

Report of the General Purposes Committee held on 22 February 2023

Present: Councillor David Boothroyd (Chair), Aicha Less and Paul Swaddle

Members' Allowance Scheme 2023-2024

- (a) The Council is required, if it wishes to pay such allowances, to adopt a Members' Allowances Scheme on an annual basis with effect from 1 April each year.
- (b) Currently, Westminster pay significantly lower allowances than other London boroughs. Therefore, in drawing up the new Members' Allowances Scheme the Committee considered several options in order to update the scheme. In drawing up the options regard had been given to the recommendations of the London-wide Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) convened by London Councils. The latest IRP report (January 2022) made recommendations based on roles as a percentage of the Leader's overall allowance (basic plus SRA). Currently the Leader and most other roles were substantially below where the IRP recommended and in addition the current scheme has significant structural anomalies within it in terms of the percentages applied to each role.
- (c) As such, the Committee acknowledged that Westminster's allowances scheme required updating to fix the significant structural and historical issues which currently beset it. Various options were explored setting out how the scheme could be amended.
- (d) In considering the proposals we noted the views of both political parties of the council and following discussions the Committee agreed to recommend to Full Council Option 4 as the most appropriate method to update the scheme in this year. This option, as set out in the report, assumed a 4.04% uplift in the basic allowance but took a more targeted approach to increasing SRAs, focusing on those roles which were under most pressure or had unique characteristics in Westminster. The overall annual cost of this option would be £998,834, an increase of £69,802 on the current position. This was higher than the existing spend but within the budget currently available
- (e) Separately, an amendment to the Dependents/Carers Allowance policy was proposed which would allow councillors who claim the allowance to do so for one hour either side of a defined duty. This was a change from half an hour either side and it was proposed in recognition of the fact that it may take Councillors more than half an hour to travel across the city, when allowing for a reasonable buffer time. The Committee considered it would not have a significant financial impact as the allowance was not claimed very often.

Recommendation:

That Full Council:

- 1) Be recommended to approve the Member Allowances 2023-2024 Option 4 scheme, as set out in the report, with effect from 1 April 2023.
- 2) Be recommended to approve the amendment to the Dependents/Carers Allowance Policy as set out in Appendix B of the report.

David Boothroyd, Chair

Background Papers

Appendix 1 - Report to General Purposes Committee (22.02.23).