence may be paid) and agreed that no further changes were recommended. The Panel did feel however, that the Council should consider in the future introducing a scheme across the authority to encourage the use of electric cars both by staff and members, to set an example of working towards a greener environment.

11 TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

11.1 Town and Parish Councils may make payments to their members, but where they decide to do so, they must have regard to the recommendations of the District Council's Independent Remuneration Panel.

11.2 Any Town and Parish Councils wishing to consider Parish Councillor Allowances, should be referred to the Panel who will consider the request on their own merits.

11.3 The Panel had not received any requests for consideration.

12 SUMMARY

12.1 During their meetings and deliberations, the Independent Remuneration Panel have been mindful of the financial restraints affecting the Council and the public sector as a whole. Despite these, the authority continues to perform very well, and the Remuneration Panel wish to congratulate the Council for maintaining the lowest District Council Tax in the country whilst providing good levels of public satisfaction and local service provision in these times of austerity.

12.2 On the basis of the considerations above the Panel agreed that there were no substantive changes to the current scheme and were therefore happy to make a recommendation for the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2023.

12.3 The Travel and subsistence rates are to remain unchanged.

13 RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 Accordingly, the Panel's recommendations are as follows:

13.2 The new scheme is effective from 1st April 2020 until 31st March 2023.(Appendix B)

13.3 That District Councillors Basic/Special Responsibility Allowance is aligned to the locally agreed Breckland staff pay settlement on an annual basis for the period 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2023

13.4 That the Carer's allowance is increased in line with the increase to the "Real Living Wage" on an annual basis and is back dated for the period 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2023.

13.5 That the Council continues to review any changes to roles and responsibilities undertaken by Councillors, and should there be any significant changes and/or requests from Parish Councils to review a request then it will invite the Independent Remuneration Panel to convene to consider the impact of any such changes/request

13.6 That Council note that a Member may, by notice in writing given to the proper officer of the authority, elect to forgo their entitlement or any part of his or her entitlement to allowances