

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF A MEETING of the Standards Committee held on Friday 23 January 2009 at 3.30 pm in the Executive Meeting Room, Floor 3 of the Guildhall, Portsmouth.

(NB These minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting.)

Present

Councillors Donna Jones
Leo Madden
Darron Phillips
Paula Riches

Independent Members

Peter Wyles (Chair)
Andrew Mackay
Peter Parham

Southsea Town Councillors

Peter Eddis

External

Professor John Craven

Officers

Michael Lawther, City Solicitor
David Williams, Chief Executive
Stewart Agland, Local Democracy Manager

Peter Parham, the usual chair of the Panel, explained that he was handing over the Chair of the committee for the next few meetings as he would be receiving medical treatment. Mr Parham thanked Peter Wyles for standing in to chair the meetings on his behalf and thanked Professor John Craven and his Panel for preparing the Independent Remuneration Panel report.

1 Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Alistair Thompson, Councillor Mike Blake (Standing Deputy) and Councillor Simon Bosher and from independent members John Wood and Mervyn Cowdrey and from David Yates, Southsea Town Councillor and Zenna Atkins, a member of the Independent Remuneration Panel.

2 Declaration of Members' Interests in accordance with Standing Order No 14 (AI 2)

The City Solicitor advised members that all Portsmouth City Council members have a personal but non prejudicial interest in the report which they do not need to declare. Consequently there were no declarations of interest.

3 Independent Remuneration Panel - Review of Members' Allowance Scheme (AI 3)

Michael Lawther, the City Solicitor explained to the committee that the purpose of today's meeting was not to discuss the allowances themselves but to seek confirmation from the Standards Committee that the processes followed are satisfactory to them. The City Solicitor went on to explain that it is some years since the allowances for members were reviewed and members cannot fix their own pay. Michael Lawther explained that Professor Craven is the Head of the Independent Remuneration Panel which produced the report and that he and his Panel are completely independent of the Council and of councillors. The Panel was advised by officers to check that the procedures followed were lawful. The report will be presented by Professor Craven to full Council when members will be given the opportunity to discuss the content of the report. The City Solicitor explained that the Independent Remuneration Panel met on a number of occasions and looked at the methodology followed by other authorities comparable in terms of size and similarity and also other types of bodies; the intention being to arrive at a fair and reasonable rate taking into account all the circumstances. The Panel also considered the views of councillors and considered what the job involved. This information enabled the Panel to make the recommendations outlined in the report. The process was undertaken in a number of meetings and the City Solicitor's view is that the allowances which the Panel has recommended are fair and reasonable and in accordance with legislation.

Professor Craven was invited to present the Panel's report and made the following points:

- He is comfortable that the Panel operated within the guidance given by officers of the Council.
- At the beginning of the first meeting it was confirmed that no member of the panel had their remuneration set by any member of the Council in order to ensure impartiality.
- The panel looked at comparable rates and felt that it was particularly important that people who may otherwise stand for election were not put off doing so because of the level of remuneration. Allowances are important to ensure that there is a good pool of candidates.

David Williams, the Chief Executive of Portsmouth City Council, agreed with Professor Craven's point about allowances being important to ensure that potential candidates are not put off because of the level of remuneration being too low.

Members of the Standards Committee made the following points:

- It was good to see that some of the concerns raised in the past have been covered in this report for example the equipment that councillors can have.
- The equal opportunities aspect of the levels of allowance and remuneration could be stressed more and perhaps this could be included in the introduction when the report goes to full Council.

The committee had no questions on the processes followed and were content that these were carried out properly.

The following questions were raised by members of the Standards Committee:

- With regard to recommendation (9) has any progress been made on whether this allowance can be paid tax-free as a necessary expense of the work. Basically does the Inland Revenue treat an elected member as an employee or not. The City Solicitor advised that this point will be checked and a definitive answer will be obtained by the time the report goes to Council. The Standards Committee welcomed the report from the Independent Remuneration Panel and liked the idea of comparing a councillor's work as equivalent to a half-time job. The committee also welcomed the equal opportunities aspect of the report and hoped that this would help to break down barriers which may prevent people standing as councillors. The Leader of each group within Portsmouth City Council wished to record his thanks to the Independent Remuneration Panel. The chair of the committee also thanked Professor Craven for his work and that of the Independent Remuneration Panel. The Standards Committee unanimously

RESOLVED that the Standards Committee confirms it is satisfied with the processes followed by the Independent Remuneration Panel.

4 Remuneration in respect of Independent Members of the Standards Committee

The City Solicitor explained to the committee that the Independent Remuneration Panel had not looked at independent members' remuneration in their report. This needed to be resolved and subject to members of the committee endorsing this approach, the City Solicitor advised that Professor Craven had already been asked to prepare an appendix to the report on councillors' remuneration which would consider remuneration for Independent Members of the Standards Committee to go to Council at the same time. Professor Craven said that when the next review of members' allowances is carried out, his view is that the remuneration for independent members should be dealt with at the same time.

There followed a general discussion during which the following points were made by members of the committee:

- Research has suggested that there is a vast difference in the remuneration paid to independent members of Standards Committees.

- That when remuneration is looked at, the rates can go down as well as up.
- Many independent members do not carry out work associated with their appointment for financial reward. Confirmation was given by the City Solicitor that the results of the Independent Remuneration Panel's further deliberations concerning independent members' remuneration will be included in an appendix to the report about members' allowances and will go straight to Council as part of the overall report.

A formal recommendation was moved by Councillor Leo Madden and seconded by Councillor Riches that the Independent Remuneration Panel look at remuneration for independent members of Standards Committee.

RESOLVED that the Independent Remuneration Panel be asked to look at remuneration for Independent Members and Standing Deputies of the Standards Committee and provide an Appendix to the report going to the meeting of Full Council on 4th February with its recommendations.

The Chair thanked Professor Craven and his committee for the report.

The meeting closed at 4.10 pm.

VJP/DMF
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