

Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel

Scheme of Members' Allowances for Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by the Independent Remuneration Panel (the **Panel**) for Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority (the **Authority**) comprising John Quinton, Keith Broughton and Martin Varley all of whom are resident in the community and who have previously served on remuneration panels for statutory authorities.

2. Legal Basis

- 2.1 The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (the **Regulations**) apply to local authorities including fire and rescue authorities.
- 2.2 The Regulations require a relevant authority to make a scheme providing for the payment of a basic allowance (**BA**) to each member of that authority. The basic allowance must be the same for each member of an authority.
- 2.3 A scheme of allowances may also provide for the payment of special responsibility allowances (**SRAs**) to such members of an authority as have special or additional responsibilities. Where members of an authority are divided into two or more political groups and a majority of members belong to the same political group, an SRA must be paid to at least one member who is not a member of that group.
- 2.4 Member allowance schemes may also provide for the payment of a dependants' carers' allowance and also for members' travelling and subsistence whilst acting in connection with their duties as a member of an authority.
- 2.5 Before an authority may make or amend a scheme of allowances it must have regard to recommendations made in relation to such scheme by an independent remuneration panel.

3. Context

- 3.1 The constituent authorities appointing members to the Authority are: Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council – Five Members; Dorset Council – Four Members; Swindon Borough Council – Three Members; and Wiltshire Council – Six Members.
- 3.2 In 2019 the Authority adopted a scheme of members' allowances (the **Scheme**) and the Panel has been requested to review this Scheme and to make recommendations to the Authority, accordingly.
- 3.3 The Panel was briefed by the Chief Fire Officer and the Clerk to the Authority in relation to the current governance arrangements. These had evolved significantly following the creation of the Authority in 2016. There had been a significant reduction in the membership of the Authority in 2018 from 30 to 18 members. The Panel's attention was drawn to the changes that had been made to governance arrangements. The focus of the Panel's work was to understand the consequent impact of those changes on the workload and time commitment of members.

4. Panel Deliberations

- 4.1 The Panel met on 26 and 28 April and 3 and 5 May 2023.
- 4.2 The Panel had the opportunity to interview those individuals named at paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 when it met.
- 4.3 Subsequently, the Panel agreed the terms of this report on the review of the Scheme and its recommendations by exchange of emails.

5. Methodology for the review

- 5.1 The Panel invited comments from all members of the Fire Authority, with one member replying in writing. The Panel sought to interview members of all political groups and officers with varying roles and responsibilities. This was in an effort to gain the best possible understanding of the roles and responsibilities of members, their performance and the impact on the operation of the Authority.
- 5.2 The Panel interviewed the following members of the Authority:
- Councillor Rebecca Knox – Chairman of the Authority;
 - Councillor Paul Oatway – Vice-Chairman of the Authority;
 - Councillor Byron Quayle – Chairman of the Finance and Audit Committee;

- Councillor Pip Ridout – Vice-Chairman of the Finance and Audit Committee and Chairman of Wiltshire Local Performance and Scrutiny Committee; and
- Councillor Peter Barrow - Chairman of Dorset Local Performance and Scrutiny Committee.

5.3 The Panel interviewed Ben Ansell, Chief Fire Officer, Jonathan Mair, Clerk to the Authority and Monitoring Officer, and David Shaw, Democratic Services Officer.

5.4 The Panel wishes to record its thanks to those individuals who gave evidence.

6. Evidence

6.1 The Panel was provided with the following evidence:

- the Scheme;
- the Regulations;
- the Members' Handbook including the terms of reference of the Authority and its committees;
- benchmarking data – levels of current allowances, electorate figures and size of authority for Avon, Royal Berkshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and Devon and Somerset Fire Authorities; and
- details of pay awards to green book staff in the Fire and Rescue Service since 2019.

6.2 As part of the initial briefing from the Chief Fire Officer and the Clerk to the Authority, the Panel was informed that the governance structures were effective and closely aligned to the priorities of the service. They had evolved since the combined structure of the Authority had been implemented. At formation, the Authority agreed to appoint four Local Performance and Scrutiny Committees (**LPSC**) to enable a local focus to be given to service performance thereby allowing the Authority to maintain a strategic overview of the service.

6.3 The Authority had since the 2019 review implemented "Buddy Scheme" whereby individual members developed contact with specific local fire stations/service workplaces. However, the Panel was advised that this Buddy Scheme had been withdrawn. The Authority had determined that LPSCs adequately provide the local focus and facilitate the engagement of members on a needs led basis.

7. Commencement Date for amendments to the Scheme

7.1 The Panel considered at what date would it be appropriate date for the Scheme to be revised and amended. The Panel recommends that this report should be considered at the annual meeting of the Authority in June 2023

(Commencement Date). The Panel further recommends that this would be the most appropriate date for the amendment of the Scheme as revised.

- 7.2 ***The Panel therefore recommends that any amendments to the Scheme adopted by the Authority should take effect and may be claimed retrospectively from the date of the Annual meeting of the Authority in June 2023.***

8. Indexation of Allowances

- 8.1 The Panel considered whether to recommend that an indexation measure be introduced to the Scheme, whereby allowances will rise annually.
- 8.2 The Panel received evidence from both members and officers in support of the introduction of such an indexation measure. This would help with budgeting. Further, to increase allowances gradually to reflect any cost of living increases would avoid potentially significant increases at the time of the next review.
- 8.3 The Panel is unanimous that if an indexation measure was introduced it should apply to the BA only and not be applied to SRAs. The purpose of the BA is to recompense members for the cost of using their homes as an office. It is here that the impact of cost of living increases is often most keenly felt. This is contrasted with the purpose of a SRA, which is to reflect the additional responsibilities and accountabilities of a specific role.
- 8.4 ***The Panel recommends that the Basic Allowance is increased annually, with effect from each anniversary of the Commencement Date, and commencing in 2024, by reference to the annual pay award to green book staff.***
- 8.5 ***The Panel further recommends that no indexation measure be applied to Special Responsibility Allowances.***

9. Basic Allowance

- 9.1 The Panel was advised that the BA had been increased from £3,200 to £4,200 in 2019, approximately a 33% increase. Since that time, the indexation measure for pay awards for green book staff, referred to in paragraph 8.4 above, amounted to approximately 10.54%.
- 9.2 Benchmarking data was provided to the Panel which indicated that the BA payable by Devon and Somerset Fire Authority was £2,786 (20/21 figure) and by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire Authority was £6,569 (22/26 figure) both of which served a slightly larger electorate. For Avon Fire Authority the BA was £2,220 (22/23 figure) and for the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority it was £2,701 (23/24 figure). The Panel accepted that the structures and

organisation of other Fire Authorities made it difficult to make exact comparisons. Notwithstanding this, the current BA was reasonably placed when compared to similar local fire authorities.

- 9.3 There was a broad consensus of those interviewed by the Panel that there had not been a substantial increase in the workloads or time commitment of members since 2019. The Panel was cognisant of the significant travel commitment of members and this additional time commitment had been recognised within the enhanced basic allowance agreed as part of the 2019 review.
- 9.4 ***The Panel recommends no increase in the Basic Allowance from the Commencement Date, and that the proposed indexation increase be applied in accordance with the recommendation at paragraph 8.4 of this report.***

10. Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)

- 10.1 The Panel was aware that in addition to the leadership role of the Chairman of the Authority, there was also a substantial "civic" role. Whilst it appeared that the civic role had not increased significantly, the leadership role of the Chairman, including the role nationally, had increased substantially. The time commitment of the Chairman's role was such that it also impacts on the Vice-Chairman who is expected to deputise for and assist the Chairman.
- 10.2 The SRAs for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman were not increased in 2019. The Chairman's SRA (£9,600), particularly, was now out of kilter with comparable Authorities regionally. The Chairman's SRA payable by Devon and Somerset Fire Authority was £13,930 (20/21 figure) and by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire Authority, £13,138 (22/26 figure). For Avon Fire Authority the SRA was £9,543 (22/23 figure) and for the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority it was £13,509 (23/24 figure).
- 10.3 The Panel was of the view that the overall role of the Chairman had increased and that the disparity with other comparable authorities cannot be justified and should be addressed. In order to spread the financial impact to the Authority, the Panel recommends phasing in increases over the 4 year life of this review.
- 10.4 There was a consensus amongst interviewees that the relativity between the Chairman's and Vice-Chairman's SRA is appropriate. It is currently set at 50%.
- 10.5 There was also a consensus that the SRA for the Chairman of Finance and Audit Committee should not be more than the SRA for the Vice-Chairman of the Authority as the roles were considered to be broadly comparable. The SRA for the Chairman of Finance and Audit Committee is currently set at £7,500 and that of the Vice-Chairman of the Authority at £4,800.

- 10.6 The Panel received no evidence to suggest that the role and importance of the Chairman of the Finance and Audit Committee had reduced or is likely to reduce in the foreseeable future. The Panel did therefore not feel able to recommend that this SRA should be reduced. However, if the Authority agree to the Panel's recommendation to a phased increase in the Chairman of the Authority's SRA, then maintaining the current relativity between the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Authority's SRA, would mean that the Vice-Chairman's SRA over the four-year period of this review, would move closer to that of the Chairman of the Finance and Audit Committee.
- 10.7 The Panel recognises that the LPSCs perform an important function and are a good example of partnership working between officers and members. However, the Panel did not consider that there was any compelling evidence that the workload or responsibilities of the Chairmen of LPSCs had increased substantially. The Panel recommends that the SRA for Chairmen of LPSCs should remain at the current level, therefore.
- 10.8 ***The Panel recommends that the following SRAs be paid from the Commencement Date in recognition of the additional workload and levels of responsibility and accountability placed upon members appointed to these roles:***
- ***Chairman of the Authority – £11,900 increasing by equal instalments of £500 on each anniversary of the Commencement Date until 2026 when it should be £13,400;***
 - ***Vice-Chairman of the Authority – £5,950 increasing by equal instalments of £250 on each anniversary of the Commencement Date until 2026 when it should be £6,700;***
 - ***Chairman of the Finance and Audit Committee - £7,500; and***
 - ***Chairman of each Local Performance and Scrutiny Committee - £1,600.***
- 10.9 ***The Panel further recommends no change to the Scheme, that members may receive only one SRA (and may elect which SRA to receive).***

11. Travel allowance

- 11.1 The Panel had recognised in its previous review, the increased travel commitment of members and had recommended the continued use of HMRC Mileage Allowance Payments (**MAPs**).
- 11.2 The MAP approved amounts are currently:
- Car – 45p per mile up to 10,000 and 25p per mile thereafter;

- Passenger payments – up to 5p per mile per passenger (up to a maximum of four) to be claimed only for passengers who would otherwise be eligible for travelling allowance;
- Motorcycle – 24p per mile;
- Bicycle – 20p per mile;
- In relation to public transport (including rail and bus) - standard fare; and
- parking fees – actual cost.

11.3 The Panel did not receive any evidence on the issue of travel allowances but it was asked to consider the inclusion of an allowance to provide for the reimbursement of the cost of charging an electric vehicle.

11.4 ***The Panel recommends that travel allowances continue to be paid to members in line with MAPs for undertaking official business as laid out in the Scheme.***

11.5 ***The Panel recommends that an allowance be included within the Travel Allowances section of the Scheme as revised to reimburse the cost of charging an electric vehicle and that this should be set at the same rate as for petrol and diesel vehicles.***

12. Subsistence allowances

12.1 The Panel did not receive any evidence on the issue of subsistence payments.

12.2 ***The Panel recommends that the Scheme continues to provide for subsistence allowances to be paid to members that reflect the scheme in place for green book staff.***

13. Dependants' carers' allowance

13.1 This allowance covers a variety of care costs.

13.2 The Panel is of the view that no one should be prevented from serving as a member of the Authority exclusively due to the costs of care obligations. The Panel was informed that this allowance had never been claimed.

13.3 The Panel recommended in the 2019 review that a dependants' carers' allowance should be paid to reimburse the actual cost expended for the care of dependants for such time as a member is attending to Authority business, at an hourly rate not exceeding £30.00 and that no allowance is payable to a

connected person unless providing care through a Care Quality Commission (CQC) approved third party entity.

- 13.4 ***The Panel recommends that the rate of the Dependants' Carer's Allowance be the actual cost expended, subject to the hourly rate not exceeding £30.00 and that no allowance is payable to a connected person unless providing care through a CQC approved third party entity.***

14. Suspension of allowances

- 14.1 ***The Panel recommends that the Authority should continue to include provisions within the revised Scheme to provide for the suspension of allowances in those circumstances which are currently set out in the Scheme.***