

MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS**Report of the Chief Finance and Administration Officer****Corporate Plan Page 136 Refers.****Budgetary Implications : NIL****Introduction**

1. Members will recall that at the annual meeting of the Council (5 May 2000), a new Scheme of Members' Allowances was introduced whereby an enhanced Basic Allowance would be paid to all Members with the abolition of an Attendance Allowance (a copy of the Scheme is attached as Appendix A).
2. The new Scheme was introduced following a review of the Members' Allowances Scheme by an Independent Panel and was in line with Government recommendations to more fully recognise and compensate the constituency role of Members. The Local Government Act 2000 subsequently confirmed that attendance allowances were no longer legally permissible and that reviews of allowances had to involve such an independent panel.
3. When agreeing the new Scheme, the Council also asked that a review of Members' attendances should be undertaken and that the Standards Committee should give some consideration to whether and how poor attendance might be penalised.
4. The current budgetary provision for Members' Allowances stands at some £200,000 and therefore represents a large budget.
5. The purpose of this report is to consider the principles applied to any scheme.

Review of First Eight Months

6. Attached as Appendix B to this report are a number of tables which set out a breakdown of the attendance at meetings for the period 5 May to 31 December 2000 together with a comparison of the current year, with Members' attendances for the municipal year 1999/2000 ie prior to the introduction of the new Scheme.
7. From this it can be seen, that overall there has been a reduction in the general level of attendance from 85% in 1999/2000, to 82% in 2000/2001. It also shows that 23 of the 40 Members achieved a lower level of attendance in 2000/2001 when compared to 1999/2000.
8. However, whilst the above figure seems disappointing, there are four Members whose attendance record is considerably below the average (less than 60%). If these figures were taken out of the calculations, the average attendance would be in the region of 85%, which is in line with that achieved in 1999/2000.

9. This therefore shows that, despite concerns to the contrary, there has been little difference in Members' attendances following the introduction of the new scheme and is very much in line with national averages. However by its nature, a block allowance pays Members the full sum irrespective of attendance and therefore some Members are receiving more for persistent poor attendance than they would have received previously.
10. It must be remembered that, the job of a Member is not only represented by the number of meetings they attend at the Council's headquarters, but also by the role that they play within their own community. This is, however, harder to evaluate.

Areas for Investigation

11. The Council has taken the decision to introduce a new Scheme of Members' Allowances but has expressed a wish that poor attendance should be penalised. There are a number of factors which this Committee is now asked to look at:-

Whether the Standards Committee support the principle that an unreasonably low level of attendance should result in a clawback of allowances.

Given that Members' role involves duties outside attendance at meetings of the Council, should any clawback be applied to the whole allowance or a portion of it?

If a portion, to what percentage?

What would the minimum level of attendance below which some clawback might be applied? Should there be a graduated clawback for different levels of non-attendance?

What proportion of the allowance or portion of allowance should be recovered?

- *pro rata to number of meetings attended*
- *fixed rate*

Are there categories of justifiable non-attendance and what provision should be made for them?

What are the practicalities of recovery to allow sufficient time to pass before an assessment of attendance can be made but allow sufficient time in which to recover the costs?

Should similar principles apply to Members in receipt of Special Responsibility Allowance?

In cases of justifiable non-attendance who should apply any recovery discretion?

Any other issues?

12. Officers of the Council need to be guided by the Committee on these matters so that they can draw up a draft scheme for further consideration and subsequent recommendations to Council.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee considers the issues in paragraph 11 above and reaches preliminary conclusions.

John Street
Principal Administrator

Standards Committee
11 January 2001

Mark Seymour
Chief Finance and Administration Officer

List of Background Papers

Scheme of Members' Allowances
Record of Members' Attendances 1999/2000.

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