

Appointment of an Independent Remuneration Panel Member

29 July 2020

Report of the Democratic Services Manager

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To enable Council to make an appointment to the Independent Remuneration Panel following a recent recruitment exercise, and to consider whether an allowance should be payable to panel members in future.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That Council appoints Mr Ameer Hakim to its Independent Remuneration Panel.**
- (2) That Council notes the difficulties in recruiting to the Panel and considers making some form of allowance payable to panel members in future.**

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) Regulations 2003 require the Council to establish an Independent Remuneration Panel.
- 1.2 An Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) must consist of at least three members, none of whom must be a member of the Council. The Panel is expected to review the Council's Councillor Allowances Scheme every year and carry out a thorough review in the year prior to elections. At the end of the review, the panel makes recommendations to the Council about the allowances to be paid to Members.
- 1.3 IRPs make recommendations about the level of basic allowance for Members; the level of Special Responsibility Allowances and to whom they should be paid and on whether dependants' carers' allowance, travel and subsistence allowances and co-optees' allowances should be paid and the level of those allowances. The Council must have regard to the recommendations of the Panel before making or amending a Members' Allowances Scheme.

2.0 Recruitment Issues

- 2.1 In years past, the Council sought to have a Panel of up to seven members, with a quorum of three. For the last full review of the Allowances Scheme, undertaken during 2018/19, the panel numbers had dwindled to the three member minimum required to be quorate. The review was completed by those three members and the new scheme was approved for adoption from May 2019. Unfortunately, following the review, the chair and another panel member resigned due to other commitments. The Council's IRP has remained inquorate since then despite efforts to recruit new members.
- 2.2 The Democratic Services Manager initially made enquiries with neighbouring local authorities about the possibility of 'sharing' panel members, however this proved unsuccessful. The role of the IRP member is voluntary and has always been without remuneration at Lancaster City Council, which makes recruitment very difficult.
- 2.3 A recruitment exercise was undertaken early this year advertised on the council website and social media accounts. Whilst this was interrupted by the COVID 19 epidemic, it did yield one candidate who lives in the Lancaster district, Mr Ameer Hakim. Mr Hakim met with the Democratic Services Manager on 7th July, via teams, to discuss the role and his application.
- 2.4 Ameer Hakim is a resident of Lancaster who went straight into banking after studying for A levels at Lancaster Royal Grammar School. He is now an ICT/Finance professional working for a multinational company in the finance sector. He is currently a Public Governor on the Board of Governors for University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation trust, where he works with fellow board members to keep the board of the NHS trust accountable for actions and delivery of service to members of the public.
- 2.5 With his understanding of financial management and a commitment to voluntary public service, evidenced by his work with the local NHS trust, Mr Hakim is an eminently suitable candidate. He is recommended to Council for appointment to the Independent Remuneration Panel.
- 2.7 It should be noted that, even with the addition of Mr Hakim, the Panel is still inquorate and at least one other panel member must be recruited.

3.0 Allowance

- 3.1 Going forward, another recruitment exercise is underway with a closing date of mid-August. However, it may be time for the Council to consider a modest allowance being attached to the role of Panel member as this is a task which is entirely without remuneration at present.
- 3.2 A quick survey of other authorities who pay an allowance shows that they either pay around £150-£300 per annum (East Lindsay District Council pay (£162pa, Cambridgeshire District Council pay £200pa, Cumbria County Council pay £300pa.) or an hourly rate of around £12.50 per hour for time spent on panel work (paid by the joint IRP for Sevenoaks District, Tonbridge & Malling Borough and Tunbridge Wells Borough). Some councils have opted to pay a flat fee on completion of an annual review report (£560 per panel member at Reigate and Banstead Borough Council).

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 Council is recommended to appoint Mr Hakim to its Independent Remuneration Panel and to consider whether to provide an allowance to its IRP members going forward, and if so, what the appropriate level of allowance should be.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

None directly arising from this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Panel is required to be appointed by the Council, although it is independent of the Council. The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 part 4, section 20 paragraph 3, allows for Council's to pay an allowances to its IRP members stating that it "may pay the members of the panel such allowances or expenses as the authority or authorities for which it makes recommendations may determine."

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Travel expenses are payable to members of the Independent Remuneration Panel attending meetings. With just two to four meetings per year the cost is minimal and can be contained within existing budgets in Democratic Services.

Should an allowance be decided upon, this would be an additional cost. If, for example, the council was minded to pay £300 per annum to each panel member, this would be a cost of £900-£1200 per annum in total for a panel of three to four and would need to be funded from within existing budgets.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Human Resources, Information Services, Property and Open Spaces:
None

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no comments.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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