

## **MODERN LOCAL GOVERNMENT GROUP**

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2012 commencing at 5.30 pm

Present: Cllr. Fleming (Chairman)  
Cllr. Mrs Hunter (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Mrs. Bracken, Brookbank, Mrs. Cook, Mrs. Davison, Piper and Walshe

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Scholey

Cllrs. Clark, Davison, Gaywood, Mrs. Parkin and Miss. Stack were also present.

### 11. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the Modern Local Government Group held on the 11 July 2012 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 12. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

### 13. Review of the Performance and Governance Committee Terms of Reference

The Modern Local Government Group considered a report outlining updates to the terms of reference of the Performance and Governance Committee to reflect organisational changes and changes in statutory or regulatory requirements.

Resolved: That the revisions be approved and it be RECOMMENDED to Council that the revised terms of reference be adopted.

### 14. Review of the Scheme for Members' Allowances

A Joint Independent Remuneration Panel was set up in November 2007. In August 2012 the Panel began a new review into Members Allowances. The review had made a number of recommendations that covered Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs), Carers' Allowances, Travel Expenses and Pensions. The report set out the recommendations that arose from the review.

The Chairman reported that the timescales for decision had slightly changed due to delays in the release of details of the Government finance package for Local Authorities.

The Chairman of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel (JIRP) introduced the Panel's report and explained that consideration had been given to the current financial climate and despite financial constraints the Panel had recommended what it felt was a fair remuneration for the work undertaken by councillors. Affordability had not been a

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primary consideration for the JIRP who were submitting their recommendations for due consideration by the Council.

The Group considered a number of issues in detail, the first of which was proposals around the level of basic allowance. Members felt that it was important to recognise and reflect the evolving role of councillors. A Member highlighted the need to consider equality and diversity issues, ensuring that the Council was inclusive and attracted a wide variety of people to be Councillors. Another Member concurred with this view and stressed the need to consider the ability to recruit new Members. The Member highlighted that councillors currently represented a number of people from different backgrounds and suggested that the composition of elected Members at Sevenoaks District Council was not necessarily an accurate reflection of the diversity of the communities that councillors served.

Another Member suggested that meetings start times were more of a deterrent to potential new councillors than the level of the Member's Allowance. A suggestion was put forward that in order to encourage more working people to become councillors, meetings should start at 7.30pm or even 8pm which would better enable those working in London to attend evening meetings. The Member also suggested that the meeting cycle should be reduced from 5 meetings a year to 4.

The Group considered the role of Vice-Chairman. A Member highlighted that in some circumstances a substantive role was played by the Vice-Chairman, although this role did not necessarily have to attract monetary recognition. It was acknowledged by the Group that it was important for the Council to be clear around expectations of Vice-Chairmen.

The Group also considered the JIRP's proposals around aligning the mileage allowance with the HMRC rate of 45p per mile. In response to a question from a visiting Member the Finance Manager reported that the suggested reduction in the mileage allowance from 65p per mile to 45p per mile would represent a saving of £5,000 to the Council. A Member highlighted that any reduction in the mileage allowance would have a greater impact on councillors serving the wards further away from the Council Offices in Sevenoaks.

Visiting Members highlighted that the Member's Allowances needed to be set at a level that sufficiently covered any costs that councillors incurred in undertaking their duties. Technology had also significantly changed the way in which residents interacted with their councillors and improvements in technology meant that elected representatives were increasingly "on call" 24 hours and day, 7 days a week. A Member also highlighted that increases in inflation had eroded the value of Member's Allowances.

Having heard the discussion, the Chairman agreed that it would be beneficial to constitute a Member level Group to consider issues relating to the Council's governance structure. In addition to establishing a Member level Group the Chairman asked Officers to develop a range of options for member's allowances to be considered at the next meeting of the Modern Local Government Group on 23 January 2013. The options to be developed would need to follow these basic principles:

- The totality of allowances to be kept the same;
- To include changes to the travel allowance;
- Options for increasing the basic allowance whilst removing additional allowances.

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- Options for phasing any increase in allowances.

The Chairman thanked the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel for their comprehensive review of Member's Allowances.

Resolved:

- a) That the MLG's formal thanks to Barry Cushway, Susan Holmes, Simon Knott, Jean Selmes and Colin Wilby for their work reviewing the scheme for Members' Allowances for 2013/14 for the Council be recorded.
- b) That Officers be requested to review all the available options for Member's Allowances and report back to the Modern Local Government Group.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 6.35 PM

CHAIRMAN