



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Name and Date of Committee	<b>ANNUAL COUNCIL – 22 MAY 2024</b>
Subject	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL</b>
Wards Affected	All
Accountable Member	Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council. Email: <a href="mailto:andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk">andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable Officer	Andrew Brown – Democratic Services Business Manager. Email: <a href="mailto:andrew.brown@westoxon.gov.uk">andrew.brown@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Report Author	Max Thompson – Senior Democratic Services Officer. Email: <a href="mailto:max.thompson@westoxon.gov.uk">max.thompson@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Purpose	To consider recommendations made to Council by the Independent Remuneration Panel, from its meeting held on 23 April 2024.
Annexes	Nil.
Recommendations	The Council’s Independent Remuneration Panel recommend that Council resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agree that the Vice-Chair of a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) of 0.5x the basic allowance paid to all Councillors, reducing to 0.25x basic allowance if there is more than one Overview and Scrutiny Committee;</li> <li>2. Agree to backdate the payment of the SRA paid to the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to first meeting of the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee (8 November 2023).</li> </ol>
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li> </ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO

Consultees/ Consultation	Independent Remuneration Panel. Director of Governance.
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## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND**

- 1.1** Prior to 5 October 2023, West Oxfordshire District Council had three Overview and Scrutiny Committees (Economic and Social, Climate and Environment and Finance & Management). On 27 September 2023, Council agreed to replace the three overview and scrutiny committees with a single 24-Member Overview and Scrutiny Committee with effect from 5 October 2023. The reasons for the change were to:
- a) Properly embed pre-decision scrutiny as part of the work of overview and scrutiny and the executive decision making process;
  - b) Ensure effective scheduling of meetings;
  - c) Facilitate effective work planning and improve efficiency e.g., removing the need for reports to be presented to multiple committees, or for joint meetings of two committees to be held.
- 1.2** Currently, there are no provisions for the payment of a Special Responsibility Allowance to the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The current member allowances scheme for 2023-27 was adopted when the Council operated three overview and scrutiny committees, which met c. 4-6 time per annum. In agreeing to change the structure of overview and scrutiny committees Council resolved to request that the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel ("The Panel") considers whether the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be paid a special responsibility allowance, and if so, at what level and any backdating to be applied, and report back to Council.
- 1.3** The Panel was invited to consider this matter at its meeting on 23 April 2024. It was not possible to hold the meeting sooner due to the Panel being inquorate following the resignation of a Panel Member. However, following a successful recruitment exercise, on 23 February 2024 two new Panel Members, Ben Russell and Graham Russell, were appointed by the Director of Governance under authority delegated by full Council on 18 January 2023. The Panel now has 4 members which is above the minimum requirement of 3 members. Janet Eustace and Michael Paget-Wilkes are the other Panel Members.

## **2. SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY ALLOWANCE FOR THE VICE-CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

- 2.1** The Independent Remuneration Panel meeting on 23 April 2024 considered a report from the Democratic Services Business Manager, allowances data for the South East England region, and of other neighbouring authorities (e.g. Cotswold District Council), a working copy of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Plan and the Members' Allowances Scheme 2023/24 to 2026/27. Group Leaders and the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were invited to make representations to the Panel but chose not to.
- 2.2** The Panel considered the role and responsibilities of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and noted that:

- Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee take place in the week prior to each meeting of the Executive, to enable timely pre-decision scrutiny of Executive decisions.
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is empowered to scrutinise the decisions of the Council's Executive and to consider any issues or decisions that affect the district or its people.

**2.3** The Panel considered the role and responsibilities associated with the position of Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and noted that this role involves presiding at meetings in the absence of the Chair and assisting with leading the function and supporting the smooth running of the Committee. This includes attending pre-meetings, having an organisational role together with the Chair between meetings, and signing off any reports or recommendation to the Executive that arise from meetings. Unlike the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Vice-Chair has no statutory responsibilities in relation to Executive decision making (e.g., where the Executive wishes to take key decisions or enter private session without providing the required 28 days' notice).

**2.4** The Independent Remuneration Panel concluded that the organisational and leadership role of the Vice-Chair of a large and busy committee which meets monthly does warrant the payment of a special responsibility allowance (SRA).

**2.5** In considering the level of the SRA for the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the Panel reviewed the SRAs paid for other roles as set out in the Members' Allowances Scheme 2023/24 to 2026/27. The Panel noted that SRAs are not paid for other committee vice-chair roles and that some committee chairs receive an allowance of 0.25x basic allowance. However, those committees (e.g. Licensing Committee) tend to meet infrequently on an ad hoc basis to discharge their responsibilities whereas the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meets monthly. The Panel considered that a special responsibility allowance of 0.5x basic allowance would be appropriate in view of the workload of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the role played by the Vice-Chair, including in between meetings.

**2.6** The Panel recommend that should the Council increase the number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, the SRA should reduce to a ratio of 0.25x basic allowance, which would be lower than the SRA of 0.5x basic paid to the Chair of each overview and scrutiny committee.

**2.7** The Panel recommend that the special responsibility allowance paid to the Vice-Chair of the single Overview and Scrutiny Committee is backdated to 8 November 2023, as that was the date of the first meeting of the new committee, when the role was first appointed and the responsibilities started.

### **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

**3.1** Council is required to "have regard" to the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel but may choose to not agree the recommendations with reasons, therefore not making alterations to the current Members' Allowances Scheme.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 A reduction in the number of overview and scrutiny committee chairs from three to one resulted in a small saving in the SRA paid to members (at 2x £2,611). This saving would be partially offset if a Special Responsibility Allowance were introduced for the Vice-Chair, as recommended by the Panel.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Council is required by The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 to make a scheme for the allowances to be paid to members before the beginning of each year. A scheme must include provisions for paying a basic allowance, special responsibility allowances, dependants' carers' allowance, travelling and subsistence allowance and co-optees' allowance. A scheme may make provision for an annual adjustment of allowances by reference to such index but may not rely on an index for a period of more than four years.

#### **6. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 6.1 There are no risks associated with this report.

#### **7. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 7.1 There are no equality impacts associated with this report.

#### **8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no climate or ecological impacts associated with this report.

#### **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 9.1 None.

(END)