

Independent Remuneration Panel

Monday, 10 September 2007

2.00pm

Present:

Jeanette Campbell - Manager of Boots the Chemist
Michael Fanstone - Minister of the Emanuel Baptist Church
David Gingell - Resident and School Governor

In Attendance:

Malcolm Bell, Principal of North West Kent College
Shirley Whatmough, Head of Democratic Services
Paul Saunders, Principal Accountant

1. Introduction

The new Panel was introduced to Malcolm Bell, a previous Panel member, who advised them on the work of the Panel since 2001.

Shirley Whatmough introduced a report outlining the statutory requirements for the Panel and the role that it performed in advising the Council on the level of members' allowances and expenses that should be paid. Since the elections in May 2007 the new administration had introduced some changes in member responsibilities and had asked that the Panel consider the payment of special responsibility allowances for Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen.

The Panel was presented with information which compared the allowances paid by other local authorities throughout the South East compiled by South East Employers. The Panel asked about the rationale for the current level of allowances and the Council's overall budget for member allowances in the current year.

2. Special Responsibility Allowance for Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen

Shirley Whatmough explained that, in addition to the post of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen currently included in the members' allowances scheme the new administration had introduced six Policy Overview Committees chaired by non-executive members to advise the Cabinet on policy matters.

Panel members asked questions about the role of the existing committees and the new committees and noted that the latter were advisory.

The Panel asked about the role of Vice-Chairmen and the frequency at which they were called upon to act in the place of the Chairmen.

The Panel was mindful that it did not wish to increase the overall costs of the scheme. The Panel also commented that the allowance currently received by Vice-Chairmen appeared quite generous when compared with that received by Chairmen and Cabinet Members.

They considered whether Vice-Chairmen should only be paid an allowance when they were required to act at a meeting but concluded that this would not be practicable.

The Panel also drew a distinction between those committees such as the Regulatory Board and the Licensing Committee which had a functional role and the new Policy Overview Committees which were purely advisory.

In conclusion, the Panel recommended that the Council should consider whether it wished to amend the members' allowance scheme to take account of the following:-

- (1) whether the current level of Vice-Chairmen's allowance is appropriate when compared with other special responsibility allowances and the amount of work involved. Consideration could be given to changing the Vice-Chairmen's allowance to a nominal one of the order of £500 per annum in recognition of the role;
- (2) in recognition of the work required to be done by the Chairmen of the new Policy Overview Committees consideration should be given to paying a special responsibility allowance at a lower level than other Chairmen because of the advisory nature of the committees. These new allowances to be funded from the savings made on Vice-Chairmen's allowances.

3. Future work of the Panel

The Panel considered what information it needed in order to carry out its work of reviewing the members' allowances scheme on an annual basis. The Panel suggested that the Leaders of the two Groups be invited to attend a Panel meeting to make recommendations concerning any changes they wished to see to the scheme and to answer the Panels questions about the various roles.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 3.30 pm.