

**REPORT SUMMARISING THE FINDINGS OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME OF CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY**

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**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 I was engaged by the Monitoring Officer to carry out a review of the Members' Allowances Scheme of Cheshire Fire Authority. I have previously carried out a similar review for the Fire Authority. I sit on the Independent Remuneration Panel of Cheshire East Borough Council.
- 1.2 I have reviewed a number of documents and been provided with a range of comparative information by the Governance Officer and wish to thank her for the excellent support that she has provided to me.

**2 MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEMES OF THE CONSTITUENT AUTHORITIES**

- 2.1 I have checked the Members' Allowances Schemes of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington Borough Councils. I have also considered the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panels of these Councils. I did not find anything that directly impacts upon the outcome of the review. However, I did note certain aspects of the schemes operated by the Councils, e.g. the number of Special Responsibility Allowances payable and the Index used.

### **3 STRUCTURE OF CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME**

3.1 The existing Members' Allowances Scheme of Cheshire Fire Authority is largely unremarkable, being typical of the schemes operated by other fire and rescue authorities and local authorities generally. Therefore, it appears to be an appropriate basis for the replacement scheme, with no requirement for significant change. Accordingly, the commentary below follows the format of the existing Scheme.

### **4 LEVEL OF BASIC ALLOWANCE**

4.1 I have considered various pieces of information. An example is attached as Annex 1 to this report. It shows the most relevant data relating to the Family Group fire and rescue authorities that have similar governance arrangements to those of Cheshire Fire Authority. This data shows that the existing basic allowance is within the range of basic allowances paid by the Family Group. There seems to be a loose correlation between the level of the basic allowance and the number of members of the fire and rescue authority, i.e. the smaller the number of members the higher the basic allowance. However, this is not a consistent situation.

4.2 I was encouraged to consider whether the allowances should be compared to those of local authorities. However, I felt that the roles of a fire authority Member and of a local authority councillor are sufficiently different to make such a comparison unproductive.

**4.3 *I concluded that the level of basic allowance was appropriate and need not change.***

### **5 SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY ALLOWANCES**

#### **5.1 Level**

5.1.1 Again, I have considered various pieces of information, the most relevant being the data on the Family Group. I found it difficult to find a clear correlation, or relationship between the various common Special Responsibility Allowances paid by the fire and rescue authorities. Of course, roles within different fire and rescue authorities may sound the same, but involve quite different levels of work. Hopefully, the following comments set the scene and help to illustrate the challenge of finding a meaningful comparison:

- The Chair's allowance is higher than the average paid across the Family Group.
- The Deputy Chair's allowance is 50% of the Chair's allowance when some Family Group fire and rescue authorities pay a higher percentage, with some paying as low as 25% of the Chair's allowance.

- The Group Leader's allowance varies significantly across the Family Group, with some not paying the allowance at all. Cheshire's is the lowest payable.
- Committee Chair's allowances vary significantly, with Cheshire's being fairly generous.

**5.1.2 *In relation to the above-mentioned Special Responsibility Allowances I concluded that they were appropriate and need not change.***

5.2 Payment of More than One SRA

5.2.1 I was also encouraged to consider whether it was appropriate to pay a Member for more than one special responsibility: the current Scheme only allows for one Special Responsibility Allowance to be paid, i.e. the higher, or highest. I know that this was raised by some Members in response to an initial questionnaire circulated by the Governance Officer. However, I am aware that a number of Members have said that they do not support the payment of more than one Special Responsibility Allowance.

5.2.2 I did comment on this when I was involved in the last review. I personally cannot see a problem in paying two Special Responsibility Allowances, when it can safely be argued that this reflects the work being undertaken. Unfortunately, this can be difficult to explain/justify and most public bodies only allow the payment of one Special Responsibility Allowance. This is, in fact, the case for all of the Family Group fire and rescue authorities and the constituent authorities. The payment of more than one Special Responsibility Allowance appears to be the exception.

5.2.3 I understand that the financial impact of paying more than one Special Responsibility Allowance is relatively small.

**5.2.4 *In the circumstances I will leave the Fire Authority to determine whether a Member is able to receive more than one Special Responsibility Allowance.***

5.3 Member Champions

5.3.1 This is probably the only aspect of the Scheme that is remarkable. Cheshire is one of only two fire and rescue authorities in the Family Group that have clearly defined Member Champion roles that attract an allowance. Lancashire is the other. Cheshire has 18 Member Champions, with Lancashire having 4. Lancashire pays nearly double that of Cheshire by way of a Special Responsibility Allowance. However, Lancashire's Member Champions are subject to formalities that do not exist in Cheshire, e.g. they are required to submit a quarterly report to the fire and rescue authority upon the activities associated with their roles.

5.3.2 I did question why Cheshire had so many Member Champions when I carried out the last review. I understand that a review has taken place since then, but note that there are now more Member Champions than before.

**5.3.3 *I believe that the Fire Authority should carry out a further review of the Member Champion roles. It should consider whether each of the Member***

***Champion roles is necessary and satisfy itself that each provides a meaningful benefit. This should be concluded within the first 12 months of the introduction of the new scheme.***

## **6 OTHER PAYMENTS**

6.1 I note that the payments for attending the North West Fire Forum (£35 per meeting) and to Independent Persons for dealing with complaints about Member conduct (£35 per meeting) have not changed since the last review.

**6.2 *I recommend that these figures are increased so that they reflect the level of NJC pay increases during the period of the current scheme. The figures should be rounded up, or down.***

6.3 I note that the payments to the independent (non-elected) members have been increased in the same way as payments to the other Members, i.e. in line with the NJC pay increases and need not consider these further.

## **7 TRAVEL, SUBSISTENCE AND OTHER ALLOWANCES**

7.1 Travel (the mileage rate) continues to be aligned to the nationally set figure. Subsistence rates are aligned to officer rates. This approach remains appropriate and is consistent with the way other public bodies deal with such payments. Whilst the rates have not increased for some time I do not recommend an increase.

7.2 I note that the maximum amount of Dependants' Carers' Allowance that can be claimed has not changed since the last review. However, other public bodies have not increased their figures.

**7.3 *I recommend that these figures remain the same.***

## **8 ANNUAL INCREASE - INDEX**

8.1 I have not spent much time considering this. It is clear that the majority of public bodies have adopted an index that aligns increases with the NJC pay awards – so that increases for members' allowances mirror the increases in pay of the majority of staff. However, some bodies do use other indices, e.g. CPI. Three of the constituent authorities use the NJC and one uses CPI.

**8.2 *I recommend that the index should continue to refer to increases that are aligned to NJC pay awards. It should apply for the duration of the new scheme, i.e. four years.***