

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	8 June 2020
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Members' Allowance Scheme – Proposed Cabinet Spokespersons' Special Responsibility Allowance

Recommendation to COUNCIL: That the Members' Allowance Scheme be amended by the addition of a Special Responsibility Allowance in respect of designated Cabinet Spokespersons / Member Champions in accordance with the criteria set out at paragraph 13.

Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Oliver

Introduction

1. In accordance with the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003, before an authority makes or amends its allowance scheme, the authority shall have regard to the recommendations made in relation to it by an Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP).
2. Following a request from the Leader of the Council this report sets out proposals to amend the current Members' Allowance Scheme to include provision for the payment of a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) to be paid to designated Cabinet Spokespersons / Champions.
3. Currently the Cabinet have appointed two Councillors as spokespersons on cycling and disability and inclusion (one of whom is a current Cabinet Portfolio Holder).

Background to current scheme

4. The IRP last met in late 2018 and made recommendations on a revised Members Allowance Scheme to take effect from May 2019. The Council considered the recommendations of the IRP in February 2019 and took these into account when agreeing its current scheme; most of the IRP's recommendations were agreed for inclusion within the current Scheme. A copy of the current scheme can be found within the Constitution at the following link:

https://www.rother.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Part_6_-_Allowances_Scheme_-_2019_-_UPDATED_MARCH_2019.pdf

Rationale for Cabinet Spokesperson Special Responsibility Allowance

5. Following the elections in May 2019 there has been significant change to the political landscape at the Council. The Council is now run by an alliance of Association of Independents (13 Members), Liberal Democrat and Green (eight

Members) and Labour (three Members) Councillors. The Conservative group are in opposition with 14 Members.

6. The new influx of Councillors are keen to be involved within their communities, take a more active role in agreeing and setting the strategic policy direction of the Council and are generally more “hands-on” than was previously in the case.
7. Given the enthusiastic number of Councillors that are now at the disposal of the ruling alliance group, the Leader of the Council has requested that the Council considers the introduction of an SRA for designated Cabinet Spokespersons / Member Champions.
8. These will be Councillors, appointed by the Leader of the Council, who are not Cabinet Members but take a leading role and champion a subject on behalf of the Cabinet and Council. They will be expected to put in extra effort over and above other non-Executive Members.
9. The SRA is intended to recognise the Councillor’s expertise in their allocated spokesperson role, the additional time required to attend meetings, represent the Council and effectively manage the Council’s role on the subject and to be the “resident expert” on the subject. Attached at Appendix 1 is the proposed Role Description.
10. The Council has appointed spokespersons in the past, but these roles were directly linked to the existing Cabinet Portfolio Holders, who were already in receipt of a SRA. Examples included spokespersons on finance, coastal protection, fluvial flooding and rural issues, housing, transport and health, children and youth issues, Local Development Framework and older people, waste and recycling and the environment, culture, sport and leisure.
11. More latterly, over the last 10 years up until the elections in May 2019, there have been two consistent spokesperson roles undertaken by two non-executive Members on health and well-being issues and education – neither of which had a specific role description nor paid an SRA.

Comparison to other local authorities

12. The only other Council in the South East that pays an SRA for a Cabinet Champion (a non-Cabinet Member) is Rushmoor Borough Council. They pay £1,605 per annum from the date appointed and have a maximum of five at any one time. They pay their Cabinet Members £8,027 per annum and the SRA works out to around 19% of the Cabinet Member SRA.

Proposed Cabinet Spokesperson Special Responsibility Allowance

13. RDC Cabinet Members currently receive an SRA of £2,843 (2019-20 level); based on the Rushmoor example above, 20% of this figure would equate to around £568 (2019-20 level) per annum. It is considered that this is a fair amount and would recompense the Members for the additional commitment and time that these roles would entail.
14. The criteria for the payment of the SRA would be as follows:
 - the Member should not be in receipt of any other SRA;

- the payment will be made from the date of appointment, or from the date at which full Council approves the new SRA, whichever is the later (i.e. no provision for back-dating); and
 - there being no more than five spokespersons attracting an SRA payment at any one time.
15. It is possible that a Cabinet Member could also act as a Cabinet Spokesperson on a subject, in which case there would be no SRA payable; this could mean that five other non-Cabinet spokespersons could be appointed who were paid the SRA. You could therefore, in theory, have more than five Cabinet Spokespersons at any one time, provided that only five were paid and any others would either not be paid or already be in receipt of an SRA.
16. It is worth noting that this proposal will not increase the overall budget for Members' Allowances, as the current administration has appointed one less Member into the Cabinet than the previous administration (currently saving £2,843.00 (2019-20 level)). In addition to this, one Member has been appointed as both a Cabinet Member and a Committee Chairman and two other Members of the Cabinet from the 2000/21 civic year are Group Leaders and will therefore forfeit their Group Leader and amount per Member SRA.
17. In accordance with the current Members' Allowance Scheme, no Member can be in receipt of more than one SRA, with the highest of the two being paid (currently a saving of £2,843.00 (2019-20 level)). Therefore, overall once the new Cabinet is appointed, there will be savings of circa £7,269 (the unfilled Cabinet position and dual roles referred to in paragraph 16 above) in the budget that can easily accommodate the suggested maximum SRAs payable of £2,840. It is noted that in line with the Members' Allowance Scheme the SRAs will be increased each year in May, in line with the staff pay award agreed in the preceding September for the Council years 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23. Following each annual increase, the amounts will be either rounded up or down to the nearest full pound.

Consultation with the Independent Remuneration Panel

18. In accordance with the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003, the IRP Members who had made the original recommendations on the current scheme were consulted for their views on these proposals.
19. In summary all three Members of the IRP support the proposals and made the following comments:
- It does seem reasonable to recognise this injection of energy into communication with the public on key issues;
 - the proportionality of the proposed allowance, based on the Rushmore example, seems to be a reasonable compensation for the additional work these five Champions will commit to; and
 - the overall proposal will not lead to additional spending on allowances.

Conclusion

20. The Leader of the Council has requested that consideration be given to the introduction of an SRA in respect of Cabinet Spokespersons. Following

research with other authorities and consultation with the IRP, which secured support for the proposal, Cabinet it requested to recommend to Council that the Members' Allowance Scheme be amended by the addition of a Special Responsibility Allowance in respect of designated Cabinet Spokespersons / Member Champions in accordance with the criteria set out at paragraph 13.

Malcolm Johnston
Executive Director

Risk Assessment Statement

There are no risks associated with this report.

Cabinet Spokesperson – Role Description

1. To be the Member point of contact for matters on your area of responsibility.
2. To maintain an understanding and assist Cabinet with particular insights in relation to your area of responsibility.
3. To collate information and assist with consultations on your area of responsibility.
4. To liaise with the Communications Team on press releases, social media etc on the specific area of responsibility.
5. To network with partner and other organisations to find out more information on the area of responsibility.
6. To meet regularly with the Lead Officer(s) for your area of responsibility.
7. To communicate with other Members on your area of responsibility as well as attending meetings (e.g. Overview and Scrutiny) where appropriate.
8. To use Cabinet and other meetings to raise the profile of the specific area of responsibility.
9. To produce an end of year report to Council updating Members on the actions and issues looking back over the past year.