



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	COUNCIL 18 JANUARY 2023
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 12
Subject	APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL
Wards affected	None directly
Accountable member	Cllr Andy Graham, Leader of the Council Email: Andy.Graham@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Susan Sale, Monitoring Officer Email: Susan.Sale@Westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Andrew Brown, Democratic Services Business Manager Email: Andrew.Brown@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To seek approval to appoint members of the public to the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel, which is responsible for assessing and making recommendations on the allowances paid to councillors.
Annexes	None
Recommendation(s)	<i>That Council resolves to:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><i>1. Approve the appointment of Michael Paget-Wilkes and Janet Eustace to the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel;</i><i>2. Delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to make one or more further appointments to the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel, subject to the Panel comprising no more than 5 people;</i><i>3. Agree that members of the Independent Remuneration Panel will be paid £250 per year.</i>
Corporate priorities	Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultation	N/A

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) Regulations 2003 provides for local authorities to establish and maintain an Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP). The Council's IRP is responsible for the monitoring of the Councillors' Allowances Scheme and making recommendations to the Council regarding the scheme.
- 1.2** The Regulations require that an IRP comprising at least three independent members of the public review and assess councillors' allowances and make a recommendation on the scheme to be adopted by the Council. The Panel produces a report making recommendations about the payment and amount of allowances, the duties to which special responsibility allowance are applicable; and whether allowances should be index linked. The IRP also makes recommendations to the Council whenever the Council decides to either revoke or amend its current scheme. The Council has a duty to have regard to the recommendations of the IRP.
- 1.5** The Council currently has no IRP members and the Council's most recent scheme for councillors' allowances expired on 1 April 2022. Once appointed, an IRP comprising at least 3 persons will be able to form a view on the uplifting of allowances for the 2022/23 Council year (to be backdated to 1 April) and to make recommendations about a new allowances scheme to be effective from April 2023. The maximum duration of an allowances scheme is 4 years and multi-year schemes may be linked to an index based as staff pay or inflation.

2. APPOINTING AN INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

- 2.1** Nationally IRP roles are difficult to fill as they are essentially voluntary positions, although some local authorities do pay their IRP members a modest sum.
- 2.2** The Council is legally required to advertise any vacancy for IRP members in such a manner as it considers is likely to bring it to the attention of the public, invite the submission of applications to fill the vacancy and have any proposed appointment approved by Council.
- 2.3** Accordingly, the role of Independent Remuneration Panel Members was advertised for 2 weeks on a number of platforms including the Council's website. The advert was set to close on 8 January 2023 and resulted in one application which is currently being assessed.
- 2.4** In addition, members of the Cotswold District Council IRP were approached and asked whether they would be interested in fulfilling the same role at West Oxfordshire District Council. This resulted in one proposed appointment.
- 2.5** Furthermore, a former member of staff who had previously served on the Council's IRP has been approached about the role and has agreed to be recommended for re-appointment.

3. SUMMARY OF PROPOSED APPOINTMENTS

- 3.1 Michael Paget-Wilkes is a current member of the Cotswold District Council IRP which he has served on for many years and a former Archdeacon of Warwick, a position held from 1990 to 2009.
- 3.2 Janet Eustace is a former member of the West Oxfordshire District Council IRP and an experienced parish clerk who recently served as the Council's Interim Democratic Services Manager from July to December 2023.
- 3.3 This report seeks a delegation to the Monitoring Officer to make further appointments to suitable candidates to ensure the Council has at least three but no more than five members appointed to its IRP.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 This report seeks agreement that IRP members will be paid a sum of £250 per annum. This is to recognise their commitment to the Council and the contribution that IRP members make, and to compensate them for their time. The £250 figure is based on the arrangements at Cotswold District Council. Although none of the proposed appointees have sought or requested any payment for fulfilling this role on behalf of the Council, local authorities across the country do experience difficulty recruiting and retaining IRP members. If agreed it is proposed that the payments will be funded from the budget for councillors' allowances and if Council approves the recommendation this will be reflected in the budget.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Councillor allowances are a responsibility of full Council. The Council is required to have a scheme for councillor allowances in place prior to the start of each financial year. The appointment of IRP members is a decision for Council and anyone falling within any of the following criteria will not be eligible for appointment to the role. This was set out in the advert:

- An elected Member of the local authority
- A member of any committees of the local authority (including co-opted members)
- Anyone disqualified from becoming a member of the local authority
- Anyone with a close personal relationship with a member or officer of the Council
- Anyone working for an organisation that receives grants from the Council
- Anyone under 18 years of age

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 If the Council does not have a properly appointed IRP in place comprising at least three members of the public then Council will be unable to agree a new allowances scheme for the period from 1 April 2023.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.1 In appointing IRP members the Council should have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality in relation to the following factors. As a minimum it would be preferable to have a gender balance on the IRP:

- Race
- Disability
- Gender, including gender reassignment
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Religion or belief

9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no climate or ecological implications arising directly from this report.

10. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

10.1 If Council decides to not agree the recommendations in this report this will increase risk that the Council will be unable to agree a scheme for councillor allowances prior to the start of the new financial year; 1 April 2023.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None

(END)