

MINUTES OF MEETING Standards Committee HELD ON Tuesday, 24th January, 2023, 7.00pm

PRESENT:

**Councillors: Felicia Opoku (Chair), Ibrahim Ali, Barbara Blake,
Scott Emery and Reg Rice**

ALSO ATTENDING: Fiona Alderman and Ayshe Simsek

29. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The chair referred to the notice of filming at meetings and members noted this information.

30. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies for absence.

31. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no public urgent business and Cllr Emery would raise an exempt matter at item 40.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest put forward.

33. MINUTES

The chair referred to the action concerning the wider circulation of the guidance on Outside Bodies and noted that this would be added to the Members weekly communication newsletter.

RESOLVED

To approve the minutes of the public meeting held on the 4th of October 2022.

34. MEMBERS ALLOWANCES SCHEME FOR 2023- 2024

The Democratic Services and Scrutiny manager introduced the report which sought consideration of the Member's Allowance Scheme proposed for 2023/24 municipal year and recommend the final scheme for approval by full Council on the 27 of March 2023, in accordance with Article 14.03 of the Council's Constitution.

Before it could adopt a Members Allowances Scheme, the Council had a duty to consider the recommendations of an Independent Remuneration Panel in relation to the payment of Members Allowances.

The Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 allowed London Boroughs to use an Independent Remuneration Panel set up for the purpose of making recommendations across London. London Councils set up a panel for this purpose in 2001 and its most recent report was published on the 14th of January 2022 and considered by the Committee on 25th of January 2022 and subsequently in March 2022.

It was noted that the Independent Review Panel was undertaking a detailed review, with recommendations on the remuneration of Councillors in London expected at the end of 2023.

Mike Cooke, the Chair of the Independent Panel for Member Remuneration in London, was currently collecting information from councils on councillors' roles, responsibilities and how workload pressures had changed over the past 12 months following the end of Covid19 Pandemic restrictions. This information would help inform the research that the Independent Panel is currently undertaking. The Democratic Services and Scrutiny Team had provided this information.

It was noted that although the IRP report in 2022 makes recommendations, it was for each individual Council to decide the level of remuneration and for which roles. The 2018 recommendations were also previously considered in the 2019/20 independent review carried out by the Standards Committee.

The following information was noted by the Committee included:

- It was not known the difference between London Member Allowances and more nationally.
- MPs did not get involved with the review of their allowances and this was completed by a separate committee.
- The IRP report indicated that basic allowance could be between £12k to £14k.
- The SRA bandings were last updated in 2017-18.
- The latest increase was to the Basic Allowance and this was in March 2020 when this was increased by 2%.
- There was no increase in SRA's or the Basic Allowance in 2022 as it was not felt appropriate given the economic situation and public sector workers had also not received an increase at the time.
- This year there had been a pay increase for public sector workers and the IRP report indicated that the Council's Basic Allowance scheme was below the recommended banding.

Comments from the Committee on the report were:

- Considering the increased community facing role of councillors which involves public speaking and further dealing with increasingly complex and sensitive casework.
- Considering taking forward a review of the potential wider changes to the Member Allowance scheme to ensure that responsibilities and roles were appropriately remunerated. This would need to be an open and accountable process with conclusions clearly set out to the public.
- The financial implications of increasing the Member Basic Allowance Scheme were noted. However, if the Basic Allowance increase was not agreed for the 2023/2024 year this would mean 3 years without an increase and any, later increase to be in line with national increases, would involve a higher percentage number.
- Ensuring the Member's Allowance Scheme was able to attract councillors from a wide demographic, the local community, and those with caring responsibilities.

The Democratic services and Scrutiny Manager outlined that there was no current budget allocation for an increase in the Basic Allowance as there had not been political indications of this. Ideally, any proposed increase should have been indicated and been put forward in September 2022 to have this included in the Council budget proposals that was due for consideration on the 2nd of March at full Council.

The Democratic Services Manager further advised that a review of the Member Allowance Scheme was undertaken by an Independent Advisor to the Committee between June 2019 and March 2020 and none of the recommendations regarding the special responsibility allowances had been agreed apart from a 1.75% increase for the 2020 – 2021 year. If a further review of the scheme was to be taken forward in the 2023/2024 year, this would need political agreement in the summer 2023 to enable a budget allocation to be proposed in September 2023.

It was also noted that the Members Allowance scheme could be updated at any point in the municipal year to allow further political and financial discussions.

The Committee were advised that if they were minded to take forward a review of the scheme, the last review had involved detailed research and surveys compiled by the Democratic services team supporting the independent advisor who had also been remunerated and the cost of this would need to be considered.

RESOLVED

To note the report and consider a further report at the 21st of March meeting.

35. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Agreed to add to the meeting in June 2023:

- Recent developments in the ethical standards of elected members that might be of interest to members of the Standards Committee in its role of promoting and maintaining high standard of conduct.
- Annual report on Councillor Complaints

Noted that the Council did try to avoid scheduling committee meetings in school holidays and special meetings were only added on an exceptional basis.

36. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None

37. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

21st of March 2023

38. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

To exclude the press and public from the meeting as the reports contained exempt information as defined in Section 100a of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by Section 12A of the Local Government Act 1985); paras 1 & 2; namely, information relating to any individual and information likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

39. EXEMPT MINUTES

To approve the exempt minutes of the meetings held on the 4th of October 2022 and 1 November 2022.

40. NEW ITEMS OF EXEMPT URGENT BUSINESS

As per the exempt minutes.

CHAIR: Councillor Felicia Opoku

Signed by Chair

Date