

7. Members' Allowances Scheme – Carers and Dependents Allowance

Purpose of report

1. To consider an additional provision to the existing Members' Allowances Scheme to cover expenditure incurred by Members for the care of their dependents whilst undertaking particular approved duties. This would bring the Authority's Scheme in line with the Schemes set out by Worcestershire County Council and Herefordshire Council.

Recommendation

The Head of Legal Services recommends that the scheme of Members' allowances be amended to include an additional allowance to cover expenditure incurred for the care of dependents as follows:

- *£6.09 per hour (same rate as Worcestershire County Council);*
- *payable in respect of attendance at meetings of the Authority, its committees and Member training events; and*
- *claims to be made only in respect of care provided by persons other than family members resident in the household and all claims to be evidenced by receipts.*

Introduction and Background

2. The Fire and Rescue Authority has a Members' Allowances Scheme as required under the provisions of the Local Authorities (Members) (England) Regulations 2003. Although the existing allowance rates are reviewed on an annual basis, it has come to light that there is an omission within the existing scheme which Officers consider ought to be addressed now, pending a wider review to ensure that the scheme continues to take into account the time and commitment of Members in undertaking their current roles, whilst also taking account of the principle of voluntary public service.

Dependents' Carers Allowance

3. Most local authorities include a dependents' carers allowance for Members. Members will be aware that their constituent authorities (Worcestershire County Council and Herefordshire Council) provide the opportunity for Members to claim such an allowance if necessary.
4. It has recently been highlighted that unlike other local authorities, the Fire and Rescue Authority does not include a dependents' carers allowance in its Members Allowances Scheme. This omission may mean that those Members with caring responsibilities do not have the same opportunities to perform their

approved duties and meet their commitments as those Members who do not have such responsibilities.

5. To address the situation, it is proposed to include a dependents' carers allowance within the existing Members' Allowances Scheme. It is recommended that the level of the allowance is set at the same rate as Worcestershire County Council i.e. £6.09 per hour. This would cover costs incurred for the care of a child aged 16 or under and in respect of other dependents where care is required.
6. Any caring work claimed for by a Member would have to be undertaken by persons other than family members resident in the household and all claims would need to be evidenced by receipts. Members can be assured that the controls in place to assess claims are robust and have been subject to an internal audit, which concluded that *"the controls concerning the Members' Allowances system are considered satisfactory. It is considered that the process in place is sufficiently robust, with adequate support at an Executive level for dealing with issues arising."*
7. It is proposed that the approved duties for which Members could claim a dependents' carers allowance would be:
 - Authority Meetings
 - Committee Meetings
 - Authority Members' Training Events
8. On average Members would attend between 15 and 20 such events on an annual basis and it is estimated that the average cost incurred under a dependents' carers allowance would be in the region of £440 per year for each Member who was eligible to claim.

Independent Remuneration Panel

9. Under the Regulations, before a Fire and Rescue Authority makes or amends its scheme, it must have due regard to the recommendations made by any Independent Remuneration Panel in relation to its constituent authorities.
10. The Worcestershire Panel reviewed the financial support to Worcestershire County Councillors in February 2011 and the Herefordshire Panel undertook a similar review for Herefordshire Councillors in May 2011. No recommendations were made with regard to dependents' carers allowances.

Conclusion/Summary

11. It has recently been highlighted that the current Members' Allowances Scheme is not consistent with the constituent authorities in terms of allowances for Members for any expenditure incurred in the care of dependents. This report proposes an additional provision to the existing Members' Allowances Scheme to cover such expenditure whilst undertaking particular approved duties. This would not only be consistent with the approach taken by the constituent authorities but also with the Equality Scheme adopted by the Authority in 2010.

12. A dependents' carers allowance would provide the same opportunities for those Members with caring responsibilities to perform their approved duties and meet their commitments as those Members who do not have such responsibilities. Such an allowance may also contribute to encouraging a wider spectrum of Members to be appointed to the Authority in future.

Financial Considerations

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e paragraph no.
There are financial issues that require consideration	Yes	Paragraph 8

Legal Considerations

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e paragraph no.
There are legal issues e.g. contractual and procurement, reputational issues that require consideration	No	

Additional Considerations

13. The table below sets out any additional issues arising from the proposals contained in this report and identifies the relevant paragraphs in the report where such issues are addressed.

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e paragraph no.
Resources (e.g. Assets, ICT, Human Resources, Training & Development, Sustainability).	No	
Strategic Policy Links (e.g. IRMP, Authority Plan, Equality & Diversity, Partnerships, Environmental Impact).	Yes	Paragraph 12 – reference to the Authority's Equality Scheme
Risk Management / Health & Safety (e.g. risk management and control measures, risk register score).	Yes	Paragraph 7- robust system in place to process allowances
Consultation with Representative Bodies	No	

Supporting Information

Background papers:

25 September 2003 - Combined Fire Authority Report: Members' Allowance Scheme
Worcestershire County Council Members' Allowances Scheme
Herefordshire Council Members' Allowances Scheme
Report of the Herefordshire Independent Remuneration Panel, May 2011
Review of Financial Support for County Councillors – Worcestershire Independent
Remuneration Panel, February 2011

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