

Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel

Review of Members' Allowances Scheme for Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority for the financial year 2017/2018 and 2018/2019.

1. The Panel has now completed its review of the Members' Allowances Scheme in respect of the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority.
2. In undertaking the review, the Panel took into account written representations received from two Members of the Authority and also met with the Chair of the Fire Authority, Cllr Tom Wright and with the former Chief Fire Officer, Tom Capeling. The Panel found these interviews to be particularly useful and informative.
3. The Panel also had regard to the level of allowances paid by the constituent authorities to their Members and the level of allowances paid by a number of comparable fire authorities elsewhere in the country.
4. Detailed information was received regarding the terms of reference of the various committees within the Fire Authority, together with the time commitment and responsibilities of Members of the Authority and the Chairmen and co-opted Members of the various Committees.
5. It was noted that in addition to the formal decision making meetings, the Authority held a number of adhoc training and development sessions and briefings. Some Members also participated in peer reviews. In addition, all Members were encouraged to have links with a fire station in their area and to take part in community activities associated with that station. The Panel was also informed that the Authority had received a number of externally accredited awards, many of which required Member involvement during any inspection. Examples were Investors In People, Stonewall and peer reviews.
6. The Panel also received information about the budgetary constraints that the Authority was facing year on year and the wide range and variety of matters with which Members were required to deal. This was highlighted in one of the written representations received which pointed out that the Authority agendas often deal with a number of technical matters including budgetary, operational, procurement, performance and human resources matters as well as other areas. The Panel acknowledged that a broad understanding of all of these areas, as well as the general political and financial situation of Tyne and Wear and other fire authorities, was desirable in considering reports and making decisions on these matters.
7. Representation was also made to the effect that there appeared to be an anomaly in the current level of allowance for the role of Independent Member of the Governance Committee (£1,648 per annum) compared with that of Authority Members, who met formally on a more frequent basis, as well as attending informal sessions and having their ongoing community role.

8. One of the representations also reinforced the significant changes there had been in the workloads of Authority Members over recent years, which was not reflected in the basic members' allowance. A representation was made to the effect that the special responsibility allowances currently set under the Scheme were at an appropriate level, but it was requested that the basic allowance be considered by the Panel.
9. A representation was also made to the effect that there should not be any travel and subsistence allowance paid to members and that this should be incorporated as part of the basic allowance. However, the Panel considered that it was preferable to continue to pay a travel and subsistence allowance, in order to assist those Members who needed help in meeting the cost of travel in order to attend meetings.
10. A request was also made that consideration be given to attaching an allowance to the role of representative at the Local Pension Board. While the Panel would be interested to hear further information on this, it was noted that none of the comparable authorities looked at by the Panel paid such an allowance. In addition, the Panel was advised that the relevant regulations in respect of the Local Pension Board specifically allowed for the payment of expenses but, unlike the regulations in respect of the Scheme Advisory Board (which provided advice in response to requests from the Secretary of State) there was no specific provision for the payment of remuneration and expenses. It was suggested however that it was considered appropriate to meet the expenses of member representatives appointed to the Local Pension Board.
11. The Panel noted that when compared to other comparable fire authorities, the basic allowance paid to Members of the Tyne and Wear Fire Authority appeared to be below average. Having regard to the time commitment and responsibilities of Members, the Panel is minded to recommend an increase in the basic allowance to £2,500 per annum.
12. Having heard evidence regarding the roles and responsibilities and time commitment of the Chairs of the various committees and other roles for which an SRA was paid, the Panel is also minded to recommend an increase in the allowance paid to the Vice-Chair of the Authority to £10,000 per annum, to reflect the time and commitment of the post, in contributing to the strategic direction and operation of the Authority.
13. In addition, the Panel considered it appropriate that the amount paid in respect of carer's allowance should be linked with the National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage.
14. A further representation made was that an indexation allowance should be applied to the allowances scheme and that, for example, the allowances be linked to staff pay increases, however, the Panel's view is that it is preferable

in the current period of change, to review the level of allowance on an annual basis, rather than provide for automatic adjustment.

15. The Panel considered that it would be appropriate to backdate the payment of the increased allowances to the start of the financial year (1st April 2017) as it appeared that the level of duties undertaken by Members had been carried out to the level concerned, prior to the commencement of the current financial year.
16. The Panel also noted that there were some technical amendments required to the scheme of allowances as follows:
 - 16.1 paragraph 2.5 should be amended as this no longer reflected the basis for the recommended level of allowances;
 - 16.2 as there was no longer provision to suspend a member from their duties under the ethical standards regime, Section 2.8 of the Scheme should be deleted;
 - 16.3 paragraph 5 of the scheme should be deleted as Members are no longer entitled to pensions.
17. The Panel therefore recommends that:
 - 17.1 the basic allowance, Vice Chair's allowance and the terms and conditions of the Scheme be amended as set out in the Report, the amendment to the allowances be backdated to the start of the financial year commencing on 1st April 2017 and the scheme also to continue to apply during the financial year 2018 to 2019, subject to any further review by the Fire Authority. A summary of the level of proposed allowances is set out in the Appendix to the Report.
 - 17.2 the Deputy Clerk (Monitoring Officer to the Authority) in consultation with the Chairman of the Authority, be authorised to amend the terms of the Scheme to reflect the recommendations set out in this report.

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