

REPORT OF MEDWAY INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

December 2023

REPORT OF MEDWAY INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL	
Summary of Recommendations	1
Introduction	4
Background	4
Appointment of the Panel	4
The work of the Panel	4
Terms of reference	4
The Panel's approach to its task	5
Benchmark baseline information	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Basic Allowance	6
Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs).....	8
Licensing Hearing Panels and 1982 Licensing Hearing Panel.....	10
Discounts for more than one SRA.....	10
Dependant carer's Allowance.....	10
Subsistence, travelling and other allowances	11
Conference expenses, duties for which allowances can and cannot be claimed and how to claim, Sickness, maternity, paternity and adoption absence.....	12
Mayor and Deputy Mayor allowances	12
Adoption and Fostering Panels	14
Foregoing and suspension of allowances and part-year entitlement ..	14
Miscellaneous matters.....	14
Conclusions.....	14
Background Papers.....	15

1. Summary of Recommendations

1.1 That paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 of the Members Allowances Scheme remain unchanged.

1.2 That paragraph 7.1 of the Scheme be amended to read as follows:

“7.1 **Basic and special responsibility allowances**

The Council has agreed that with effect from 1 April 2024, the allowances as shown in the table below are payable. The basic allowance is index-linked to the median Council staff hourly pay until 31 May 2027” .

1.3 That the table below replace that currently shown below paragraph 7.1 and that the levels of special responsibility allowances should be linked to the basic allowance as shown by the benchmark % in the table from 1 April 2024 until 31 May 2027.

POSITION (and number of Councillors entitled to receive allowance)	BENCHMARK AS % OF BASIC ALLOWANCE	
Basic Allowance (59)	100	
Leader of the Council (1)	300	
Deputy Leader (1)	200	
Cabinet Portfolio Holder (8)	160	
Chairman of Planning Committee (1)	120	
Opposition Group Leader (more than 20% of members) (1)	120	
Chairman of Health & Wellbeing Board (1)	120	Only payable if held by Councillor who is not Cabinet member
Chairman, Overview & Scrutiny Committee (4)	120	
Chairman of Audit Committee (1)	70	
Deputy Opposition Group leader (more than 20% of members) (1)	60	
Overview & Scrutiny Spokespersons (group more than 20% of members) (4)	60	
Opposition Group Leader (more than 10% of members) (0)	60	Not currently payable
Vice-Chairman of Planning Committee (1)	50	
Opposition Group Spokesperson for Planning Committee (>20% of members) (1)	50	
Chairman of Employment Matters Committee (1)	35	
Vice-Chairmen of Overview & Scrutiny Committee (4)	35	
Ruling Group Whip (1)	15	
Opposition Group Whip (>20% of members) (1)	10	
Independent Person on Audit Committee	10	
Mayor (1)	125	
Deputy Mayor (1)	60	

1.4 That paragraph 7.1.1 of the Scheme be amended to read as follows: “The SRA to the Chairman of Licensing & Safety Committee and members of the Licensing Hearing Panel and Licensing 1982 Panel Hearings from 1 April 2024 continue to be index-linked to the median Council staff hourly pay until 31 May 2027”.

1.5 That paragraph 7.1.2 remains unchanged.

1.6 That the Notes below paragraph 7.1.2 be removed.

1.7 That the Members Allowances Scheme be amended to include new provisions as follows:

“7.1.3 Councillors on the Fostering Panel receive an SRA from 1 April 2024 at the rate of £14.71 per hour and that the SRA be index-linked to the median Council staff hourly pay until 31 May 2027.

7.1.4 If the Council agrees to appoint an Independent Person to Audit Committee and wish to pay that person an allowance to reflect the time and effort involved, the Panel recommends an annual allowance of £1,147 calculated as 10% of the basic allowance against which it should be index-linked to the median Council staff hourly pay until 31 May 2027.

7.1.5 A Member of the Council is only entitled to receive one Special responsibility Allowance at any one time”.

1.8 That the Members’ Allowance Scheme (paragraph 7.2) be amended to read as follows:

“Councillors of Medway or formally co-opted members of a Committee or sub committee who have incurred expenses on childcare or care of dependent adult relatives or children with special needs for the purposes of carrying out an approved duty qualify for reimbursement of the actual expenses incurred.

In all cases claimants may include time spent in carrying out an approved duty and up to one hour in total travelling to and from the venue of the approved duty.

The claim is per hour per child/dependent relative. The baby or child-sitting claim is only allowable for children aged 14 years or under.

Reasonable travelling expenses paid to the carer are also claimable as follows:

(a) public transport; or

(b) in cases of urgency or where no public transport is reasonably available, the amount of any taxi fare actually paid (excluding any tip) .

The allowance does not apply where the carer is a member of the Councillor’s or co-optee’s own household. The carer in respect of a dependent child or adult relative must be aged 18 or over.

For attendance at conferences, there is no maximum claimable in any one 24 hour period. No allowance is claimable for periods whilst children are at school.

Claims are entirely the responsibility of the Councillor or co-optee making the claim. A member wishing to claim under this part of the allowance scheme will be required promptly to complete the necessary paperwork and submit receipts as evidence of the amount incurred. In the case of claims for dependent adult care or children with special needs the claim must be accompanied by evidence that specialist care is required.

The Chief Executive has delegated authority to vary these provisions to assist claimants who need specialist care that costs more than the approved rates”.

- 1.9 That paragraphs 7.3 and 7.3.1, the list of duties that qualify for travelling and subsistence allowances in Appendix 1 and the subsistence rates set out in Appendix 2 remain unchanged and be indexed against those payable to Council staff for a maximum of four years to 31 May 2027.
- 1.10 That (a) the arrangements for travelling allowances set out in paragraph 7.3.2 remain unchanged; (b) Appendix 3 setting out the rates per mile be amended to indicate that rate for use of all models of electric cars is £45p; and (c) the mileage rates be indexed against the HMRC Approved Mileage Allowance Payment (AMAP) rate until 31 May 2027.
- 1.11 That paragraphs 8, 9, 10 and 11 of the Members’ Allowances Scheme relating to Conference expenses, duties for which allowances can and cannot be claimed and how to claim remain unchanged.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Medway Council has established this Independent Panel to make recommendations about the financial allowances to be paid to Councillors.
- 2.2 The Panel has reviewed the Members Allowances Scheme on a regular basis since August 2001. This latest review is generated as a result of the expiry of the existing index-linking period for the Scheme.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Local Government Act 2000 and subsequent regulations require every local authority to establish and maintain an Independent Remuneration Panel to make recommendations about the financial allowances to be paid to Councillors. Regulations require the Panel to make recommendations on travel and subsistence allowances, pensions, and co-opted members' allowances.
- 3.2 Medway Council decides its own scheme of allowances for Councillors and the amounts to be paid under that scheme. However, it must first have regard to the advice of this Independent Remuneration Panel and must make the report and recommendations of the Panel available for public inspection.

4. Appointment of the Panel

- 4.1 Independent Remuneration Panels must have at least three members. In Medway the composition of the Panel comprises a Panel of 5 members from a broad range of experiences and backgrounds including the business community, not-for-profit sector, charity and HR with the support of South East Employers to Chair the Panel.
- 4.2 All members of the Panel have declared that they are not active members of a political party or associated with any Councillors serving on Medway Council or any of its Parishes through friendship or any other personal association.
- 4.3 The Panel members are as follows:
- Mark Palmer, Development Director, South East Employers (Chair)
 - Marina Gleaves
 - Norma Hastings
 - Jackie Powell
 - Natalie Wallace
 - Christopher Webb

5. The work of the Panel

- 5.1 The Panel met twice in November 2023 including interviews with Councillors. The Head of Elections & Member Services ensured that the Panel had appropriate advice and administrative support.

6. Terms of reference

- 6.1 The terms of reference of the Panel set by the Council are:
- to make recommendations to the authority as to the amount of basic allowance that should be payable to its elected Members

- to make recommendations to the authority about the roles and responsibilities for which a special responsibility allowance should be payable and as to the amount of each such allowance
- to make recommendations as to whether the authority's allowances scheme should include an allowance in respect of the expenses of arranging for the care of children and dependants and, if such a recommendation is made, the amount of this allowance and the means by which it is determined
- to provide informal advice, as requested by the Council, on other allowances payable under the Local Government Act 1972 (i.e. travel and subsistence allowance and allowances for attendance at certain meetings and conferences)
- to make recommendations on travel and subsistence allowances, and allowances for co-opted members of committees.

6.2 As well as undertaking the four yearly review of the whole Members Allowance Scheme the Panel were particularly mindful to consider the appropriateness of the allowances paid to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor even those these allowances are not strictly covered by the Regulations covering the Members Allowances Scheme.

7. The Panel's approach to its task

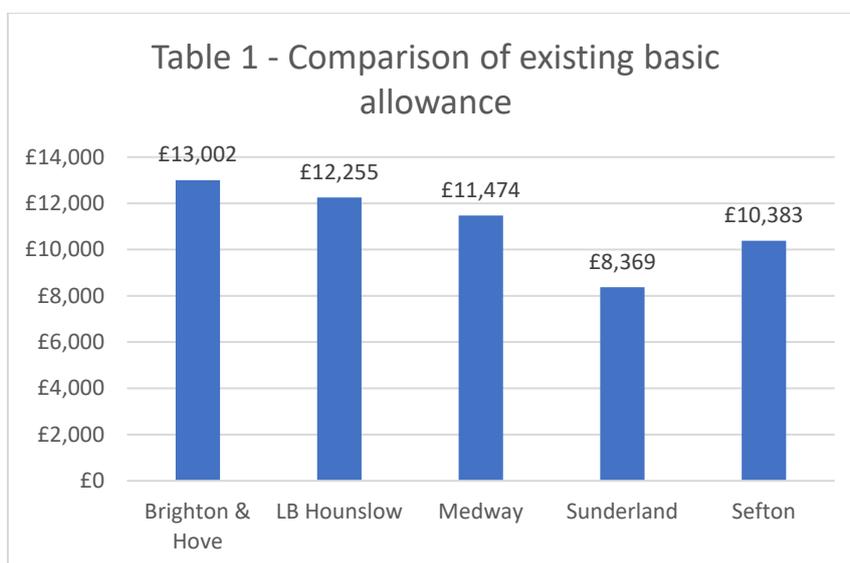
7.1 In formulating its recommendations the Panel has taken account of statutory guidance from the relevant government department.

7.2 In addition, the Panel considered comparative information relating to allowances paid by other local authorities, particularly other Unitary authorities in the South East, and London authorities. The panel also took into consideration a submission from the Conservative Group of the Council. No other submissions were received.

7.3 The Panel also considered responses to a questionnaire it circulated to all Councillors to ascertain information about the number of hours spent on their ward work and other responsibilities and their views on other aspects of the members' allowances scheme. A total of 19 completed questionnaires were received. The Panel also had discussions with a broad range of Councillors to discuss these issues in more detail, including the Leader of the Council, a Cabinet member, a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of an Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the Leaders of both Opposition Groups.

7. Benchmark baseline information

The tables below indicate Medway's current position amongst the comparator group in terms of the basic allowance and some key SRAs.



Average - £11,097
Median - £11,474

Table 2 - Comparison of key SRAs

	Leader	Deputy Leader	Cabinet Member	Chair of Planning Cttee	Chair of O&S Cttee	Opposition Group Leader	Mayor	Deputy Mayor
Brighton & Hove	£32,505	£19,503	£11,377	£11,377	£4,876	£11,377	£9,752	£1,950
LB Hounslow	£41,616	£26,010	£20,808	£10,404	£12,485	£11,444	£13,525	£6,763
Medway	£34,422	£22,948	£17,211	£13,769	£11,474	£13,769	£14,343	£6,885
Sunderland	£37,667	£25,111	£20,716	£6,277	£12,556	£9,417	£12,000	£6,000
Sefton	£25,664	£0	£17,109	£10,382	£5,191	£4,153	£15,574	£0
average	34375	18714	17444	10442	9316	10032	13039	4320
median	34422	22948	17211	10404	11474	11377	13525	6000

8.1 As can be seen, the current basic allowance compares favourably with a basket of authorities of a similar population size. It also compares favourably with the average across 95 other local authorities of varying populations and types of authority. The picture across a range of SRAs shows a similar position, with Medway paying at or above the average across the comparator group with similar populations. The Panel took the general view that Medway's basic and SRA allowances are broadly in line with appropriate comparator authorities.

9. Basic Allowance

9.1 Each local authority must make provision in its scheme of allowances for a basic, flat rate allowance payable to all members. The allowance must be the same for each councillor and the Panel are firmly of the view that the level set should be sufficient to enable people of limited means to undertake the role whilst not acting as the only incentive to do so.

9.2 The formula for calculating the basic allowance usually comprises three elements – an average number of hours spent on ward work and responsibilities of a non-executive councillor, an hourly rate and an element of discount to reflect the amount of time expected to be provided unpaid (called the Public Service Discount – PSD).

- 9.3 In 2019 the Panel took some time to identify a coherent and robust future proof and transparent formula that was seen to be fair from the perspective of Councillors and Council staff that could be easily explained to the public and could be readily updated as appropriate.

Average weekly hours on ward work

- 9.4 The Panel recognises that it is difficult to identify the average number of hours per week that Councillors spend on ward work; it will vary according to the type of ward the Councillor represents in terms of the issues that may be raised by constituents, how many Councillors represent the ward in question, and indeed the number of hours the councillor can make available due to other commitments. However, for the Panel to make its recommendations it needs to identify an average that adequately reflects the majority of councillors' experiences most of the time.
- 9.5 When the last full review was undertaken in 2019 the average number of hours was deemed to be 20 and the Panel were keen to ascertain if this had changed. This was one area that was addressed in the questionnaire sent to all Councillors and the meetings held with a variety of Councillors.
- 9.6 Out of the 19 responses received, several Councillors felt unable to identify an "average" because their workload varied considerably week to week. However, of those responses and those of the interviewees, the average hours is 21 with a range of between 3 and 35, and in the light of this the Panel is minded to take the view that the average of 20 remains an appropriate figure.
- 9.7 The Panel has therefore determined to use the average hours of 20 per week in the formula for members' basic allowance.

Hourly rate

- 9.8 Currently, the average hourly rate used in this calculation is the median hourly rate for Council staff which is updated yearly. The Panel remain of the view that this is a more transparent multiplier than others, such as the ONS rate, and is simpler to use as it can be revised more readily than waiting for the ONS figure in November, and therefore be applied at or near the start of the new financial year. It also ensures that the rate of increase in Councillors' allowances remains firmly linked to Council staff pay increases. The current median hourly rate is £14.71.

Public Service Discount (PSD)

- 9.9 The Panel recognises that the recruitment of councillors should be drawn from across the social spectrum, and not just restricted to those people who can afford to give an open-ended time commitment in return for no more than honorary remuneration. A realistic scheme of allowances is needed to enable councillors to do their work effectively. Whilst a genuine concern for the welfare of the community and a commitment to public service has historically been one, if not the main, reason people seek election, and is one of the keystones of the effective local democracy, it is not enough in itself for people of limited means. However, it is expected that there is also a reciprocal obligation on councillors to do a proportion of their ward work without remuneration – this is called the Public Service Discount (PSD).
- 9.10 The level of PSD cannot, inevitably, be calculated scientifically. As referred to earlier in this report, the average number of hours incurred on ward work varies considerably between Councillors depending on their personal circumstances.

- 9.11 The responses from Councillors to the questionnaire and those who met the Panel about the level of a fair PSD varied but generally the consensus was that it should be around 25%.
- 9.12 The level of PSD in the comparator group was difficult to use as a benchmark as it varies considerably between none at all and 50% with the average being 32%. Medway's current PSD at 25% ranks below the average.
- 9.13 Ultimately the Panel is minded to retain the PSD at 25% as it continues to be seen by the majority of Councillors who took part in the review as a fair reflection of the average amount of hours councillors should be expected to work as a voluntary contribution. This translates to 5 hours of the average 20 hours undertaken on ward work being deemed to be a voluntary contribution.

Calculation of Panels' recommended basic allowance

- 9.14 Using the different parameters discussed above, the Panel recommends the basic allowance is calculated using the following formula:

$$20 \text{ hours per week} \times \text{£}14.71 = \text{£}294.2 \times 52 \text{ weeks a year} = \text{£}15,298.4$$

$$\text{PSD of 25\%} = \text{£}3824.6$$

$$\text{£}15298.4 - \text{£}3824.6 = \text{£}11473.8 \text{ (rounded to £11,474)}$$

- 9.15 The Panel was conscious there was no appetite from Councillors via the completed questionnaires or interviews, for the basic allowance to be increased since it fairly reflects the average number of hours spent on ward work and takes into account the current financial climate in terms of the budgetary position of the Council and the likely response by the public. Taking this into account and reviewing comparisons with similar authorities the Panel are of the view that there is no justification to increase the basic allowance. Therefore it is not recommending any change in the formula for calculating the basic allowance.

Indexing of basic allowance

- 9.16 For the reasons set out in paragraph 9.8 the Panel recommends that the Basic Allowance is indexed annually against the median hourly rate for Council staff for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 May 2027. The later date in May 2027 mirrors the municipal year rather than the fiscal year and allows sufficient time for the uplifting of allowances from 1 April 2027 for those Councillors in post at that time before the Local elections.

10. Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)

- 10.1 The Panel noted the views of the Conservative Group that some SRAs should be increased over a phased period to more accurately reflect the amount of extra work involved particularly in respect of consideration and decisions relating to Local Government finances.
- 10.2 The Panel also took into account the views of the Leader of the Council and Labour & Co-operative Group that the workload of the Audit and Employment Matters Committees has increased and therefore the SRAs for the Chairpersons of those committees might benefit from a review to ensure they more adequately reflected the new workload. However, the Panel ultimately felt the benchmarks for both these SRAs were balanced fairly in comparison to other roles such as Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons of Overview & Scrutiny Committees and therefore are not recommending any increase to those SRAs.

Cabinet portfolio holders SRA

- 10.3 When reviewing the benchmarks of the SRAs against the basic allowance, the Panel took the view that role of cabinet portfolio holders merited an increase from 150 to 160% to reflect the workload in comparison to the Leader and Deputy Leader. Using the current basic allowance, the revised SRA for Cabinet portfolio holders would be £18,354 which retains it within the range of the comparator authorities as shown in Table 2.

Chairperson of Overview & Scrutiny Committee SRA

- 10.4 Whilst the current SRA for Overview & Scrutiny Chairpersons is above the average of comparator authorities, the Panel were conscious that these roles should be given some parity with Cabinet portfolio holders and the Chairperson of Planning Committee, particularly in light of the statutory guidance issued in 2019. That Guidance recognised that the role that overview and scrutiny can play in holding an authority's decision-makers to account makes it fundamentally important to the successful functioning of local democracy. Effective scrutiny helps secure the efficient delivery of public services and drives improvements within the authority itself. Conversely, poor scrutiny can be indicative of wider governance, leadership and service failure. The Chairperson plays a leadership role on a scrutiny committee as they are largely responsible for establishing its profile, influence and ways of working. The attributes authorities should and should not take into account when selecting individual committee members also apply to the selection of the Chair, but the Chair should also possess the ability to lead and build a sense of teamwork and consensus among committee members.
- 10.5 With this in mind the Panel are recommending the benchmark for the SRA of Overview & Scrutiny Chairpersons is increased from 100 to 120%. Using the current basic allowance, the revised SRA for Overview & Scrutiny Chairpersons would be £13,769 which retains it within the range of the comparator authorities, albeit it at the higher end of the range. This is shown in Table 2.

SRA to the Independent Person on Audit Committee

- 10.6 The Panel were made aware that proposals are being considered by the Council to appoint an Independent Person to the Audit Committee in line with guidance issued by the Chartered Institute for Public Finance (CIPFA). The role of this person is to give technical advice and guidance to the Committee, and it is for the Council to agree if the person should be paid an allowance.
- 10.7 Having reviewed the allowances paid by other authorities who have appointed an Independent Person to their Audit Committee there is a wide range – between £300 and £2034 with an average of £713. After some consideration of the nature of the role and the comparison of that to the rest of the SRAs, the Panel took the view that if the Council decides to appoint an Independent Person it would recommend they are paid an annual allowance on the basis of 10% of the basic allowance. On the current rate that would be £1147.40 per annum. This will uplift each time the basic allowance is uplifted.

Determining the scope and numbers of other SRAs

- 10.8 The responses to the questionnaire and discussion with Councillors showed that there was more or less common agreement amongst Councillors about the ranking of SRAs. The Panel continues to recommend that each of the positions is calculated as a multiplier of the basic allowance rather than any other arrangements

as this transparent and makes the Scheme clear to understand. After considering the relative complexities of each of the roles, the Panel is not recommending any other changes to the benchmarks other than those set out in paragraphs 10.3 and 10.4 above.

- 10.9 Whilst the Panel is conscious that the position of Chairperson of the Health & Wellbeing Board is a particularly complex role, it notes that this is now included in the role of the Deputy Leader whose Portfolio includes Adult Care. As and when the Chairperson position is held by a Councillor who is not a Cabinet Member, the Panel has continued to include an SRA in the Scheme to save the Council having to seek their views on it separately.

Indexing of SRAs

- 10.10 As the rates of SRA are calculated as percentages of the Basic Allowance, which will be annually indexed against the median Councils staff hourly pay, SRAs will be uprated annually as well, and the Panel recommends this is done for a maximum of 4 years until 31 May 2027.

11. Licensing Hearing Panels and 1982 Licensing Hearing Panel

- 11.1 No specific comments were made by Councillors about the current session rates paid to those who sit on these Licensing Panels but the Panel is advised that the regularity and workload has now settled and is fairly well-established and are of the opinion that the current allowance fairly reflects the time commitment and workload involved.
- 11.2 The current rate is £44.13 which breaks down to £14.71 per hour on the basis that most Hearings last no more than 3 hours. The Panel recommend that the hourly rate continues to be indexed against the median hourly rate for Council staff for four years until 31 May 2027.

12. Discounts for more than one SRA

- 12.1 In 2019, the Panel recommended and Full Council agreed, that the practice of Councillors receiving 50% of any second SRA should be discontinued. The Panel continues to be mindful that public perception of multiple SRAs could be that this is a system whereby Councillors sought additional duties simply to receive an SRA. Therefore, the Panel recommends the continued rule that Councillors may only be in receipt of one SRA at any one time. For these purposes the Panel is of the view that the allowances payable to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are not included in this provision as they are not covered by the Regulations governing members' allowances. The level of SRAs recommended by the Panel have been formulated on the basis that the resulting allowance levels should ensure that Councillors are adequately recompensed for their work so as not to require more than one SRA .

13. Dependant carer's Allowance

- 13.1 The Regulations authorise the payment to councillors of an allowance ('the Dependants' Carers' Allowance') in respect of the expenses of arranging for the care of children or dependants when the councillor attends meetings or is engaged in other official duties.

- 13.2 Several Councillors made the point, and the Panel would support the view, that access to dependant carers' allowances can make it possible for a wider range of people to serve on councils. Also these allowances can reverse any disadvantage to those Councillors who have caring responsibilities that impact on their ability to engage in the full range of activities. This is explained in more detail in paragraph 9.9.
- 13.3 In 2019, it was agreed that Councillors could claim for dependent childcare a maximum of £10.90 per hour indexed against the Living Wage Foundation rate and that for dependent adult care or children with special needs, a maximum of £19.44 per hour could be claimed, indexed against the Council's commissioned hourly home care rate.
- 13.4 The Panel heard compelling evidence from Councillors that the cost of childcare and particularly adult care and children with special needs was expensive. They were also persuaded that high dependency care requires reliable people with high levels of skill and that the maximum limits set did not adequately reflect the skills required.
- 13.5 In light of this evidence and the likelihood that this particular allowance can lead to a wider range of people being encouraged to serve on councils, the Panel is therefore recommending that the hourly rates for both childcare and dependent adult care and children with special needs be removed and that Councillors should be able to claim the actual expenses incurred, including the existing provision to cover up to one hour travel time to and from the approved duty. Arrangements should be made for appropriate proof of payment to be provided and confirmation about the level of specialist care required.
- 13.6 The Panel are also recommending no change to the existing requirement that the allowance does not apply where the carer is a member of the Councillors' own household. This is on the basis that a Councillor paying a member of their own household for dependent care and then the Council reimbursing the Councillor for those costs could lead to a negative public perception which would be difficult to manage.
- 13.7 The Panel recommend that the existing provisions in the Scheme setting out the maximum that can be claimed in any one 24 hour period while attending a conference should be removed in line with the recommendations in paragraph 13.5 above.
- 13.8 The Panel recommends that the remainder of the provisions relating to Dependants Care Allowance remain unchanged.

14. Subsistence, travelling and other allowances

Payments to co-optees and members of Education Schools Admission and Exclusion Appeals Panels

- 14.1 The Panel recommends that the current provisions for payments to co-optees and members of Education Schools Admission and Exclusion Appeals Panels as set out in the Scheme are retained without amendment.

Duties for which subsistence and travelling allowances can be claimed

- 14.2 The Panel considered the existing list of duties that qualify for travelling and subsistence allowances in Appendix 1 to the Members' Allowances Scheme and would not recommend any changes to it.

Travel allowances

- 14.3 The Panel is aware that, the Approved Mileage Allowance Payment ("AMAP") rate for the first 10,000 miles is 45p per mile and that rate has remained static for Councillors for a number of years. Council staff who are casual users can currently claim between 46.9p and 50.5p depending on the cubic capacity of their vehicle. The Panel are aware that a very small number of Councillors claim travel for approved duties and did not receive any overwhelming evidence from Councillors that they sought an increase in the rate. Indeed, the Panel were conscious that an increase is likely to have an impact on the need for Councillors to complete tax returns and of the sensitivity of the amounts claimed by them when they are published annually.
- 14.4 The Panel is of the view that the current travel allowances for Councillors should remain but that the table in Appendix 3 be amended to include electric vehicles at the same rate as other vehicles and the rates continue to be indexed against the AMAP rate for the next four years until 31 May 2027.
- 14.5 The Panel continues to recommend that the rate for travel by motor cycles should mirror that paid to Council staff (currently 21.3p per mile) and travel by bicycle should continue to mirror the rate paid to Council staff (currently 20p per mile).
- 14.6 The Panel considered the other provisions in the Scheme relating to travel set out in existing paragraph 7.3.2 of the Scheme and confirms that they do not require any amendments apart from those indicated above. The Panel would recommend that Councillors are encouraged to claim travel related to Approved Duties rather than worry overly about the public perception about the matter. The amounts are relatively small and could help in the current financial climate to make the difference between someone considering to be a Councillor or not.

15. Conference expenses, duties for which allowances can and cannot be claimed and how to claim, Sickness, maternity, paternity and adoption absence

- 15.1 The Panel could see no reason why any of these provisions in the current Scheme (paragraphs 8-11) require amendment and recommend that they stand unchanged.

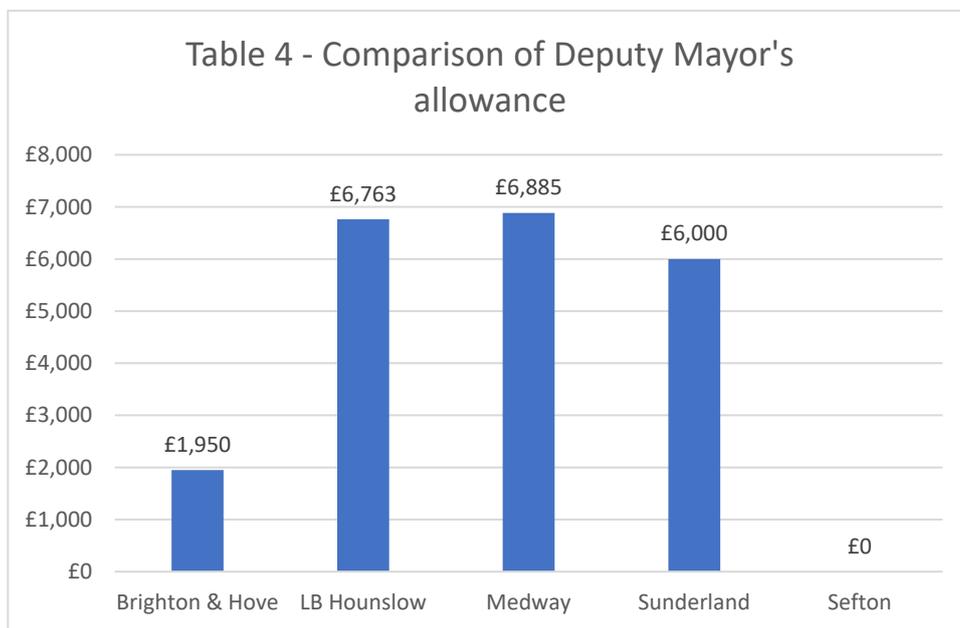
16. Mayor and Deputy Mayor allowances

- 16.1 The Council asked the Panel to consider the allowances paid to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor although they are not technically part of the Members' Allowances Scheme because they are not provided for in the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.



Average - £13,039
Median - £13,525

16.2 In terms of the Deputy Mayors allowance, amongst the comparator authorities Medway is also paying above the average of £4320. The table below shows this:



Average - £4,320
Median - £6,000

16.3 The Panel is mindful of the importance of the role as the First Citizen of Medway and how time-consuming it is, with lots of anti-social hours involved. It was also aware that the allowances paid are intended to cover additional costs incurred on suitable clothing and out of pocket expenses such as raffle tickets when attending other charity events. However, the Panel are of the opinion that the current benchmarks for both the Mayor and Deputy Mayor SRAs adequately reflect their roles and are comparable to other SRAs within the Scheme in the right proportion. Therefore they are not recommending any changes to these SRAs.

17. Adoption and Fostering Panels

- 17.1 A couple of Councillors and the submission from the Conservative Group asked the Panel to consider introducing an SRA for the Councillor representatives on the Fostering Panels. The Council nominates four Councillors to sit on the Fostering Panel.
- 17.2 The Panel understands that it meets twice a month during the day for an average of 3 ¼ hours and there is a high volume of case papers to read for each meeting. As well as the time to read the paperwork, members of the Panel are required to submit their questions in advance of the meeting and have regular training and performance feedback. The Remuneration Panel understands that currently the chair, vice-chair and other members of the Panels who are not Councillors or Council employees, receive a payment per session, paid for by the relevant service department, but the Members' Allowances Scheme does not have a provision for the Councillor representative to receive any payment in recognition of the responsibility or time commitment involved.
- 17.3 The Panel were told by a couple of Councillors who have or do sit on the Panel that the work was at least on a par with those who sit on the Licensing Panels who do receive an allowance for attendance.
- 17.4 Taking this evidence into consideration, the Panel are recommending that Councillors on the Fostering Panel receive an SRA from 1 April 2024 at the rate of £14.71 per hour and the SRA be index-linked to the median Council staff hourly pay until 31 May 2027. This is the same rate as paid to the Councillors who sit on the Licensing Hearing Panel.

18. Foregoing and suspension of allowances and part-year entitlement

- 18.1 Members Allowances Schemes must contain provisions regarding (a) the option for Councillors to forego all or part of their allowances; (b) the circumstances under which the payment of allowances can be suspended; and (c) the arrangements for part-year entitlements if a Councillor's term of office begins or ends otherwise than at the beginning or end of a year.
- 18.2 Having reviewed the current Scheme the Panel is recommending no change to the existing provisions set out in paragraphs 4, 5 and 6 of the Scheme.

19. Miscellaneous matters

- 19.1 The Panel wish to acknowledge the submission from the Conservative Group but felt there was no strong evidence to increase the basic allowance or the benchmarks for the SRAs as suggested and particularly that it is not the role of the Panel to recommend any phased implementation of such increases.

20. Conclusions

- 20.1 In approaching this review, the Independent Remuneration Panel has taken due account of statutory guidance, the current financial climate, and the need to ensure that Councillors are fairly compensated for the significant contribution they make. At the same time, it has sought to ensure that compensation should be at a level that would encourage a broad cross section of the local population to stand for election. The Panel has also taken into account the need to ensure that stakeholders (Council staff and the public) can be confident that the scheme is transparent and making sensible use of public money, and that the scheme is aligned with those of similar local authorities in the South East of England.

- 20.2 The Panel has, therefore, made recommendations that seek to continue to produce a rational formula for the calculation of the basic allowance that provides adequate recompense for front line council activities. This basic allowance is used as the foundation for the SRA scheme that is intended to reflect the considerable responsibilities of key roles in a unitary authority of the size of Medway Council.
- 20.3 Furthermore, the Panel has made recommendations to increase the Dependent Carer's Allowances to maximize the ability of those with caring responsibilities to engage in council duties and to align other expenses and allowances to those payable to council staff.
- 20.4 Finally, in order to ensure that, over time, Councillor's allowances do not drift from the remuneration of council staff, the panel continues to recommend that all allowances for Councillors are indexed to the median Council staff hourly pay which will always reflect the annual pay award.
- 20.5 The Panel would like to extend their thanks to the Councillors who responded to the questionnaire and those who agreed to meet the Panel. We are conscious that Councillors are committed to providing the best service they can to their constituents and are giving a lot of their time.

21. Background Papers

- South East Employers (SEE) Members' Allowances Survey November 2023
- New Council Constitution: Guidance on Regulation for Local Authority Allowances (OPDM)– extract of sections 70-76 re: Special Responsibility Allowances
- Schedules showing Medway current SRA's and basic allowances
- Submission from the Conservative Group dated 30 October 2023
- Information obtained from discussions with Councillors