

Appendix A
Independent Remuneration Panel
14 October 2009

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL held on Wednesday 14 October 2009 at 2.00pm at the Council Offices, Welwyn Garden City.

PRESENT: David Ball, Dean of Students, University of Hertfordshire
Terry Mitchinson, Editor, Welwyn Hatfield Times

OFFICIALS Chief Executive (M.Saminaden)
PRESENT:

1. CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING:

The Panel continued with previously agreed arrangements not to appoint a Chairman for the meeting.

2. APOLOGY:

An apology for absence was received from Sue Beck, Public Health Partnership Manager, Primary Care Trust.

3. MINUTES:

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2008 were approved as a correct record.

4. SCHEME OF COUNCILLORS ALLOWANCES FOR 2009/10:

The report of the Chief Executive informed the Panel that an independent review of the Members Allowances Scheme had been carried out by an independent Company, Solace Enterprises. The report of Solace Enterprises was appended to the Chief Executive's report and members of the Panel gave due consideration to all of the recommendations of the independent consultants in their deliberations.

Members of the Panel wished to put on record their acknowledgement of the considerably increased burden on Councillors, especially those Executive Members who are in charge of specific portfolios in the Cabinet. They felt that the Leader and the Deputy Leader of the Council had particularly heavy workloads and were minded to review the remuneration of these two posts at least, when the general economic situation improved.

Members of the Panel felt that, despite the acknowledged increased workloads, they were not in a position to agree large increases to Members allowances under the current economic circumstances.

Members gave due consideration to all of the recommendations of the independent consultants, and made the following recommendations.

1. Basic Allowance

The Panel noted that Richard Penn had recommended a basic allowance of £5,000 per annum for all Members. Members were sympathetic with this recommendation, but decided that they would not recommend any increase for the current year. However, they would be very willing to review this once the general economic situation had improved.

2. Special Responsibility Allowances

The Panel noted the recommendations of Richard Penn, but decided that they would recommend no changes for the year 2009/2010. They did however reiterate their recognition of the valuable role played by Members, especially the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Members, and would be willing to return to this and review it in 12 months time.

3. Leaders of the Opposition

The Panel noted the recommendations of Richard Penn, but decided to recommend that both Leaders of the Opposition, the Labour Group and the Liberal Democrat Group should receive a special responsibility allowance each equivalent to that of a Cabinet Member.

They also recommend that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition no longer gets a special responsibility allowance.

4. Co-optees Allowance

The Panel noted the recommendations of Richard Penn proposing changes to the allowance for co-optees on the Standards Committee. Having given this some consideration, they decided to recommend no changes for the year 2009/2010 but they will review this in a year's time in the light of the workload of the Standards Committee.

Members decided that they would make no recommendations with regard to changes to other co-optees. They decided that they would not take any allowance as Members of the Independent Remuneration Panel.

5. Deputy Mayor

Members gave consideration to the allowance paid to the Deputy Mayor and decided to recommend that the Deputy Mayor's allowance is set at 25% of the Mayor's allowance.

5. Travel and Subsistence Allowances

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Members noted the recommendation by Richard Penn that the Council reimburses travel costs incurred by Councillors undertaking approved duties in line with the HMRC rate and agreed with this recommendation.

6. Care Allowance

Members noted the recommendation of Richard Penn that the Council introduces a care allowance at a rate of £6 per hour for childcare and £10 per hour for adult dependent care (up to a maximum of 200 hours per annum). This allowance to be claimed by any Member of the Council where there is a child aged under 14 residing at home or a dependent relative in need of special attention by reason of disability. Members of the Panel agreed with this recommendation.

7. Access to Pension

Members noted the recommendation of Richard Penn that a feasibility study to establish the potential take up and the consequential costs be undertaken before any decision is made on this aspect of the Allowances Scheme. Members of the Panel decided that it would not be appropriate to carry out such a feasibility study at this stage and recommend accordingly.

8. Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Independent Remuneration Panel will be held in June 2010.

Michel Saminaden
Chief Executive