

MINUTES OF MEETING STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY, 2ND MARCH, 2020, 19:00 – 20:40

PRESENT: Councillors Felicia Opoku (Chair), James Chiriyankandath, Luke Cawley-Harrison and Elin Weston.

123. FILMING AT MEETINGS

Members of the Committee noted the notice attached at Item 1 of the agenda pack in respect of filming at meetings.

124. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Demir.

125. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

126. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

127. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

It was noted Councillor Rice was present as a substitute and should therefore be moved from 'Also present' to 'Present'.

The Committee were advised of the completed actions from the previous meeting. Additionally, it was noted that:

- Regarding Pension Committee and Board Member training, this was constantly reviewed by that Committee in an item on its agenda at every meeting. It was noted that training was provided before every Pensions Committee and Board meeting.
- There was to be a report prepared for the Committee in June on co-opted members which would address concerns raised at the previous meeting. The Acting Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager would provide an update on the co-opted membership process by April (**Action: Ayshe Simsek**).
- Regarding the recruitment of co-opted members, it was noted this was subject to legislation and, further, that information on co-opted member appointments should be evident in the constitution. The principal lawyer was going to investigate the role of co-opted members to provide further clarity.
- Regarding the involvement of different faith groups at Scrutiny meetings, this was being explored by the relevant legal officer at the Council.
- Amendments to the Social Media Guidance had been made.

RESOLVED

To confirm and sign the minutes of the Standards Committee held on 23rd January 2020.

128. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEMBERS ALLOWANCE SCHEME 2020/21

Richard Penn, Independent Advisor (IA), introduced this item to the Committee. It was noted that the draft 'Review of the Members Allowance Scheme' ('the Review') had been presented to the Committee on 23rd January 2020. The Review had since been adapted to include the proposed amendments by the Committee. The Review included in the documentation was the final report.

The Committee were referred to paragraphs 8.2 to 8.5 which outlined the financial impact to the Council if the recommendations of the IA were to be approved.

The Acting Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer noted that the missing information on Southwark Council at page 31 was £1,324,831 for '*Total cost of Members' Scheme from budget*', 63 for '*Total number of councillors*' and £21,029 for '*Average cost per councillor*'.

The Chair invited Member questions and/or comments on the Review. The following was noted:

- The Committee praised the Review for its thoroughness and the IA for all the work he had done.
- The IA noted there had been previous efforts to introduce a national scheme for all councillors in England in the early 2000s, however, this ceased following a change of Government.
- London Councils had commissioned a report by an independent panel on 'Remuneration of Councillors in London Report 2018'. The IA considered the recommendations contained within helpful and would have created consistency across the London Councils, however, they had not been adopted.
- The IA noted the structure of a council was a political choice and that it was up to individual councils to decide which committees they had and how to remunerate chairs. For this reason, it was accepted that comparisons between councils was difficult.
- The IA noted that in Wales, there was a separate body which oversaw Members Allowance Schemes and took decisions on behalf of Councils. For example, it had capped the number of committee chairs a council was able to remunerate and had also capped the total expenditure a council was able to budget for their Member Allowance Scheme. The Member Allowance Schemes for councils in Wales were therefore consistent with one another.
- The IA considered any committee which had a 'terms of reference' warranted a SRA.
- The option to allocate any changes to the Member Allowance Scheme to a London wide body was considered helpful and would create consistency. However, it was recognised that it would be difficult to amalgamate a Member Allowance Scheme across all the London councils, as all had different structures with different political agendas.

- The Acting Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer advised that reducing the number of committees would not be practical as that would then result in fewer committees available to cover necessary work.

The Committee then went on to discuss the recommendations.

The Committee were against Recommendation 1 and 2 as set out at pages 42 and 43. In discussion, it was noted:

- It was noted that the two recommendations were separated as Recommendation 1 presented various options for the Leaders remuneration (which Members would have to choose from) whereas Recommendation 2 proposed fixed figures for other SRAs. The IA suggested the Leader's SRA should be fixed at £45,000.
- There was concern that it would not be appropriate to raise existing SRAs beyond an index linked rise to the basic allowance, in light of the difficult financial situation of the Council.
- It was suggested that part of recommendation 2, that "*the Basic Allowance payable in 2020/21 remains at £11,026 per annum, and that this payment is index linked to the local government staff pay award for 2020 when it is finalised later this year. The increase will be payable in the 2021/22 municipal year*" should be adopted.
- There was concern that there would be confusion as to why the Committee commissioned the report at a cost in the first place, if it then argued that it was too costly to adopt the proposed recommendations. The Chair noted that it was considered important that there be an independent review of the Members Allowance Scheme but that it had not been possible to foresee what the outcome of the review would be. The Chair had anticipated there would be proposals to decrease SRAs as well as increase them. However, no decreases had been proposed, which would mean all proposed increases would incur extra costs.
- Regarding a suggestion that the Committee could have included in the terms of reference a restriction on the total amount that the SRAs could equal, the Acting Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager noted that would not have been possible. This was an independent, evidence-based review which would have been compromised were there to have been any restrictions on what the total SRAs equalled. It was noted there had been significant evidence gathered with a multitude of responses to the questionnaires sent to councillors and there had also been interviews held with councillors. The IA noted there had been few calls for a decrease in any SRA.
- The IA was satisfied that the proposed changes to SRAs were right but accepted that it was a difficult political decision for the Committee to make.
- The Committee praised the Review as providing a good basis for future decision making on remuneration of SRAs but noted that the national and economic context must be considered.
- It was suggested that the Committee had not bound itself to the outcome of the review just because it had commissioned it. The Review contained valuable information but there was concern that it was not appropriate at the current time to adopt the proposed increases to certain SRAs.

- There was a difference of opinion in what the evidence showed with a member considering there was enough evidence to suggest that the existing Member Allowance Scheme was fair and should therefore continue without any change.
- It was suggested that any increase to the Basic Allowance should be pegged to inflation increases or pay offers to local government staff.
- A member noted frustration that the issue of cost had not been previously discussed, despite a draft version of the Review having been presented to the Committee in January 2020. It was felt the issues raised at this meeting could have been addressed in advance. The IA noted that there was more to the Review than SRA changes. It provided educational aspects such as on the role of councillors and the role of chairs.

The Chair thanked the IA and complimented the Review and the significant responses provided by councillors. However, it was noted that the Committee must be conscious of the difficult political and economic climate and also the view of colleagues, who had not widely supported the two proposed recommendations. For those reasons and the above, the Chair and the Committee did not support adopting the recommendations, as set out in the Review.

The Committee was aware that it needed to decide on the Members Allowance Scheme. The Committee considered whether to increase the Basic Allowance earlier for 2020/21, pending the outcome to the local government staff pay award. As the budget allocation for 2020/21 had already been set, if the Committee decided to increase the Basic Allowance earlier, that would lead to an increase of £24,450 (based on an assumed 2% increase) which had not been factored into the budget. The IA had suggested that the increase to the Basic Allowance take place from 2021/22.

The Acting Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager noted that Appendix 6 outlined what the changes to the Constitution would be if the Council had adopted the recommendations proposed by the IA. Appendix 6 did not have an increase to Basic Allowance for 2020/21 factored in.

The Committee considered what increase, if any, it should apply to the Basic Allowance. It was advised that previously, the Committee had agreed for the Basic Allowance to be increased in line with local government staff pay award. However, that figure had yet to be determined for 2020.

The Committee supported the Basic Allowance payable in 2020/21 remaining at £11,026 per annum. It also supported any increase to that payment being index linked to local government staff pay award for 2020, once it had been finalised. That increase would be capped at 2% increase, should the local government staff pay award be greater than 2%. That increase would be payable in the 2021/22 municipal year.

RESOLVED

The Committee approved the Basic Allowance payable in 2020/21 remaining at £11,026 per annum. This payment would be index linked to any local government staff

pay award for 2020, once finalised, and capped at 2%, should there be a greater increase. That increase would be payable in the 2020/21 municipal year.

129. COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

Disbanding the Regulatory Committee and separating the Planning Committee and Licensing Committee

Regarding the proposal to disband the Regulatory Committee and have a Planning Committee and Licensing Committee only, the IA had proposed two new SRA for chairs of these committees, to reflect the extra responsibilities. However, the Acting Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager advised it would not be possible for the Regulatory Committee to be disbanded before the next Annual General Meeting (AGM). A report would need to be prepared with comments provided from legal on whether such an option was possible and also from planning and legal officers for their views on separating the Planning Committee and Licensing Committee. As this would require a change to the amendment, the report would need to be approved by Full Council, however, there was not enough time for that report to be prepared before the next AGM.

The Committee were supportive of separating the two committees but, in light of the Member Allowance Review, considered it appropriate to allow time for a thorough report to be prepared on the matter, and also for the views of the respective chairs to be sought to ensure they were satisfied with the proposal.

It was suggested that, in line with the Work Programme, the Committee have a preliminary discussion on the separation of the Planning Committee and Licensing Committee further at its next meeting in June. The Committee sought a brief report on the potential separation which outlined:

- what the desired outcome would be;
- what the potential issues would be; and
- what the potential timescale was for this to be achieved (**Action: Ayshe Simsek**).

Name Change for Corporate Committee

The Acting Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager would bring the terms of reference for Corporate Committee to the next meeting. That would enable the Committee to consider any appropriate alternative name for Corporate Committee. It was noted the terms of reference included a varied and substantive remit.

The Chair noted that membership of the Corporate Committee would continue as it was until the Standards Committee had an opportunity to review the terms of reference and explore and potential name change.

It was suggested that this matter be included in the report which was to be prepared for the Committee in June, alongside the exploration of separating the Planning Committee and Licensing Committee (**Action: Ayshe Simsek**)

The Acting Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager noted the Terms of Reference for the Health and Wellbeing Board was likely to be revised and presented to the Committee in June. As this was in the Constitution, it would need to be brought before the Standards Committee. The Health and Wellbeing Board was a Council body which included members of the Cabinet and also partner organisations. The work of the Health and Wellbeing Board was Haringey specific.

The Acting Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager would amend the Work Programme to read 'Draft Recommendations for Member Allowance Scheme 2021/2022'.

130. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

N/A.

131. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

2nd March 2020.

Date