

Report of the General Purposes Committee held on 26 February 2020

Present: Councillor Paul Swaddle (Chairman), Melvyn Caplan (Vice-Chairman), Mark Shearer and David Boothroyd

1. Members Allowances Scheme 2020-2021

- (a) The Scheme for the current municipal year was approved by the full Council on the 23 January 2019 upon recommendation from the General Purposes Committee. It was amended by the Council on 18 September 2019 to include arrangements for the receipt of allowances by members in the event of sickness or taking parental leave and to include provision for councillors to claim reimbursement of care expenses they incur in arranging carers to look after dependents when they are undertaking approved council duties.
- (b) The proposed scheme, effective from 1 April 2020 for 2020-2021, which we considered and recommend has been prepared on the basis of the current scheme. As in previous year's regard has been given to the findings and recommendations detailed in the report of the London Council's Independent Panel on the Remuneration of Councillors which was last published in January 2018.
- (c) This committee has previously endorsed the principle of increasing members' allowances as a minimum in line with the increase awarded to all staff. Therefore, basic and special responsibility allowances have been inflated by 2% to reflect the proposed increase in salary for local authority staff in 2020-21 proposed by the employers' side of the National Joint Council for Local Government Services. In the event that the salary increase for Council staff agreed by the NJC exceeds 2% it is proposed that members' allowances are increased further by this difference which will be back dated to the 1 April 2020.
- (d) In considering the proposals we have noted the views of both political parties of the council. The minority party has highlighted that it has two deputy leaders and it suggested that both should be eligible for the associated allowance in the same manner as is afforded to the two deputy leaders of the majority party. We support this amended proposal.

We recommend:

- (i) That the Council approve the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2020-2021 as set out in Appendix 1 to this report from 1 April 2020 subject to the amendment that both deputy leaders of the minority party be eligible to receive the associated allowance for the post.
- (ii) That the Council be recommended to agree that Members' Allowances (Basis and SRA) for 2020-2021 be increased further in line with any salary increase for Council staff that may be agreed above 2% by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services.

2. Reduction in the number of Policy and Scrutiny Committees

- (a) We considered a report that set out proposals to reorganise the roles of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees, including reducing their number from 5 Committees to 4.
- (b) On the 27 January 2020 the Leader of the Council reduced the number of Cabinet Members from 10 to 9 which took effect immediately from that date. The portfolio that was removed was incorporated within the portfolios of the remaining Cabinet Members.
- (c) Currently there are five Policy and Scrutiny Committees:
- City Management and Public Protection;
 - Communities and Customer Services;
 - Economic Development, Education and Place Shaping;
 - Family and People Services; and
 - Housing, Finance and Regeneration
- (d) The proposals we considered envisaged reorganising the Policy and Scrutiny Committees and reducing their number from 5 to 4 so that each Committee scrutinises two Cabinet Members. This will ensure consistency across each Committee and provide adequate time for each to consider other agenda items. The responsibilities included in the Leader of the Council's terms of reference will continue to be scrutinised by the Westminster Scrutiny Commission, the overarching body of the Council that is responsible for overseeing the policy and scrutiny function of the authority.
- (e) The new Policy and Scrutiny Committees will have the same proportionality as the previous policy and scrutiny committees; namely 5 majority party members and 3 minority party members.
- (f) The chairmen of each of the council's policy and scrutiny committees are included in the membership of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission. The proposals we considered recommended reducing the membership of the Commission by one seat to reflect the proposed reduction in the number of committees.

We recommend:

- (i) That Council agree to the reorganisation of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees, which includes reducing them in number from 5 to 4, with the same proportionality and allocation of seats as set out in paragraph 4.5 of the report we considered which is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

- (ii) That the Council agree to reduce the membership of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission by one majority party seat to reflect the reduction in the number of Committee chairmen.
- (iii) That the Council authorise officers to adjust the terms of reference and names of the Policy and Scrutiny Committees to reflect the changes in the Cabinet Member reporting lines as shown in paragraph 4.8 of the report we considered which is attached at Appendix 2 to this report.

Paul Swaddle, Chairman

Background Papers

Report to General Purposes Committee (26.2.20)