

Report of the Head of Legal Services

Members' Allowances Scheme 2024/25

Purpose of report

1. To propose an increase in the allowances paid to Members for 2024/25 in accordance with the previous decision that increases be linked to the National Joint Council annual pay award for 'Green Book' staff.
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Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) *the existing basic and special responsibility allowances paid to Members be increased by 3.88% for 2024/25, in line with the increase to additional allowances agreed as part of the NJC pay award for 'Green Book' Staff for 2023;*
- (ii) *the Dependent Carers' allowance be increased to £11.44 per hour in line with the national living wage; and*
- (ii) *the revised Members' Allowances Scheme for 2024/25 be approved.*

Introduction and Background

2. The Authority is required to make a scheme each year for its Members to be paid a basic annual allowance, under the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. Authorities may also make provision for other allowances, for example for those Members with special responsibilities or for travel and subsistence. The proposed 2024/25 budget for Members' allowances is £52,000.

Annual Increase

3. The Regulations allow for authorities to refer to an index for the purpose of any annual adjustments to the levels of allowances.
4. At the Authority's meeting in February 2022, it was resolved that allowances should be increased each year by the same percentage as the preceding year's pay award for National Joint Council 'Green Book' staff (if any). This ensures that allowances keep pace with, but do not exceed, the pay increases awarded to staff.

NCJ Annual Awards

5. The NCJ Green Book pay settlement for April 2023, agreed in November 2023, was for a flat rate increase of £1,925 at all pay grades. Thus the pay award ranged from 9.4% for the lowest paid to 3.88% for higher paid employees. Additional allowances were updated by 3.88%%
6. It is difficult to translate a flat rate increase of £1,925 for staff into a percentage increase to members' allowances. It is therefore proposed to use the 3.88% increase to staff allowances as the most appropriate measure, as we did last year.
7. The table below shows a comparison of the current allowances and the proposed 3.88% increase.

	Current	Proposed 2024/25	
	2023/24	Increase	Allowance
		3.88%	
Basic Allowance	£ 1,235.15	£ 47.92	£ 1,283.07
FRA Chairman	£ 9,487.68	£ 368.12	£ 9,855.80
FRA Vice--Chair	£ 5,692.56	£ 220.87	£ 5,913.43
Group Leaders	£ 1,423.14	£ 55.22	£ 1,478.36
Chair - A+S Cttee	£ 1,423.14	£ 55.22	£ 1,478.36
Chair - P+R Cttee	£ 1,423.14	£ 55.22	£ 1,478.36

8. Members may only receive one special responsibility allowance. Based on the current Member appointments, the total allowances payable are/will be as follows:

	Current	Proposed	
	2023/24	2024/25	Increase
Total allowances payable	£ 50,328	£52,281	£ 1,953

Dependent Carer's Allowance

9. The scheme of allowances also includes an additional allowance that can be claimed to cover expenditure incurred for the care of dependents whilst Members' are attending Authority meetings. This has previously been set in accordance with the national living wage (currently £10.42 per hour) and will increase to £11.44 per hour from April. In practice, no claims have been made under this heading.

Conclusion/Summary

10. The proposed increase of members' allowances by 3.88% gives effect to the decision taken in February 2022 linking future increases to the annual pay awards for the Authority's non-operational, NJC 'Green Book' staff.
11. It is proposed that the dependent carers' allowance would be increased in line with the national living wage to £11.44 per hour
12. The proposed increase would equate to an additional cost overall of £1,953 which has been allowed for within the current draft budget.
13. The revised amounts have been included in a draft Members' Allowances Scheme for 2024/25 at appendix 1. Any Member who does not wish to receive the allowance either in full or who chooses to decline the proposed increase may do so.

Corporate Considerations

Resource Implications (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	The proposed increase of 3.88% across all allowances would equate to an additional cost of £1,953, bringing the total budget for Members' allowances to £52,300 .
Strategic Policy Links & Core Code of Ethics (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	None directly.
Risk Management / Health & Safety (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	None directly.
Consultation (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	None.
Equalities (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	The current Members' Allowances Scheme includes a Dependents' Carers' Allowance to assist those members with caring responsibilities in carrying out their approved duties.

Data Protection Impact Assessment (where personal data is processed a DPIA must be completed to ensure compliant handling)	
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Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Draft Members’ Allowances Scheme 2024/25

Background papers:

Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003
NJC pay agreement for 2023

Members' Allowances Scheme 2024/25

Fire Authority Members receive certain allowances in recognition of their various duties and to recognise the time they give to undertake Authority work. Allowances are also intended to cover incidental costs that may be incurred by Members.

Allowances will be adjusted annually in line with the preceding year's pay award to the Authority's non-operational NJC 'Green Book' staff.

Basic Allowance

The annual basic allowance of £1,283.07 is paid to all Members.

Special Responsibility Allowances

The following additional allowances are paid to Members with special responsibilities:

Chair of the Authority	£9,855.80
Vice Chair of the Authority	£5,913.43
Political Group Leaders	£1,478.36
Chairman of Audit & Standards Committee	£1,478.36
Chairman of Policy & Resources Committee	£1,478.36

Members with more than one special responsibility will only receive one special responsibility allowance at the higher appropriate level.

The Members' Allowances Scheme also includes the following travel and subsistence allowances:

Travel Allowance

Allowances for travel expenses incurred by Members undertaking their approved duties can be claimed.

Mileage can be claimed for travel by car motorbike or cycle in line with the rate used by HM Revenue & Customs. Car park costs incurred by a Member whilst undertaking an approved duty may also be claimed back although evidence of the payment will need to be submitted.

For those Members who car share, a passenger allowance can be claimed by the driver in respect of one or more passengers who are fellow Authority Members carried on Authority business.

Members may claim for use of public transport up to the amount of the ordinary standard class fare (or any available cheap fare as incurred). Evidence of the payment will need to be submitted. Taxi fares may be claimed where bus/train travel is not practical. Receipts will be required.

Approved Duties

Members may submit a claim for travel allowances for:

- a) meetings of the Authority, its committees, sub-committees, panels or working parties;
- b) meetings of outside bodies to which a Member is appointed by the Authority, if that organisation does not pay Members' expenses;
- c) Authority Member training seminars, events and workshops;
- d) Chairman's briefing meetings;
- e) meetings with Officers in connection with the functions of the Authority which have been convened by the Chief Fire Officer or a member of the Senior Management Board; or
- f) any meeting or event as approved by the Authority or its Committees.

Subsistence Allowances

Members can claim subsistence allowance payments as a reimbursement of actual expenditure, on the basis that reasonable expenses evidenced by receipts will be paid. Similarly, reasonable overnight accommodation expenses will be paid where this is necessary and is evidenced by receipts.

Dependent Carers' Allowance

Members may claim an additional allowance to cover expenditure incurred for the care of dependents as follows:

- i) £11.44 per hour (this amount will increase each year in line with the national living wage);
- ii) Payable in respect of attendance at meetings of the Authority, its committees and Member training events; and
- iii) Claims to be made only in respect of care provided by persons other than family members resident in the house and all claims to be evidenced by receipts.