

Report
of the

**Independent
Remuneration
Panel**
for

**Stockport Metropolitan
Borough Council**

A Review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

January 2025

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Chair's Foreword

The role of the Independent Remuneration Panel, under the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003, is to make recommendations to the Council as to the responsibilities or duties in respect of which allowances should be available and the amount of those allowances.

Under the Regulations the Council is required to keep its Members Allowances Scheme under review. It is noted that the last full review of the scheme was undertaken in the autumn of 2016, albeit the scheme has been subject to minor amendments in the intervening period. The Panel noted that one of the consequences of this has been a significant period of time when the value of allowances in Stockport has been suppressed as the rules around the indexation of allowances only allow such a link to apply for a maximum period of four years.

The process for making and reviewing such a scheme is regulated so that the public can have confidence in the independence, openness and accountability of the process involved. The process requires that the Council must establish an Independent Remuneration Panel, and before making or amending its scheme of allowances, it must have regard to the views of the Panel.

In undertaking this year's Review, the Panel considered written responses to a survey issued to all Members in relation to the Review. The response from Members was very impressive with 75% of members completing the survey. In particular, the Panel was grateful for the detailed contributions that members made as part of their responses to the survey that helped inform the Panel's deliberations.

Your Panel also interviewed thirteen Members across a wide range of responsibilities as well as the Council's Chief Executive. I would like to extend the thanks of the Panel to all Members for the way in which they have engaged with the review process, made themselves available and for the open and thoughtful views offered to the Panel.

The Panel reflected on the fact that its last two final reports in 2012 and 2016 had contextualised those reviews as taking place during a period of unprecedented financial pressures on local authorities. The Panel no longer feels it appropriate to make such a comment – these pressures have now seemingly become a fixture of public sector finance. That Stockport Council finds itself in a better position than most to weather these financial headwinds is a testament to the professionalism and sound advice of its officers, but also, in no small part, to the excellent stewardship of its elected members, of all political hues and administrations, who have played a vital role either in taking difficult decisions to balance the books every year, or through scrutinising those decisions to ensure that they represented the best possible outcome for local residents.

In these times of significant financial pressures, the decisions facing members gets more difficult every year. Ultimately, it is you as councillors; as elected members; as representatives of the 295,000 residents of the borough, that are accountable for the actions of this Council – its successes, and its failures. The Panel acknowledges that some of the proposed levels of allowances that it is recommending as part of this review may prove difficult for members to accept. However, it is the duty of the

Panel to attach a monetary value to the various roles that you are undertaking. It is a very blunt tool for measuring the 'significance', or perhaps 'value' of these roles.

This Panel has consistently recognised that value of Stockport's elected members. It continues to believe that the calibre of its members is incredibly high, and the public should be rightly proud that Stockport stands out as a shining example of what can be achieved when officers and all councillors work together in the best interests of the borough. Moreover, the Panel heard during the course of its interviews that an increase in the level of allowances for members could be considered an investment. That is not a position with which this Panel would disagree

I referred at the outset of my foreword as to the statutory duties of the Panel in making its recommendations to the Council. The Panel would also reflect on the duty of the authority to have regard to these recommendations. It is noted that the Council is under no obligation to accept our recommendations. Indeed, it is noted with regret that in 2016, the Council Meeting rejected our recommendation for an increase in the level of the basic allowance. However, I would strongly urge Members, to the extent that you feel it possible to do so, to be bold and invest in your own wellbeing, development and futures – for the future of the Council and its residents depends on it.

Finally, I would also like to reflect on the fact that after 24 years of being Chair of Stockport's Independent Remuneration Panel, this will be the final review of the scheme that I will be participating in as I formally retire from the Panel. I would also note that two further longstanding members of the Panel (Patrick Dempsey with 13 years' service and Bernadette Holgate with 9 years' service) have also elected to retire at this stage as well. I would like to commend those members for their service to the Panel and Stockport. It has truly been an honour for us to serve on the Panel.

I would therefore like to personally wish all members well for the future. I know that this borough and its residents are in safe hands.

Philip Smith

Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel

Membership of the Panel

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003, the Independent Remuneration Panel must consist of at least three members, none of whom can be a member of the authority or who would otherwise be disqualified from becoming a member of the authority.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council has appointed the following four members to serve on the Independent Remuneration Panel:-

Mr Philip Smith (Chair)
Mr Patrick Dempsey
Mrs Bernadette Holgate MBE
Mr Ben Poland

The Panel also had the benefit of advice and support from Mr Damian Eaton (Head of Democratic & Electoral Services) whose role was to support the proceedings and take the organisational lead in facilitating the review and the Panel would like to place on record their thanks and appreciation for his work during the conduct of this review.

Terms of Reference

The Panel met on 19 September 2024 and agreed the following Terms of Reference for the conduct of the Review. The Terms of Reference reflect the requirements of the Regulations to Review the Members' Allowances Scheme in its entirety:-

- (i) To make recommendations to the Authority as to the amount of basic allowance which should be paid to its elected members.
- (ii) To make recommendations to the Authority about the roles and responsibilities for which special responsibility allowances should be payable and as to the amount of each such allowance.
- (iii) To make recommendations to the Authority as to the amounts that should be payable in respect of travel and subsistence.
- (iv) To make recommendation to the Authority as to the amounts that should be payable to co-opted members.
- (v) To make recommendations as to whether the Authority's allowances scheme should maintain an allowance in respect of the expenses of arranging the care of children and dependants and if it does make such a recommendation, the amount of this allowance and the means by which it is determined.
- (vi) To make recommendation as to whether the Authority's allowances scheme should make provision for adjustments to the level of allowances may be determined according to an index and if so which index and how long that index should apply.

Conducting the Review

The Panel met on four occasions between September 2024 and January 2025 as follows:-

19 September 2024
27 November 2024
28 November 2024
13 January 2025

In conducting the Review, the Panel had regard to a significant amount of evidence to assist them with their deliberations, which included the following documentation:-

- The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003
- The Government's "Guidance on Consolidated Regulations on Members' Allowances for Local Authorities in England 2006".
- A comparison of the level of Basic Allowances and Special Responsibility Allowances across Greater Manchester.
- The current Members' Allowances Scheme for Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council.
- A comparison of members' attendance rates at meetings from 2020/21 to present.
- A comparison of committee 'workload' at meetings from 2020/21 to present.
- Recommendations made by the Independent Remuneration Panel in September 2016 (i.e. the last Review).
- Council Business Programme for 2024/25 and 2025/26
- Methodology for the Calculation of the Basic Allowance.

In addition, at its meetings on 27 and 28 November 2024, the Panel conducted a series of interviews with thirteen members who held a variety of remunerated positions and those who held none in addition to the Chief Executive of the Council. The Panel aimed to select a range of interviewees which was representative of the variety of roles performed by members. The Panel considered these interviews to be an important source of information:-

Councillor Mark Hunter	- Leader of the Council
Councillor Mark Roberts	- Deputy Leader of the Council
Councillor David Meller	- Leader of the Labour Group
Councillor Anna Charles-Jones	- Leader of the Independent Ratepayer Group
Councillor Gary Lawson	- Leader of the Green Group
Councillor Matt Wynne	- Leader of the Edgeley Community Association
Councillor Mark Jones	- Chair of the Planning & Highways Regulation Committee
Councillor Shan Alexander	- Chair of the Licensing, Environment & Safety Committee
Councillor Claire Vibert	- Chair of the Economy, Regeneration & Climate Change Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Karl Wardlaw	- Chair of Central Stockport Area Committee
Councillor Alex Wynne	- Chair of Bramhall & Cheadle Hulme South Area Committee
Councillor Jake Austin	- Councillor not in receipt of an SRA
Councillor Jon Byrne	- Councillor not in receipt of an SRA

An anonymous electronic survey was also sent to all councillors on 24 October 2024 soliciting views on the current remuneration offered through the Members' Allowances Scheme. The survey also requested that members give an indication of the average number of hours per week that they spent undertaking their duties as a councillor. The survey remained open for a period of 18 days until 10 November 2024. In total, the survey received 45 individual responses representing a response rate of 75%. This is a slight reduction on the response rate for the survey undertaken in 2016 which saw 81% of members respond, but remained above the response rate from the 2012 survey which saw 57% of members respond. This survey provided the Panel with valuable information; naturally there were areas of divergent opinion, nevertheless there were a number of trends and strong areas of agreement that greatly assisted the Panel in the formulation of its recommendations.

In response to an invitation from the Panel extended to all political groups, it also received a formal written representation on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group.

The Panel remains cognisant of the current national and local financial climate and the ongoing budget pressures being faced by all local authorities. The Panel also noted that as part of its last review, the Council felt unable to accept its recommendation for a modest increase in the level of the basic allowance. The Panel observed that this decision, while understandable, has had the impact of further suppressing the current level of members' allowances in Stockport.

The Panel agreed at the outset of the review that its task in looking at members' allowances would need to take account of this national picture as well as the range of evidence about roles and responsibilities. However, the Panel considered that it was the primary purpose of an independent panel to make recommendations for allowances appropriate to the roles performed by Stockport's Councillors and Co-opted Members within the Council's political management arrangements and that its view on the level of allowances needed to reflect the onerous nature of the role undertaken by members.

The Panel expressed the view that the task for the Members was more akin to a job performed by an employee than services rendered by the voluntary sector. However, the application of a Public Service Discount is an acknowledgement that an element of the role should nonetheless be considered voluntary. The Panel regrets that Members in 2016 felt unable to accept their then recommendations, leading to a prolonged period in which Stockport members have received a lower level of allowances than would otherwise have been the case. See "*Other considerations*" on Page 12.

While the Panel recognised the pressure for economy, this aim needed to be balanced against the need to promote proper democratic representation. Although the Panel had an eye towards cost in arriving at its recommendations it was noted that this was in the context of a total revenue spend by the Council of £336 million per year and in the midst of significant additional capital expenditure by the Council.

The Panel considered that its assessment of this challenge in 2012 remained valid:-

"We are aware that since the Panel last undertook a review of the Scheme, the Government has been asking councils to show restraint in considering councillors allowances, to freeze their allowances in line with public sector workers, and suggesting that 'councillors must remain arms-length volunteers'(DCLG, 12 July 2010).

“However, the Panel was also concerned that councillors and co-opted members should be remunerated fairly in proportion to the tasks that they perform within the political management arrangements operated under the Local Government Act 2000 save that an element of a councillor’s time should be deemed to be voluntary.”

The Basic Allowance

“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...Basic allowance is intended to recognise the time commitment of all councillors, including such inevitable calls on their time as meeting with officers and constituents and attendance at political group meetings. It is also intended to cover incidental costs such as the use of their homes.” (Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003)

In 2012, the Panel fundamentally changed the methodology it used to calculate the basic allowance to adopt the approach recommended in the “Guidance on Consolidated Regulations on Members’ Allowances for Local Authorities in England”.

This approach suggests that the Panel should take a view on the rate at which, and the number of hours for which, councillors ought to be remunerated. It also stresses the importance that some element of the work of Members continues to be voluntary – i.e. that some hours are not remunerated. This must be balanced against the need to ensure that financial loss is not suffered by elected members, and further to ensure that, despite the input required, people of all economic backgrounds are encouraged to come forward as elected members and that their service to the community is retained. It is noted that this approach is now employed by the vast majority of independent remuneration panels in arriving at an appropriate computation of the basic allowance.

The Panel agreed that this remained a reasonable, readily understandable and justifiable means of determining the basic allowance.

Most Remuneration Panels break this guidance down into three distinct variables as a means to arrive at the recommended Basic Allowance:-

Input:	The time required to undertake the role
Public Service Discount:	The element of that time which is voluntary
Day Session Rate:	The worth of the remunerated time

The time required to undertake the role

In evaluating the average time requirement for a member’s duties connected with the basic allowance the Panel gave consideration firstly to the results of the electronic survey that had been distributed to all members of the Council. Whilst a wide range of views were expressed (between a low of 8 and a high of 55 hours), by far the most commonly expressed range was between 20-30 hours a week with the mean average being 22.7 hours. This constitutes a slight reduction from 2016 where the average was 25 hours.

The Panel also benchmarked the ‘local time commitment’ against the position nationally and recognised that the average time commitment calculated from the 2024 Stockport survey of 22.7 hours very closely aligned with the average weekly commitment of 22.4 hours from the most recent *National census of local authority councillors 2022* which provides a high level of assurance in relation to the outcome of the local survey.

The Panel noted that members may well spend significantly more or less time on the duties than the computed average may indicate, and remain similarly effective as local councillors, however as the basic allowance is a 'flat rate' and 'must be the same for each councillor' the Panel must find and settle on an 'average' figure.

In considering all the available evidence, the Panel was satisfied that the use of 22.7 hours as a figure from which to calculate the 'time required to undertake the role' was appropriate.

The element of that time which is voluntary

The Panel, in considering the level of the basic allowance, is compelled to recognise that some element of the duties of a councillor continues to be voluntary i.e. that some hours are not remunerated. The level of public service discount applied can vary widely across the country from a low of 25% to a high of 50%. The most commonly utilised size of the voluntary (or public service) discount is within the 30%-33% range, to reflect the principle that an element of a member's time should be given freely, as public service. A public service discount of this size is the most commonly utilised figure as it broadly corresponds with the proportion of time the majority of elected members in England spend on undertaking ward and constituency duties.

The Panel, in considering the level of the voluntary discount, was impressed by the evidence provided by those members who were interviewed and who consistently informed the Panel of their commitment to public service. In 2016, the Panel opted for a higher public service discount of 36% to reflect both the financial climate in which the review was taking place, but also in the light of those statements from members that public service rather than remuneration was the single most important motivating factor in their decision to stand for election to the Council. This represented an increase from the previous level of the discount which had been set at 31.5% (being the midpoint of the 30%-33% range).

However, the Panel noted that since its last review in 2016 there had been an increased alignment both nationally and locally around setting a public service discount of a 'third' (i.e. 33%), noting that panels in Bolton, Rochdale and Wigan had all applied the same level of public service discount as part of their recent reviews of their respective allowances schemes. The Panel was persuaded that this represented a more logical and readily understandable level at which to set the public service discount.

Setting a rate

In 2016, the Panel took the view an appropriate benchmark to obtain the day session (or remuneration) rate was the median hourly salary (excluding overtime) for all workers residing in Stockport which in the *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2016* was £12.68. The mean average is higher than the median but the Office for National Statistics (ONS) advises that median salaries are a closer reflection of real salaries as they are not skewed by a handful of very high earners. The further advantage of utilising this rate for remuneration for Members over and above the former LGA Daily Rate (which was dispensed with the LGA in 2010) is that it relates their Basic Allowance to the median earnings of their constituents.

In reassessing the appropriate rate for 2024, the Panel took as its starting point its judgment in 2016 and considered that it remained largely sound as the foundation for

setting a new rate. In particular, the Panel was keen to ensure that the rate was reflective of and linked to the typical earnings of Members' constituents.

As such, the Panel considered that it should continue to utilise this local data to obtain the day session (or remuneration) rate using the median hourly salary (excluding overtime) for all workers residing in Stockport which in the *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2023* was £16.80 per hour.

Calculating the basic allowance

In having regard to paragraphs 52-54 of the *Guidance on Consolidated Regulations on Members' Allowances for Local Authorities in England* the Panel was able to calculate a basic allowance as follows:-

(22.7 hours weekly average time commitment x £16.80 per hour) x 52 weeks = £19,830.72

After 33% public service discount (£6,544.14) = **£13,286.58**

Benchmarking the basic allowance

The Panel was keen to ensure that in setting a basic allowance, the methodology was not only robust but that the output produced by that methodology was a figure which could be considered 'reasonable' in the context of the basic allowance paid in a basket of comparator local authorities.

The Panel gave consideration to the proposed basic allowance for Stockport and that paid in the nine other Greater Manchester councils.

Table 1: Basic Allowances in the ten Greater Manchester Councils

Council	Basic Allowance
Manchester	£18,841
Tameside	£16,637
Wigan	£14,460
Stockport *	£13,287
Salford	£12,478
Bolton	£11,848
Bury	£11,227
Rochdale	£11,172
Oldham	£10,922
Trafford	£10,467
Mean	£13,117 [#]
Median	£11,848 [#]

* as proposed

[#] excluding Stockport

Table 1 shows that in following the methodology detailed in the Statutory Guidance, the resultant calculated figure of £13,286.58 places Stockport's proposed basic allowance roughly midway (being in fourth position) between the highest and lowest remunerating authorities. The Panel noted that Stockport also had the fourth largest

revenue budget in Greater Manchester. While this was not a determinative factor in the setting of the level of the basic allowance, it provided a level of assurance to the Panel in the robustness and appropriateness of the calculation.

Other considerations

The Panel noted that Stockport's members' allowances had not been subject to an annual uplift since 2020. This is because the Regulations only permit a scheme to be index linked for a maximum period of four years. This has effectively resulted in members allowances having been the subject of a 'pay freeze'. Had the allowances scheme been subject to indexation until the present time, it was understood that the basic allowance would currently be £12,079.83 per annum, and not the £10,716.93 currently payable under the scheme.

The Panel also considered the impact of inflationary increases on the value of members' allowances, noting that for the basic allowance to have retained its same spending power from that agreed the Council Meeting in January 2017, it would now need to be set at £13,352.01

In addition, the Panel had to recognise the significant number of responses that it had received from members in relation to the current value of the basic allowance. 67% of members felt that it no longer adequately met their expenses and 69% considered that it was now too little. Through the interview process, the Panel heard consistently through the interview process that the value of the basic allowance was now too low. This was accompanied by an emotion of sadness rather than rebellion. However, one hard-working Member indicated that they would not stand again as they found it increasingly difficult to reconcile to the increasingly onerous duties of the role and the impact that it had on their career and home life, with the remuneration that was offered for the role. These are views that this Panel firmly concurs with.

The Panel acknowledged that at a 23.98% uplift, the proposal represented a not insignificant increase in the level of the basic allowance beyond what was currently remunerated. However, the Panel was of the view that such an adjustment was now necessary as a consequence of both the 'freeze' in members' allowances that had occurred since 2020, but also as a result of the decision of the Council Meeting to reject the original recommendation of the Panel in 2016 to uplift the basic allowance at that stage. Both of these factors have resulted in a suppression of the value of the basic allowance which has meant that proportionately larger increases are now necessary.

Moreover, the Panel feel that the approach which had been followed in calculating the basic allowance is transparent, understandable, and reflects the median earnings of local residents; the result of which was to place the proposal on par with the basic allowances paid in the comparator group of Greater Manchester councils.

RECOMMENDATION ONE

That a Basic Allowance of £13,286.58 be set.

Special Responsibility Allowances

“Special responsibility allowance (SRA) may be paid to those members of the council who have significant additional responsibilities, over and above the generally accepted duties of a councillor. These special responsibilities must be related to the discharge of the authority’s functions.” (Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003)

Special Responsibility Allowances: the context

The Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 provides a list of type of responsibilities which may be considered should attract a special responsibility allowance:-

- acting as leader or deputy leader of a political group within the authority;
- acting as a member of an executive where the authority are operating executive arrangements within the meaning of Part II of the Local Government Act 2000;
- presiding at meetings of a committee or sub-committee of the authority, or a joint committee of the authority and one or more other authorities, or a sub-committee of such a joint committee;
- representing the authority at meetings of, or arranged by, any other body;
- acting as a member of a committee or sub-committee of the authority which meets with exceptional frequency or for exceptionally long periods;
- acting as the spokesman of a political group on a committee or sub-committee of the authority;
- acting as a member of an adoption panel within the meaning of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983(a);
- acting as a member of any committee or sub-committee that deals with any function
- arising under any enactment authorising the authority to license or control the carrying on of any activity;
- carrying out such other activities in relation to the discharge of the authority’s functions as require of the member an amount of time and effort equal to or greater than would be required of him by any one of the activities mentioned above.

The Regulations further provide that where one political group is in control of the Council, and where the authority has decided that it will pay at least one special responsibility allowance, it *must* also make provision for the payment of a further special responsibility allowance to at least *one other member of a minority group*.

In considering the setting of special responsibility allowances, the Panel also took into account the statutory guidance relating to SRAs which states that:-

“It does not necessarily follow that a particular responsibility which is vested to a particular member is a significant additional responsibility for which a special responsibility allowance should be paid. Local authorities will need to consider such particular responsibilities very carefully. Whilst such responsibilities may be unique to a particular member it may be that all or most members have some such responsibility to varying degrees. Such duties may not lead to a significant extra workload for any one particular member above another. These sorts of responsibilities should be recognised as a time commitment to

council work which is acknowledged within the basic allowance and not responsibilities for which a special responsibility allowance should be recommended.”

The number of Special Responsibility Allowances and the 50% guideline

While the 2003 Regulations do not limit the number of special responsibility allowances which may be paid, the Panel was mindful of the statutory guidance which does state that:-

“If the majority of members of a council receive a special responsibility allowance the local electorate may rightly question whether this was justified. Local authorities will wish to consider very carefully the additional roles of members and the significance of these roles, both in terms of responsibility and real time commitment before deciding which will warrant the payment of a special responsibility allowance.”

Currently, there are 34 remunerable posts within the Scheme (notwithstanding that more than one role may be fulfilled by one councillor). This means that, potentially, 54% of elected members may be in receipt of an SRA which exceeds the 50% guideline.

However, the Panel noted that notwithstanding the *potential* for the number of recipients to exceed this threshold, the number of actual recipients of an SRA (excluding those paid on behalf of the cross-conurbation joint authorities) has peaked at 51%. This has largely been due to situations where not all of the scrutiny committees took up the opportunity to conduct a scrutiny review, or where the Chair of those scrutiny review panels was already remunerated for another post they held within the Scheme (the current Scheme precluding members from receiving more than one SRA in most circumstances).

The Panel was of the view that this provision was an effective check which made overall compliance with the 50% guideline more likely. The Panel also noted and concurred with the conclusion of the *2008 Councillors Commission report on Members Remuneration* on this point, which stated that:-

“[by] paying more than one special responsibility allowance to individuals who hold two or more posts... [the] consequence was that allowances schemes were not transparent...[and] it is difficult to deduce from the members’ allowances scheme the amount paid to any one individual. It may also produce the anomaly of the executive leader receiving a lower total allowance than another councillor.”

The Panel was therefore minded to recommend that the current provision within the scheme relating to the number of special responsibility allowances that a member may receive be retained.

The Panel further noted that there remained within the Scheme special provisions to exclude from this rule those allowances paid on behalf of cross-conurbation joint authorities or committees. While at present there are no such posts remunerated through Stockport’s scheme, it had been highlighted that there had been recent cases where the ten Greater Manchester authorities had been asked to remunerate on behalf of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (such as for members of the GMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee) and the inclusion of this exemption

from the rule had allowed the necessary flexibility for those allowances to be paid to members who were otherwise in receipt of an allowance from Stockport. The Panel was therefore minded to also recommend the retention of this exemption within the scheme, subject to suitable modification, to retain flexibility within the scheme for future such occurrences.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

That the existing provisions within the Scheme relating to the number of special responsibility allowances that may be received by a single member be retained.

Arriving at a methodology for calculating the level of SRAs

The “Guidance on Consolidated Regulations on Members’ Allowances for Local Authorities in England” recommends that a good starting point in determining special responsibility allowances may be to agree the allowance which should be attached to the most time consuming post on the council (most commonly the Leader of the Council) and pro rata downwards for the other roles which it has been agreed ought to receive an extra allowance.

The Panel held that its methodology in 2016 for the calculation of special responsibility allowances (as a factor of the basic allowance) remained valid and robust, and the Panel heard no evidence either through the responses to the electronic survey, or as part of its interviews, that there was a need to fundamentally revisit this element of the Scheme. However, the Panel recognised that an indirect consequence of its recommendation for an uplift in the basic allowance was to raise by the same factor all of the special responsibility allowances. This consequential increase may, or may not, be appropriate for each category of SRA and it is this that would need to be assessed in conjunction with the range of evidence received by the Panel during the course of the review.

Leader of the Council

The current level of the SRA for the Leader of the Council is £32,150.79 and was calculated in 2016 as being three times the level of the basic allowance. The Panel noted that this was the second lowest level of remuneration for a Leader in Greater Manchester.

On the appropriate calculation for a leader’s special responsibility allowance, the 2003 statutory guidance promotes a factor-based approach which determines the leader’s special responsibility allowance as a multiple of the basic allowance. The Panel heard that the most commonly used multipliers nationally were those between 2.5 and 4 times the basic allowance, with 3 being most frequently used.

The reason for the popularity of this approach was not simply because its suggestion within the statutory guidance, but also because the multiple of 3 had become most discernible nationally.

Within the comparator group of Greater Manchester district councils, the mean SRA paid to Leaders is 3.14 times the mean basic allowance whereas the median Leader’s SRA is 3.34 times the median basic allowance. The mean figure has not altered significantly from the last time the Panel conducted this exercise (marginally up from 3.13) and the median being up from 3.05. The Panel noted that some of the

upward pressure on the median figure was as a result of a minority of Councils now applying a 'GMCA supplement' to the Leader's allowance to separately account for their work as a member of the Combined Authority. However, the Panel was of the view that the multiplier of three continued to remain sound in the light of the available evidence.

*Table 2: Leader's SRA in the nine other Greater Manchester Councils **

Council	Basic Allowance	Leader's SRA	Multiplier	Multiplier (exc. GMCA)
Bolton	£11,848	£31,989	2.7	-
Bury	£11,227	£39,681 ⁺	3.5	3
Manchester	£18,841	£47,016	2.5	-
Oldham	£10,922	£39,318	3.6	-
Rochdale	£11,172	£39,395 ⁺	3.5	3
Salford	£12,478	£61,276	4.9 ^{**}	-
Tameside	£16,637	£39,588	2.4	-
Trafford	£10,467	£42,685 ⁺	4.1	3
Wigan	£14,460	£50,026 ⁺	3.5	2.7
Mean	£13,117	£41,212	3.1	-
Median	£11,848	£39,635	3.3	-

* Not all councils will have applied the 'multiplier methodology' to their schemes to arrive at the Leader's allowance. Figures may also have been rounded up or down by the relevant remuneration panel which may skew the multiplier shown here, which would otherwise have been a round figure.

** Salford Council operates a directly elected Mayoral model of governance for which remuneration is calculated on a different basis and is therefore not considered commensurate for the purposes of calculating a multiplier. As such, this figure has been discounted from the mean and median averages.

⁺ These allowances are inclusive of a separate GMCA supplement paid by the authority to the Leader. In these cases, the table includes a multiplier inclusive and exclusive of the GMCA supplement.

By utilising the commonly accepted multiplier of three times the recommended Basic Allowance (£13,286.58) it would produce a new indicative Leader's SRA of £39,859.75 which sits comfortably between the narrow band of the mean and median SRA paid to Leaders in the comparator group of Greater Manchester councils, and which would represent an increase of 23.98%

Again, the Panel recognised that this produced an indicative SRA that would be set at a level higher than the provision within the current scheme. However, the Panel attached significant weight to the considerable number of responses to the member survey, and from the evidence extracted through the interviews, from respondents across the political spectrum which observed that the current level of the SRA for the Leader of the Council was either too little (59%) or about right (34%). In this context, the Panel was satisfied that the increase in the level of this allowance was justifiable in the light of national guidance, regional benchmarking and in the light of the representations received.

The Panel decided to take a lead from the figure produced by multiplying the recommended Basic Allowance by three. This approach retains the advantages of being transparent, simple to understand, maintains the relationship to the median earnings of local residents, and continues to place it on par with the Leaders' SRAs paid in the comparator group of Greater Manchester councils.

The Panel did give consideration as to whether the Leader of the Council's role should receive separate remuneration for the increasingly onerous duties of the Leader on behalf of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. The Panel had observed that an increasing number of Councils were now doing so with four now paying a separate amount varying between £5,879 and £10,634. However, the Panel was satisfied that, notwithstanding this approach elsewhere, the computed SRA for the Leader of the Council would now sit at a level that was broadly similar to those paid elsewhere in Greater Manchester.

RECOMMENDATION THREE

That a Leader of the Council's SRA of £39,859.75 be set being three times the Basic Allowance.

Deputy Leader of the Council

The current level of the SRA for the Deputy Leader of the Council is £17,682.94 representing 55% of the current Leader's SRA of £32,150.79.

The Panel referred to the representations received through the member survey and interviews that strongly suggested that the differential between the SRA of a Cabinet Member and the Deputy Leader of the Council was too small to reflect the additional responsibility of being Deputy Leader.

The Panel turned to the *2008 Councillors Commission report on Members Remuneration* for a national reference point which suggested that the deputy leader's post should be set between the range of 50-75% of the leader's special responsibility allowance.

The Panel then looked at the SRAs paid in the 'comparator group' and noted that this ranged widely from £16,758 to £28,200 (excluding the Deputy Mayor of Salford). Moreover, the percentage of the Leader's allowance that this represented also varied from a low of 50% to a high of 72%. The Panel considered that these wide variations were likely to be explained by the different duties and 'job descriptions' that a Deputy Leader of the Council might be expected to undertake as part of their role and so may not necessarily be directly comparable to the role performed at Stockport. Notwithstanding this variation, it was interesting to note that the mean average percentage was 59% with the median being 60%.

In the light of these figures, the Panel therefore found it extremely useful to give detailed consideration to the whole range of evidence submitted as part of the Review and from the interview process and noted as part of this that the main statutory additional responsibility of the Deputy Leader, beyond being a Portfolio Holder, is to stand in for the Leader of the Council when required. However, there is an additional workload and responsibility associated with the Deputy Leader's role that merits recognition and should be taken into account in setting an appropriate ratio - although the Panel was not satisfied that this should necessarily be reflected through an uplift in the integer at which it set the SRA for this specific allowance in 2016, being 55% of the recommended SRA for the Leader.

The Panel determined that a better approach to reflect the differential between the Deputy Leader of the Council and a Cabinet Member, would be to consider the two

SRAs collectively, and instead consider a reduction in the integer applied to the Cabinet Member SRA. This is dealt with separately in the next section of the report.

Turning back to the Deputy Leader of the Council's SRA, the Panel noted that the rate of 55% was within both the national and local ranges for this allowance. Further, it was noted that this did nonetheless still result in an uplift in the computed allowance, now being £21,922.86 which the Panel considered reasonable in the light of all the evidence and was now at a level which sat within the range of the mean (£22,994) and median (£20,650) averages for this allowance in the Greater Manchester region.

The Panel therefore decided that the SRA should be set at £21,922.86 which being a ratio of 55% of the recommended SRA for the Leader of the Council, and which would represent a 23.98% increase.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

That a Deputy Executive Leader's SRA of £21,922.86 be set, being 55% of the Leader of the Council's SRA.

Cabinet Member

The Scheme currently makes provision for an SRA of £16,075.40 to be paid to Cabinet Members, of which there are currently six post holders. The Panel noted that in 2016 this SRA had been set at a rate of 50% of the Leader of the Council's SRA.

The *2008 Councillors Commission report on Members Remuneration* suggests that an appropriate index for a cabinet member would be within the range of 45-65%. The current Cabinet Member SRA at Stockport sits towards the lower end of that range.

Amongst the 'comparator group' of Greater Manchester councils, Cabinet Members again received remuneration which ranged widely with the highest payer of £22,081 being more than twice of the lowest at £8,665. However, the payment differential was slightly wider than that of the Deputy Leader of the Council, being between 27% and 56% with a mean and median average of 44% and 47% respectively. This places the current SRA for this post broadly in alignment with local and national ranges for this allowance.

The Panel also noted that of those representations received that expressed a view on the SRA for Cabinet Members, there was an almost equal split between those who felt the allowance was 'too little' (49%) and those who felt it was 'about right' (44%). The Panel also considered the many representations received through the interviews and in the survey that suggested that there needed to be a greater differential between the Deputy Leader of the Council and a Cabinet Member.

The Panel therefore agreed that in the circumstances it would be appropriate to reflect this though a reduction in the ratio applied to this allowance such that it be set at 45% of that of the Leader of the Council which would translate into an indicative SRA of £17,936.89 and which would represent an 11.58% increase. This would then provide for a difference of 10% between the rates at which a Cabinet Member was remunerated and the Deputy Leader of the Council.

It should be noted that notwithstanding this reduction, there would still be a modest uplift in monetary terms for this allowance from the rate that was currently being paid to Cabinet Members which the Panel felt accurately represented the views that had been expressed by Members to the Panel.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE

That a Cabinet Member's SRA of £17,936.89 be set being 45% of the Leader of the Council's SRA.

Leader of the Main Opposition Group

The Council is under a legal obligation to award at least one member of the Opposition an SRA (where they are paid at all) when one or more party groups form the administration. The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that the Opposition is resourced to fulfil its role. This is only a legal requirement where the political groups are registered as political groups under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, which is the case in Stockport.

Table 3: Main Opposition Leader's SRA and smaller Opposition Group SRAs in the ten Greater Manchester Councils

Council	Opposition SRA	Ratio	Minority SRA	Ratio
Bolton	£10,741	34%	£2,991	9%
Bury	£11,115	33%	£5,917	18%
Manchester	£11,877	25%	-	-
Oldham	£16,383	42%	£5,495	14%
Rochdale	£11,731	35%	£1,676	5%
Salford	£10,068	16%	£10,068	16%
Stockport*	£9,645	30%	£2,093	7%**
Tameside	£12,381	31%	£2,536	6%
Trafford	£11,357	35%	£3,264	10%
Wigan	£4,279	11%	-	N/A
Mean	£10,958	29%	£4,255	9%
Median	£11,236	32%	£3,128	8%

* As currently remunerated.

** This allowance is not indexed by way of a percentage of the Leader's allowance, but has been expressed this way for the purposes of this table to allow for .

Currently, the Leader of the main (Labour) Opposition Group receives an SRA of £9,645.23 which is 30% of the Leader of the Council's SRA. The Panel has always taken the view that the Opposition needs to be supported to fulfil its role and further that this role has now taken on a heightened importance in the light of the political balance of the Council which means that all opposition groups are required to play a greater and more complex part in the decision-making structures of the Council.

The Panel is of the view that the holders of these roles are necessarily responsible for much of the critical scrutiny necessary for proper governance and a lively

democracy and for the holding of the controlling group to account and should be remunerated commensurately.

The Panel looked to the comparator group of Greater Manchester councils where the mean SRA paid was £10,958 and the median £11,236 utilising differentials of between 11% (Wigan) and 42% (Oldham). Importantly, the mean differential was 29% and the median 32% which is midway between where the current allowance at Stockport is pegged.

From the member survey, the Panel noted that a majority of members considered that the current level of the allowance was 'too little' (59%). Moreover, the Panel noted that the monetary value of the Stockport SRA was presently somewhat below the averages paid in other councils in Greater Manchester. Further, it is acknowledged that it is appropriate to recognise within the system of remuneration the important role that the Opposition, and opposition groups in general, had to play within the changing political context.

However, the Panel noted that in retaining the current rate of 30% (a rate for which there was a strong evidential base) this would nonetheless result in an increase in the level of the allowance from £9,494.78 to £11,957.92, or a 23.98% increase. This would also reflect the views of members that this allowance should see an uplift in its monetary value.

RECOMMENDATION SIX

That a Leader of the Main Opposition SRA of £11,957.92 be set being 30% of the Leader of the Council's SRA.

Leaders of Smaller Opposition Groups

Currently there are three SRAs paid under this category to the Leaders of the Edgeley Community Association, the Green Group; and the Independent Ratepayers Group.

This allowance has historically not been paid at a set fee indexed against the Leader of the Council's SRA in the same way as the rest of the Scheme. This is because the Panel formed the view that groups of differing sizes would wield greater degrees of responsibility and influence, and as such the role and responsibilities of Group Leader would differ according to the size of the group.

In 2016, the Panel arrived at the conclusion that it would be necessary to attach a weighting to this allowance in the guise of a 'per Member premium' which would reflect the potential variation in the size of minority political groups while simultaneously applying a 'group leader supplement' to reflect the core functions of the post which would need to be discharged regardless of the size of the group.

The Panel therefore agreed to calculate this SRA on the basis of the application of a £1,020.10 'group leader supplement' plus a £306.03 'per member premium' for each member of that group. These figures have subsequently been increased annually in accordance with the annual pay award for members of staff (as with the rest of the Scheme) such that they are now £1,101.41 and £330.42 respectively.

Table 4: Smaller Opposition Group SRAs

Group	Size of Group	SRA
Edgley Community Association	3	£2,092.68
Green Group	3	£2,092.68
Independent Ratepayers	3	£2,092.68

The Panel further agreed that in computing the SRA due to the Leaders of the Smaller Opposition Groups, account should be given only to the membership of the Group on the date of the Annual Meeting of the Council for each Municipal Year, and that 'in year' variations should not result in consequent recalculations for the purposes of remuneration. This had the benefit of being both easy to administer and transparent to members of the public.

The Member survey indicated that the majority of respondents considered that this allowance was set at a level that was 'too low' (57%). There was a suggestion amongst the responses that the level of this allowance did not adequately reflect the level of work that needed to be put in. There were further reflections in the survey that there needed to be a larger differential between the value of the allowance for smaller opposition group leaders, where there was a sustained workload throughout the year, against that of a Chair of a Scrutiny Review Panel where the work took place during a defined period and during a smaller number of meetings. The Panel was therefore of the view that the rate at which this allowance is paid should rise at the same rate as the basic allowance (i.e. 23.98%)

The Panel therefore determined that the Leader of the Smaller Opposition Groups SRA should be set at £1,365.53 plus £409.65 per member.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

That a Leader of the Smaller Opposition Groups SRA be set at £1,365.53 plus £409.65 per member.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

That in computing the SRA due to the Leaders of the Smaller Opposition Groups, account should be given only to the membership of the Group on the date of the Annual Meeting of the Council for each Municipal Year.

Chair of Planning and Highways Regulation Committee

Within the current Scheme an allowance of £8,037.70 is payable to the Chair of the Planning and Highways Regulation Committee, representing a ratio of 25% against the current Leader of the Council's SRA.

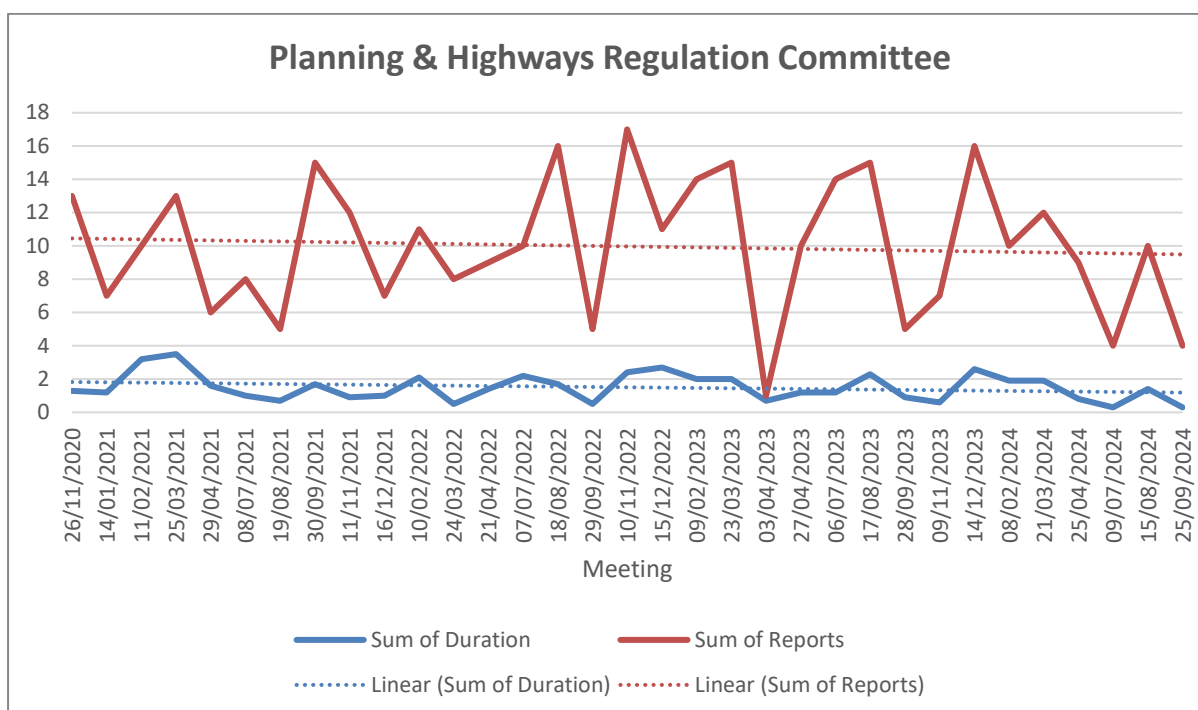
The Panel noted that nationally Chairs of planning committees usually attracted a substantial special responsibility allowance in deference to the importance which they often assume in local decision taking, its high-profile nature and to their workload. The Panel did not disagree with that assessment in its view of the role of the Chair of the Planning & Highways Regulation Committee at Stockport.

Table 5: Planning Committee allowances in the ten Greater Manchester Councils

Council	Planning SRA	Ratio
Bolton	£8,321	26%
Bury	£8,420	25%
Manchester	£11,877	25%
Oldham	£9,830	25%
Rochdale	£11,172	33%
Salford	£10,068	16%
Stockport*	£8,038	25%
Tameside	£10,526	27%
Trafford	£11,357	35%
Wigan	£13,029	33%
Mean	£10,264	27%
Median	£10,297	26%

* As currently remunerated.

The Panel observed from the comparative data that the Chair of the 'planning committee' was amongst the highest remunerated non-cabinet posts within the comparator group. The Panel considered that it would both appropriate and reasonable to maintain this position in Stockport. However, the Panel noted that there had been a steady downward trend over the previous four-year period in both the duration and number of items considered by the Committee.



The Panel further heard that there was a likelihood that this trend would continue, if not increase in pace, due to a recent decision by the Council to make changes to the planning scheme of delegation that has meant that the number of applications that are capable of being called-up to committee has reduced. It was also noted that this year-on-year reduction in the number of items and duration of meetings had been achieved despite a reduction in the number of times that the committee meets each year, since the last review was undertaken in 2016 (down from nine cycles to eight).

The Panel was also mindful that the member survey indicated that members were largely satisfied with the current rate at which this allowance was set (59% of members saying it was 'about right' and a further 23% saying it was 'too much').

The Panel was of the view that it was important to reflect this local context and the views of members within the scheme, and that it would therefore be appropriate to maintain the current monetary level of the allowance as close as possible at its current rate. The Panel is therefore of the view that it should seek a reduction in the rate of the allowance from 25% to 20.5% of the Leader's allowance producing an indicative SRA of £8,171.25, representing a modest monetary increase of 1.66%.

The Panel acknowledges that this would produce an SRA that is the lowest in Greater Manchester for a Chair of a planning committee. However, this should also be read in the context of a local authority that has delegated substantial and significant planning powers to its area committees in a way that no other authority in Greater Manchester currently does. The Panel was therefore satisfied that the level at which it was proposing to set this allowance was both reasonable and justifiable in the light of all of the available evidence.

RECOMMENDATION NINE

That a Chair of the Planning and Highways Regulation Committee SRA of £8,171.25 be set being 20.5% of the Leader of the Council's SRA.

Chair of Licensing, Environment and Safety Committee

and

Chair of Licensing, Environment and Safety Sub-Committees

Within the current Scheme an allowance of £4,822.62 is payable to the Chair of the Licensing, Environment and Safety Committee (the 'Licensing Chair'), representing a ratio of 15% against the current Leader of the Council's SRA.

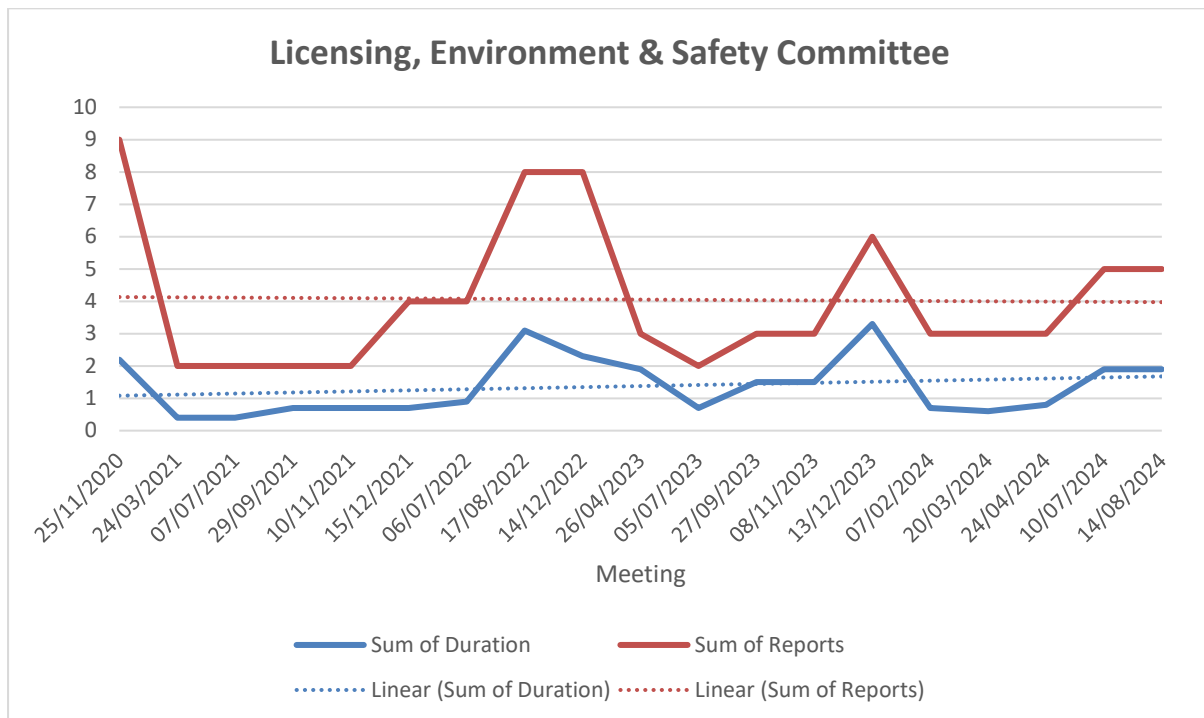
The Panel noted that, similar to the role of Chair of the Planning & Highways Regulation Committee, Stockport was an outlier in terms of the remuneration that it paid to the Chair of its Licensing Committee – being the lowest in Greater Manchester.

The Panel referred back to the view that it formed in 2016 when it fundamentally reassessed the level of remuneration attached to this role and made a significant reduction in the ratio at which it was set from 28% of the Leader's SRA to 15%. Part of the rationale for the Panel's recommendation at that time was to reflect the decision of the Council to separate out the role of chair and vice-chair of the committee from that of Chair of the Licensing, Environment & Safety Sub-Committees, thereby removing a significant degree of the responsibility that the roles once occupied.

As such, the Panel recommended that that element of the SRA which related to the responsibility for a sub-committee should be stripped out thereby providing for a Licensing Chair SRA which was more closely aligned to the responsibility associated with the role as it now stood. The Panel heard that this position had not changed since 2016.

The Panel further noted that notwithstanding the comparatively low level of remuneration attached to this role, two-thirds of members expressed the view in the member survey that the current level of remuneration was ‘about right’ (59%) or ‘too much’ (7%). As a result, the Panel took as its starting point that the current position was not significantly out of alignment with the responsibility – in the ‘Stockport context’.

The Panel also considered that the number of items being considered by the committee had remained relatively static over the preceding four-year period, while there had been an increase in the average duration of meetings. However, as with the Planning & Highways Regulation Committee, the Panel also took account of the fact that there had been a reduction in the number of cycles of the committee from nine to eight per year which may account for some of this increase in duration.



In considering all of the available evidence, the Panel was of the view that it would be appropriate to set a rate for this allowance that would, insofar as possible, maintain the current monetary level of the allowance. As a result, the Panel is recommending that there should be a reduction in the rate of the allowance from 15% to 12.5% of the Leader’s allowance producing an indicative SRA of £4,982.47, representing a modest monetary increase of 3.31%.

RECOMMENDATION TEN

That a Chair of the Licensing, Environment and Safety Committee SRA of £4,982.47 be set being 12.5% of the Leader of the Council’s SRA.

With regard to the role of chairs of a Licensing Sub-Committee, the Panel did not consider that there had been any material change in circumstances since its full reviews of the role in 2011 and 2012 and its reassessment in 2016 such that it should alter its view on the fundamental principles underpinning the award of this allowance; namely that there was a significant additional quasi-judicial responsibility which was required to be undertaken by the two chairs which was of a significance worthy of remuneration.

The member survey appears to reinforce this view with 71% of members being of the view that the current level of remuneration was either ‘about right’ (55%) or ‘too much’ (16%).

Unlike most other remunerable roles, the work of the sub-committees is demand-led. That is to say that meetings of the sub-committees are only convened when there is business to consider. The Panel therefore noted that since emerging from covid-restrictions, the work of the sub-committees had resumed at a level seen pre-pandemic and was remaining static at approximately eight meetings a year. It was also noted that these meetings required a significant degree of flexibility on the part of chairs and members as they were frequently convened at short notice.

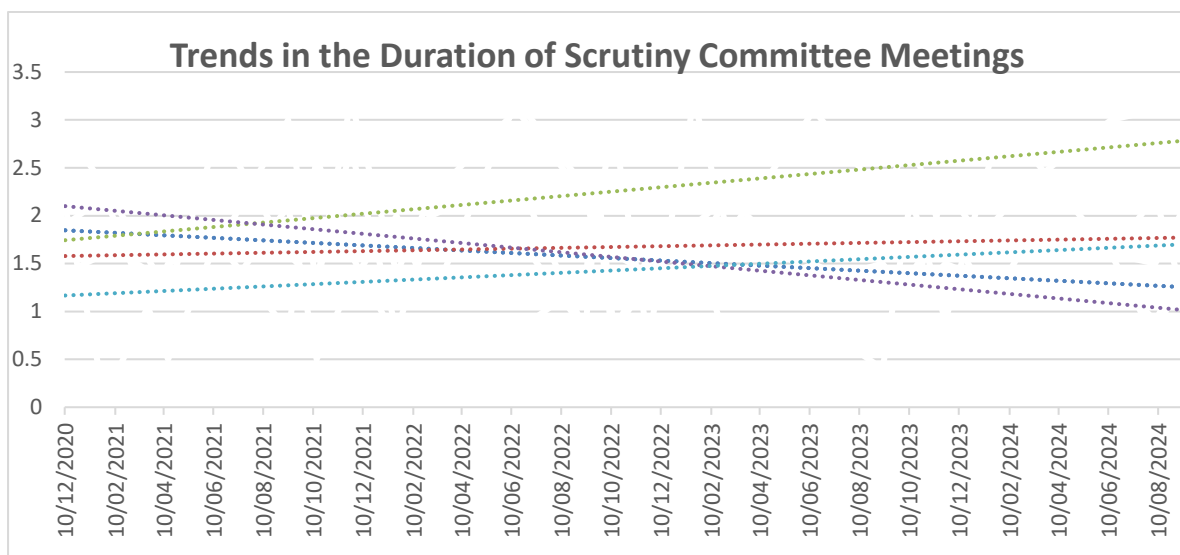
The Panel was therefore minded to again recommend the setting of an allowance that would aim to maintain the current monetary value of the SRA, and such is recommending a reduction in the ratio from 12% to 10% of the Leader of the Council’s SRA producing an indicative SRA of £3,985.97, representing a modest monetary increase of 3.31%.

RECOMMENDATION ELEVEN
That a Chair of a Licensing Sub-Committee SRA of £3,985.97 be set being 10% of the Leader of the Council’s SRA.

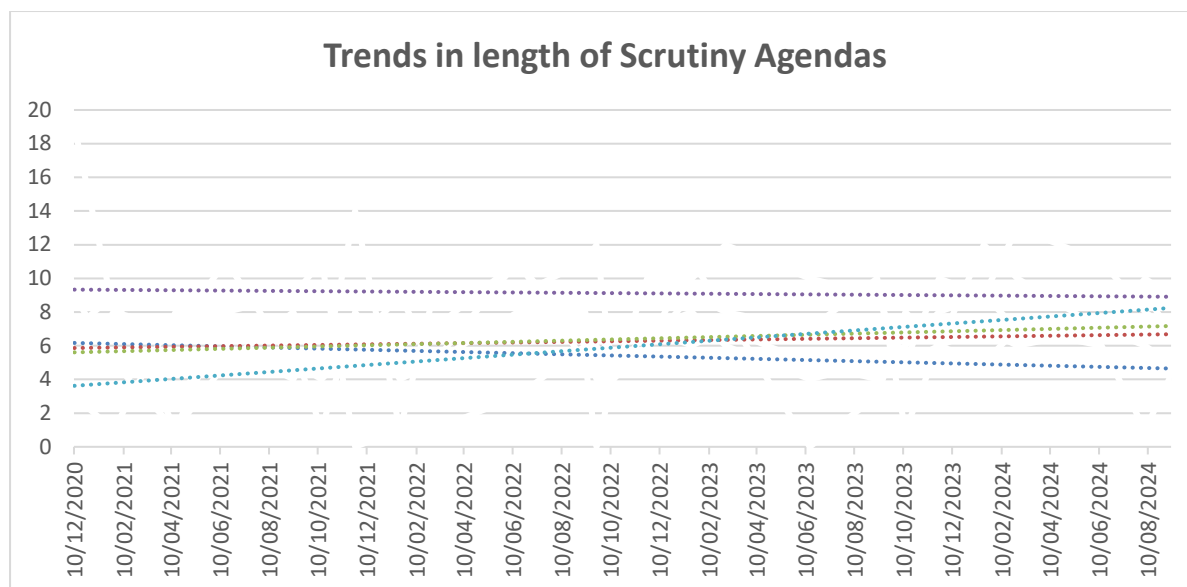
Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees

Stockport’s current Scheme makes provision for an allowance of £6,430.16 to be payable to a Chair of a Scrutiny Committee, of which there are five post holders. This represented a differential of 20% against the current Leader of the Council’s SRA.

In considering this allowance, the Panel directly interviewed a scrutiny committee chair in relation to their scrutiny role. The Panel also had sight of the number of hours that each scrutiny committee had spent in session between the 2020/21 municipal year to present and also took account of the relative size of the agendas for those meetings. The Panel observed that there was an element of variability in the duration of meetings with three scrutiny committees having seen an increase with the remaining two seeing a reduction. There is now significantly more variability in meeting length than previously.



The Panel further noted that the average length of agendas had remained relatively static over the same period, albeit there had been some adjustment between the different committees.



The Panel initially reflected that Stockport's Scrutiny Chairs' SRA appears on the face of it to be set at the lower end of the scale when compared to the comparator group of Greater Manchester councils; that is being 27% below both the mean and median averages. However, the reality is that this lone figure masked wide variation in practice across the conurbation in how the scrutiny function was in actual fact carried out. In particular, the Panel was made aware that considerable discretion had been used in the organisation of scrutiny such that some councils had split the scrutiny function amongst as many as six separate scrutiny committees, whilst others had as few as three.

It is not the Panel's role to comment on the benefits or otherwise of centralised or service-based scrutiny; however, in such circumstances when benchmarking the allowance it is not particularly useful to use the single figure SRA as a measure of its appropriateness. Rather, the Panel took a holistic view of the cost of the scrutiny function by comparing the total cost of the chairs' SRAs in each authority as being a more accurate comparator.

Table 6: Scrutiny Committee allowances in the ten Greater Manchester Councils

Council	Chair's Allowance	Differential	Number of Posts	Total Scrutiny Chair Cost
Bolton	£6,089	19%	4	£24,356
Bury	£8,420	25%	3	£25,260
Manchester	£11,877	25%	6	£71,262
Oldham	£9,830	25%	4	£39,320
Rochdale	£8,379	25%	3	£25,137
Salford	£10,068	16%	5	£50,340
Stockport*	£6,430	20%	5	£32,150
Tameside	£10,526	27%	3	£31,578
Trafford	£8,923	27%	3	£26,769

Independent Remuneration Panel	Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council			
Wigan	£8,688	22%	4	£34,752
Mean	8,921	23%	4	£36,092
Median	8,806	25%	4	£31,864

* As currently remunerated.

When the Panel applied this packaged comparator, rather than being the second lowest remunerator (when using the single figure chair's allowance) Stockport becomes fifth and is also remunerating at a rate that fell between the mean and median averages.

The Panel identified that the Scrutiny function was valued highly at Stockport by members of all political affiliations, and that the scrutiny chairs performed an important and 'responsible' function. The Panel considered that it needed to balance the apparent 'low' level of the individual SRA against the cost of the overall package of scrutiny chair allowances.

Again, the Panel reflected on the results of the member survey, where 75% of members felt that the level of this allowance was either 'about right' (52%) or 'too much' (23%). As a result, the Panel felt that it would not be appropriate to provide for an increase in the monetary value of the allowance as part of this review and to instead maintain the allowance as close as possible to its current value.

In the circumstances, the Panel was of the view that it was therefore appropriate to reduce the ratio of the allowance to 16.5% of the Leader of the Council's proposed SRA which computed to an indicative SRA of £6,576.86 and a 'total scrutiny cost' of £32,884.29 representing a small increase of 2.28%.

RECOMMENDATION TWELVE

That a Chair of the Scrutiny Committees SRA of £6,329.86 be set being 16.5% of the Leader of the Council's SRA.

Chairs of the Scrutiny Review Panel

Within the current Scheme an allowance of £ £1,286.03 is payable to the Chair of a Scrutiny Review Panel, representing a ratio of 4% against the current Leader of the Council's SRA.

Scrutiny Review Panels are commonly established by the parent Scrutiny Committee each year to undertake targeted reviews of specific areas of the Council's work. The Panel remained of the view that the scrutiny reviews were onerous, in-depth examinations of an area of the Council's work which did require the Chair of those Panels to undertake extensive additional work outside of panel meetings. In the light of this evidence, the Panel was of the view that the 'Chair of a Scrutiny Review Panel' continued to pass the test of having '*significant* additional responsibility' attached to it.

In recommending a level at which an SRA should be set for this post, the Panel considered the outcome of the member survey where 68% of members considered the current value of the allowance was 'about right'.

In this context, the Panel was satisfied that this allowance should be retained at a similar monetary value as at present and therefore agreed that a reduced ratio of 3.5% should apply, producing an indicative allowance of £1,395.09, representing an 8.48% increase in the monetary value of the allowance. While this was a proportionately larger increase than other allowances where the Panel had tried to retain it at or around its current level, any smaller a ratio would produce a reduction in the level of the allowance, which the Panel felt unable to recommend. It was also noted that this only represented an actual increase of £109.06.

In recommending this level, the Panel was aware of the number of scrutiny reviews that had been conducted by the scrutiny committees in recent years (roughly one a year) and that there was no expectation that this number would rise. However, again, should there be any significant change in the pattern of scrutiny reviews the Panel may need to take a further view on this in the future.

Finally, the Panel noted that in proposing this recommendation, the 'one-SRA only' would continue to apply, and further that no councillor should receive this SRA more than once during the course of a municipal year regardless of the number of reviews that they chaired.

RECOMMENDATION THIRTEEN

That a Chair of a Scrutiny Review Panel SRA of £1,395.09 be set being 3.5% of the Leader of the Council's SRA.

Chairs of the Area Committees

A Chair of an Area Committee is entitled to an SRA of £4,822.62 under the current Scheme, and there are seven recipients of the allowance in total. In terms of its measure against the current Leader of the Council's SRA, it represents a differential of 15%.

In evaluating an appropriate level of remuneration for this post, the Panel interviewed two current chairs of area committees representing different political parties.

The Panel early on determined that it would be difficult to benchmark this allowance against other potential comparators outside of the authority due to either the absence of an area-based model of governance or because of significant differences in delegation where they did exist.

Stockport's seven area committees have a great deal of local 'autonomy', including delegated executive powers and budgets, the authority to determine some planning applications and exercise limited licensing functions and then being held to account for those decisions in an open and public forum. There was also the almost unique challenge of frequently having to manage significant numbers of members of the public during the course of conducting the committee's business. Further there was a significant role for the area committee chairs in between meetings in acting as a single point of contact for officers in relation to matters within that area committee's purview; sometimes being called upon to take urgent action under the constitution and being consulted on proposals for that locality prior to their final determination.

In finding a suitable local benchmark to arrive at a differential, the Panel considered the duration and number of meetings of area committees combined with the chairs' additional responsibility in undertaking that role. The Panel noted that in 2016 it had

agreed to a reduction in the value of this allowance from 20% to 15% of the Leader of the Council's SRA. There were a wide range of individual comments made in the member survey on this SRA reflecting views that the allowance should be commensurate with a scrutiny chair, to others suggesting that it remained over-remunerated. There were further views that the Panel should consider varying the value of the allowance according to the number of wards they contained. However, the Panel had received evidence that the size of area committees didn't necessarily have a direct impact on their agenda length or the duration of their meetings.

However, while there was clearly individual strength of feeling, overall 66% of members considered that the current level of the allowance was 'about right'. Only 18% of members suggested that it was 'too much'.

The Panel was therefore not minded to make a significant adjustment in the monetary value of this allowance, save that it would apply a reduction in the ratio in order to achieve, insofar as possible, a freeze in its value. Accordingly, it was determined that in setting an appropriate SRA for a Chair of an Area Committee a ratio of 12.5% of the Leader of the Council's proposed SRA was reasonable and fair which computed to an indicative SRA of £4,982.47 representing at 3.31% increase.

RECOMMENDATION FOURTEEN

That a Chair of the Area Committees SRA of £4,982.47 be set being 12.5% of the Leader of the Council's SRA.

Chair of the Audit Committee

The Chair of the Audit Committee was currently the recipient of an SRA of £3,858.10 which represented a differential of 12% against the current Leader of the Council's SRA.

The Panel noted the conclusions from its dedicated review of this post in 2008:-

"The Panel was impressed that the Audit Committee has a particular responsibility as the ultimate check on impermissible behaviour. The panel also took the view that the work of the Chair was complex, ranging as it does across the fields of standard audit, value for money and risk management and anticipation."

The Panel remained of the view that the role undertaken by the Chair of the Audit Committee was one that was of a level of significance clearly worthy of remuneration. From the member survey, a majority of members considered the current level of remuneration was 'about right', however a significant minority (36%) suggested that it was 'too little'. The survey produced a very small number of individual comments from which no particular common themes could be established.

After considering all of the evidence the Panel agreed that Audit clearly had a vital role in ensuring the sound financial governance of an organisation which in the current climate had an increasingly prominent role.

In the light of the response, the Panel was of the view that again the monetary value of the allowance should be held as closely as possible to its current value, and accordingly recommended a reduction in the differential to 10% of the Leader of the

Council's proposed SRA computing to an indicative allowance of £3,985.97 and which represented a 3.31% increase.

RECOMMENDATION FIFTEEN

That a Chair of the Audit Committee SRA of £3,985.97 be set being 10% of the Executive Leader's SRA.

Other representations

The Panel also asked members whether they considered there were any posts that were currently unremunerated that were worthy of consideration by the Panel for the receipt of an SRA.

Vice-Chairs of Committees

There were a small number of responses that suggested that vice-chairs should be remunerated for their roles. The Panel considered this matter at length in its review in 2012.

The role of a vice-chair can include the chairing of an occasional meeting. However, this is a function which every member could reasonably be expected to perform without additional remuneration. The vice-chair may also attend briefings along with the chair in relation to the business of the committee, and there an expectation that the vice-chair may need to undertake further research and be more 'learned' than the average committee member in relation to the forthcoming business of the committee.

However, the Panel concluded that the role of vice-chair continued to fail to meet the test of being a duty that was 'significant; in the context of the Regulations.

Greater Manchester Combined Authority Duties

The Panel heard a number of representations both from the interviews and the survey, that consideration should be given to remunerating for roles that members undertook on behalf of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. The Panel specifically considered this as part of its recommendations relating to the role of Leader of the Council.

The Panel had a great deal of sympathy with this point and acknowledges that the piecemeal approach to this across the Greater Manchester conurbation is unhelpful, divisive, and deeply unfair.

However, the Panel is also of the view that the solution to this problem lies in Greater Manchester and not with adding another tier of locally agreed allowances onto the Stockport's allowances system. The Panel is aware that over the past two decades, Greater Manchester has convened its own allowances Panel and made recommendations to each district on the appropriateness and the level of any such allowances that should be paid where they themselves have been unable to remunerate. This is a tried and tested solution which produced an equitable system of allowances across the conurbation and one which this Panel would support the authority making representations in support of to the Combined Authority.

Junior Cabinet roles

Finally, there were a number of further responses that suggested the creation of roles which did not currently exist, such as junior cabinet members. This falls outwith the scope of the Panel. Should such roles be created in the future, the Panel would at that stage be called upon to consider this point. It should be noted that while the Panel acknowledged such a decision would be a political one, it would not wish to deviate from the accepted position that a majority of members should not be in receipt of a special responsibility allowance.

Co-optee's Allowances

Chair of the Standards Committee

The Chair of the Standards Committee currently receives an SRA of £1,286.03 which represents 4% of the Leader of the Council's allowance.

Under the Localism Act 2011 the Council replaced its statutory Standards Committee, which previously had to have a co-opted Chair and other co-opted Members who had full voting rights, with a non-statutory Standards Committee subject to the normal rules of political proportionality, albeit Stockport has elected to retain a majority of non-voting co-optees. The Chair of the Standards Committee continues to be a co-opted member, albeit again without any voting rights.

On the basis that the Standards Committee has four scheduled meetings per year, plus meetings of Standards Committee Sub-Committee that may be needed to deal with complaints, the Panel accepts that the Chair of the Standards Committee merits an allowance.

The Panel noted that the Standards Committee does not have the same range of statutory sanctions as the old Standards Committee; in particular it does not have formal powers to suspend a councillor. By definition, the responsibilities held by the Chair of the Standards Committee are not as extensive as those that were exercised under the old standards regime. While the Standards Committee still has responsibility for formal investigations of complaints against councillors, the Panel noted that since its last review in 2016, it has only met in this capacity on three occasions.

With regard to this allowance, the Panel has taken a prudent approach and decided that the Co-optee Allowance for the Chair of the Standards Committee should continue to be set at a level of 4% of the proposed Leader of the Council's SRA which computes to an indicative allowance of £1,594.39, or a 23.98% increase.

RECOMMENDATION SIXTEEN

That a Chair of Standards Committee Co-optee Allowance be set at £1,594.39 being 4% of the Leader of the Council's SRA.

Independent Member of the Standards Committee

The Panel noted that the five Independent Members on the Standards Committee were recipients of a modest allowance of ££643.02 representing a ratio of 2% of the Leader of the Council's SRA.

The Panel maintains that Stockport was well served by its independent members and was concerned that the Committee should continue to attract members of the highest quality and that they represented the spectrum of demography in the Borough. The Panel was concerned that the current level of allowance might be satisfactory for a person with a good income and the ability to find time for public service or in receipt of a decent pension but would not attract persons not so fortunate. However, in the circumstances in which the review was taking place, and further with the diminished role the Standards Committee had to play, the Panel was

unable to recommend anything other than the maintenance of the level of the allowance of 2% of the proposed Leader of the Council's SRA equating to £797.19, or an increase of 23.98%.

RECOMMENDATION SEVENTEEN

That an Independent Member of the Standards Committee Co-optee Allowance be set at £797.19 being 2% of the Leader of the Council's SRA.

Other Co-opted Members

The allowance currently available to co-opted members of the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee and the Audit was set at £321.50, or a ratio of 1% against the current Leader of the Council's SRA.

The Council's Constitution regulates the membership and role of co-opted members on the Council's scrutiny committees as follows:-

"Each relevant Scrutiny Committee or Sub-Committee dealing with education matters shall include in its membership the following voting representatives:

- 1 Church of England diocese representative;
- 1 Roman Catholic diocese representative;
- 2 Parent Governor representatives."

These co-opted members are "treated as Councillors for the purposes...of the call-in provisions" in relation to education functions and have voting rights in relation to these matters. These members therefore have a defined responsibility which the Panel considered merits an SRA. The Panel believed that the co-opted allowance should reflect the core time needed to serve on a Committee and that it should also recognise that any additional work will be undertaken within the ethic of voluntary public service.

The Panel further noted that following the recommendations of the independent review by Sir Tony Redmond into the effectiveness of external audit and transparency of financial reporting in local authorities, the Council had now appointed a further co-opted member onto its Audit Committee.

The Panel noted that the distinction between co-opted members of the Standards Committee and the co-optees on the Children & Families Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Committee appeared to be very blurred. Indeed, the Panel could see no further justification for maintaining a differential in the remuneration regime between them

In this light of this, the Panel was minded to recommend an increase in the level of this allowance to 2% of the proposed Leader of the Council's SRA, producing an indicative co-optees allowance of £797.19. The Panel further recommends the abolition of the two sets of co-optees allowances and the creation of a single allowance to simply this element of the scheme,

RECOMMENDATION EIGHTEEN

That the Co-optee's Allowance be set at £797.19 being 2% of the Leader of the Council's SRA.

Other considerations

Dependants' Carers Allowance

An allowance is currently payable under the Scheme at a rate equivalent to the current value of the Living Wage paid by the Council (net of tax) (or the actual cost of providing the care, whichever is the lesser amount) for the care of each dependent who is a child. A further allowance is payable for other dependents that is paid at a level equivalent to the rates payable for the time being by the Council's Adult Services.

The dependants' carers allowance is designed to make it easier for those with caring responsibilities to serve as a councillor. In considering this allowance, the Panel took account of the comments of the LGIU which has previously stated:-

"The number of councillors who have caring responsibilities is decreasing and this is the group least likely to stay as elected representatives. Councillors cite it as the second biggest factor affecting their decision to stand down."

Support for the payment of this allowance nationally has not been universal. Opponents of the allowance argue that a normal employer does not pay more to employees with caring responsibilities. However, the Panel would point out that employees of a 'normal' employer receive pay unreduced by the public service discount.

Stockport's scheme has made such provision for a dependants' carers allowance since its inception. The Panel has consistently been of the view that the level of remuneration members' received needed to reflect the unique challenges of life in public service and that members should not be significantly disadvantaged through their full participation in local democracy.

The Panel noted that this allowance had been the subject of frequent review in the past which made significant changes to the basis for the payment of this allowance. The member survey saw overwhelming support for the retention of this allowance (82%). The Panel therefore saw no cause to fundamentally revisit this allowance on this occasion and determined that it would be appropriate to retain the existing provision within the scheme.

However, the Panel remained concerned that the uptake of this allowance had historically been very low, and a number of respondents had indicated a lack of awareness that this provision existed. The Panel would therefore recommend that further publicity be provided to members to ensure that those members eligible to receive support are able to claim for it

RECOMMENDATION NINETEEN

That the existing provision within the scheme as relates to the Dependants' Carers Allowance be maintained and that further publicity be provided to members on how such claims can be made.

Travel and Subsistence Allowance

Until 1 May 2003 the system of paying travel and subsistence allowances to members was governed by the 1972 Local Government Act and as such were statutorily claimable allowances up to maximum rates set by the Secretary of State. Under the 2003 regulations travel and subsistence becomes a discretionary allowance and can be paid at the rate the authority decides.

The Panel noted that travel within the borough was not separately remunerated and was included within the basic allowance. The Panel was content with this approach and noted that this was common practice amongst many local authorities, including in the other Greater Manchester authorities.

The Panel received a small number of representations with regard to these allowances ; specifically, that the levels at which they were paid were insufficient. The Panel did not necessarily disagree with this view, however, the previous decisions of the Panel on this matter had simply tied these rates to those that could be claimed by the staff that the Council employed. If at such a time that the Council chose to vary this figure to pay a more generous or adequate amount to its employees, the amount claimable by members would be similarly uprated without further reference to this Panel.

The Panel was therefore of the view that the principle should ordinarily remain that members should receive the same allowance as an employee of the authority.

Again, there were a number of representations that suggested a lack of awareness around the ability to make such claims, and the Panel agreed that further publicity should be provided.

RECOMMENDATION TWENTY

That the existing provision within the scheme as relates to travel and subsistence expenses be maintained and that further publicity be provided to members on how such claims can be made.

Annual Adjustment of Allowance Levels

The Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 provides that the Panel may make recommendations:-

“as to whether adjustments to the level of allowances may be determined according to an index and if so which index and how long that index should apply, subject to a maximum of four years, before its application is reviewed;”

As discussed earlier in this report, the Panel has noted that members' allowances had not seen an uplift since 2020, and that the consequence of this has been 'freeze' in the level of the allowances. This has meant that many members in Stockport have suffered the impact of the wider financial pressures observed elsewhere in the economy, more than most.

The Panel strongly feels that an annual adjustment of allowance levels is necessary and appropriate. Moreover, it is the right thing to do.

In giving consideration to this matter, the Panel concluded that the previously agreed linkage by the Panel in 2016 to the level of increase in local government employees' pay was appropriate and that the Panel had received no further evidence in the current review to persuade them to arrive at a different view.

Any such linkage cannot, by law, extend beyond four years. The Panel suggests that it should be asked to undertake a further review of Stockport's scheme before this four-year period expires.

RECOMMENDATION TWENTY-ONE

That for the four years commencing with the implementation of the Panel's recommendations, the amount of an allowance payable under this scheme shall be increased by reference to the annual percentage salary increase for local government staff (at spinal column 49) to be implemented from the start of the municipal year for which year it is applicable.

ICT Allowance

The Basic Allowance is intended to not only recognise the time commitment of all councillors, but also to cover incidental costs such as the use of their homes, local travel within the borough, telephone call charges relating to council business and stationery and other office consumables as required in the councillor's home for council work.

Additionally, as part of its review in 2012, the Panel gave approval to the introduction of a separate flat rate ICT Allowance of £300.00 be payable to all members to cover the cost of their own ICT provision and broadband in lieu of council provided equipment, save that a member may elect to forgo this allowance in favour of the Council's Standard ICT package provided on a four-year loan at the commencement of their term of office. This figure now stood at £337.69.

The Panel noted through the responses to the electronic survey that members had welcomed this additional alternative provision to the Council's ICT package. Moreover, 75% of respondents to the survey considered that the current level of the allowance was 'about right'. The Panel did not consider that in the light of the available evidence, there needed to be any change to this offer. However, it considered that the current level of the allowance should be uplifted by reference to the increase applied to the basis allowance, and then index-linked along with the remainder of the scheme.

The Panel therefore recommended that an ICT allowance of £418.67 be set.

RECOMMENDATION TWENTY-TWO

That the ICT Allowance be set at £418.67 per annum.

Civic Allowances

A Civic Allowance is payable under the relevant provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 (s3(5) and s5(4)) that can be paid to a Chair and Vice Chair of a principal Council (or in the case of Stockport as a borough, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor) at a level a council thinks is reasonable for the purpose of meeting the expenses of holding those civic offices.

Consideration of a Civic Allowance is outwith the remit of the 2003 Regulations and therefore the IRP but IRPs are often asked to provide a view in the absence of any other external means of validation which is the case on this occasion.

However, bringing the allowances under the remit of the Panel and publishing them as part of the Members' Allowances Scheme, albeit identifying them separately, aids transparency. In addition, while the Mayor is primarily engaged in civic duties, the Mayor holds an important function within the Council structure in terms of chairing the Council Meeting.

The Mayor

The Mayor is currently the recipient of a civic allowance of £11,873.19. This has not historically been indexed against the remainder of the scheme.

The Mayor has precedence in the Borough, but not so as to affect His Majesty's Royal Prerogative – effectively and historically, this means the Mayor is the "first citizen" of the Borough. This civic role of office is perhaps the more important element of the Mayor's duties during the term of office in representing the Borough in its widest sense, both within Stockport and outside when attending functions in other areas.

The Mayor also presides over meetings of the Council. If the Mayor is not present, then the Deputy Mayor will preside at the meeting. The 1972 Act states that the person presiding at a meeting of the Council, i.e. the Mayor, will have a second or casting vote in the event of an equality of votes on any question coming before the meeting.

The Mayor is a respected office and it is a long held belief that this office should be seen to be "above politics", as far as possible. It is the Mayor's duty to ensure that Council meetings are conducted in a proper manner and in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Council's procedure rules.

Comparative data on the value of the civic allowances across Greater Manchester shows that Stockport is paying the third lowest amount across the conurbation and significantly adrift from the mean and median Civic Allowance for the Mayor of £16,506 and £17,046 which indicates that the allowance far adrift from its peers.

The Panel also noted that the responses from the member survey indicated that 41% of respondents considered that the allowance was 'too little', with a further 50% saying it was 'about right'.

Table 7: Civic allowances in the ten Greater Manchester Councils

Council	Mayor	Deputy Mayor
Bolton	£20,378	£530
Bury	£18,567	£4,642
Manchester	£26,628	
Oldham	£17,135	£3,129
Rochdale	£13,500	£3,500
Salford	£11,204	£1,305
Stockport*	£11,873	£850
Tameside	£16,957	£4,218
Trafford	£10,000	£6,000
Wigan	£18,818	£6,273
Mean	£16,506	£3,279
Median	£17,046	£3,315

In assessing the appropriate value for the Mayoral allowance, the Panel balanced the comparative data against the views expressed in the member survey, along with the significant profile attached to the role and its importance to the borough. The Panel did not consider that an uplift in the allowance at the rate applied to the basic allowance would be appropriate, but did consider that an adjustment needed to be made to raise the level of the allowance closer to those of its neighbours.

The Panel therefore decided that the civic allowance for the Mayor should be set at £13,950.91 being a ratio of 35% of the recommended SRA for the Leader of the Council, and which would represent a 17.5% increase.

RECOMMENDATION TWENTY-THREE

That the Mayor's Civic Allowance be set at £13,950.91 being 17.5% of the Leader of the Council's SRA.

The Deputy Mayor

The Deputy Mayor is currently the recipient of a civic allowance of £850.39. This has not historically been indexed against the remainder of the scheme.

The Panel noted that the biggest consensus from the member survey was that the civic allowance for the Deputy Mayor was 'too little'. 80% of respondents to the survey were of that view. The Panel also saw that across Greater Manchester, Stockport (along with Bolton) was something of an outlier in the payment of this allowance.

The Panel heard that unlike the vice-chair of a committee, the Deputy Mayor had a clear and distinct role over and above chairing a committee in the absence of a chair, and a level of responsibility of their own. This included attending a significant number of events throughout the year where the Mayor was otherwise unable to attend.

The level of the allowance deviated significantly from those of comparator authorities across Greater Manchester and the Panel was of the view that action needed to be

taken now to correct this, notwithstanding that the necessary increase to the monetary value of this (very low) allowance would result in a percentage increase that would appear large.

However, the Panel did not consider it appropriate at this stage to raise the level of the allowance to that which would be comparable elsewhere, while remaining proportionate to those increases seen elsewhere within these recommendations. As such, the Panel was of the view that the civic allowance for the Deputy Mayor should be set at £2,790.18 being a ratio of 7% of the recommended SRA for the Leader of the Council, and which would represent a 228% increase. It should be noted that while in percentage terms this appears significant, it actually represents an increase of £1,939.79 in the monetary value of the allowance. The Panel considered that this was reasonable and justified in the light of the available evidence.

RECOMMENDATION TWENTY-FOUR

That the Deputy Mayor's Civic Allowance be set at £2,790.18 being 7% of the Leader of the Council's SRA.

Implementation of the Recommendations of the Panel

The Panel was mindful that it had made recommendations that would have a significant impact on the operation of the Members' Allowances Scheme and in particular upon a number of recipients of allowances who will have had a reasonable expectation that the current remuneration for those posts would remain the same throughout the course of the year.

The Panel was of the view that it would be unreasonable to implement these changes part way through the municipal year, and moreover that such a change would be difficult and complex to administer.

The Panel was therefore of the view that its recommendations should be implemented from the date of the next meeting of the Annual Meeting of the Council.

RECOMMENDATION TWENTY-FOUR

That the recommendations contained within this report be implemented from the date of the next meeting of the Annual Meeting of the Council.

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME – MAY 2025

	Index	£
Basic Allowance		13,286.58
Special Responsibility Allowances:-		
Executive Leader	3x Basic Allowance	39,859.75
Deputy Executive Leader	55%	21,922.86
Executive Members	45%	17,936.89
Leader of main Opposition Group	30%	11,957.92
Leaders of smaller Opposition Groups	£1,365.53 +£409.65 per group member	
Chair of Planning and Highways Regulation Committee	20.5%	8,171.25
Chair of Licensing, Environment and Safety Committee	12.5%	4,982.47
Chair of a Licensing, Environment and Safety Sub-Committee	10%	3,985.97
Chairs of a Scrutiny Committee	16.5%	6,329.86
Chair of a Scrutiny Review Panel	3.5%	1,395.09
Chair of an Area Committee	12.5%	4,982.47
Chair of Audit Committee	10%	3,985.97
Co-optee's Allowance:-		
Independent Chair of Standards Committee	4%	1,594.39
Co-opted Members	2%	797.19
Civic Allowances		
Mayor	35%	13,950.91
Deputy Mayor	7%	2,790.18
ICT Allowance		418.67