

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL (MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES) TO STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

JULY, 2022

Introduction

1. The Local Government Act, 2000 required local authorities to produce a Scheme in respect of councillors' allowances. Under the Local Government (Members' Allowances)(England) Regulations 2003, Councils have to set up an independent remuneration panel to make recommendations on members' allowances.
2. A review was started in 2020 but had to be halted because of the pandemic. A new Panel was recruited in 2021 to begin a new review and now comprises

Graham Russell, former Head of Democratic Services with Bath & North East Somerset Council (Chair of the Panel)
John Morris, former Squadron Leader RAF
Kim Hawkins, Administrator at Pangolin Editions, Fine Art Foundry
Chris Markley,
3. The Panel has explored many issues during its review and has made wide ranging demands upon its Officer advisers. We are extremely indebted to Hannah Emery, Policy and Governance Manager for her advice and support throughout the review period. We are also extremely grateful to Katie Kirton (nee Markwick) for her most efficient and creative administrative and service based support.
4. We wish to acknowledge the time given by elected Members who took part in our survey questionnaire or who took the time to have face to face/virtual meetings with the Panel. This direct evidence has proved extremely valuable in shaping our recommendations.

Context of the Review

5. In accordance with legal requirements, the Scheme of Allowances has to be reviewed every 4 years, particularly with regard to the indexing arrangements for the Basic Allowance to which all members are entitled. The present Scheme has been in place since 2016, with values updated in line with the agreed indexed link to the annual percentage pay increase given to Stroud District Council employees. The pandemic accounts for the delay in completing a full review of the Scheme.

6. The Panel has based its review on a number of key principles as follows:
 - recognising the core values of Stroud District Council as a service provider and as an employer;
 - recognising that under the Committee style of governance, all members play a part in the formulation, delivery and review of policy;
 - the need for recommendations that did not of themselves create or perpetuate barriers to people standing or returning as a local councillor *(The Panel recognised that the Council's internal working arrangements were also a strong influencing factor in this)*;
 - there should be a sound local basis for calculating the level of Basic Allowance for all councillors and an indexing method that was easily understood and applied;
 - the need for recommendations on Special Responsibility Allowances that clearly distinguished those member roles that involved sufficient special characteristics **(see para 31 below)** to justify an allowance over and above the Basic Allowance;
 - recognising that while there was very little prescription in the Regulations governing members' allowances, there was statutory guidance which should be followed – and an awareness of the public's perception if this was not the case;
 - recognising that the Panel was concerned to make recommendations that were supported by the evidence offered in the review; and finally
 - the overall financial implications of implementing our recommendations were a matter for the Council to consider, on advice from Officers.

Review Methodology

7. An important part of the evidence base for the Panel was to hear directly from elected councillors in Stroud. In designing our questionnaire we were mindful of balancing the effort expended by members in completing the survey with the value of the information obtained. The returns have given the Panel a valuable insight into the time and effort expended by councillors in their duties and responsibilities to the electorate and to the Council.
8. There were many individual comments made in the returns about many aspects of the allowances scheme and about how Council business was conducted. These have been extremely useful to the Panel and many are reflected in our recommendations.
9. We have also considered comparative statistics, particularly those relating to (a) the other Councils operating a new-style committee system of governance and (b) adjoining District Councils. As with all such information, the Panel has exercised caution in using comparator information as not all similar Councils necessarily have the same level of involvement of members.

The Basic Allowance

10. The Basic Allowance is to be made available to all councillors at the same level of remuneration. There is no flexibility to pay different amounts to members. Members may forego all or part of their allowance.
11. The present Basic Allowance is £5,726 which compares favourably with that awarded in other Councils which operate a committee-style of governance.
12. According to Government Guidance issued in 2003, the purpose of the Basic Allowance is to *"recognise the time commitment of all councillors, including such inevitable calls on their time as meetings 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"*.

13. In the context of modern local government, the Panel believes this description does not offer enough of the clarity that councillors and officers require. Indeed, the Panel was specifically asked to clarify in more detail what they felt basic allowance was intended to cover. The Panel has identified the following as being the main aspects of a councillor's role recognised through the Basic Allowance and has used this to inform its recommendations:

- time and effort in conducting the local representation role;
- use of home as an office/work base;
- travel within the electoral ward (excluding travel to Parish/Town Council meetings – see Approved Duties appendix);
- recompense in part for the direct impact of the councillor role on the family;
- serving on such outside bodies to which the member may be appointed;
- membership of the full Council and its Committees/Sub Committees/Working Groups/Task and Finish Groups/Boards and reasonable attendance at meetings of these bodies to which the member has been appointed;
- performing a chairing or other lead role at such meetings where the time and effort involved does not equate to a chairing role for which a special responsibility is justified;
- attendance at political group meetings;
- making a contribution towards the effective governance, administration and performance review of the Council's strategies, policies and service delivery;
- attendance at a reasonable number of training and development events, including all mandatory training events;
- IT consumables (including printing, ink and paper) broadband and telephone.
- *(The Panel is aware and welcomes the recently developed arrangements to support members' IT needs, which are separate to the Basic Allowance and should continue)*

14. Some of the member responses to the questionnaire indicated dissatisfaction with the level of Basic Allowance which, it was claimed, did not adequately reflect the duties of a District Councillor in Stroud. Other members declared that the allowance was, for them, satisfactory, but recognised that it was less so for those councillors on lower incomes or with care responsibilities. Another factor was that self-employed councillors found it easier to balance their Council work with employment. For other councillors, there was potentially a significant career and financial impact in achieving the same balance, particularly when aspiring to SRA roles within the Council.

A fundamental issue for the Panel is to ensure that everything possible is done to ensure that the councillor body represents the widest sectors of the community, and that the allowances scheme does not in any way act as a barrier to this.

15. The Panel is mindful that the role of a councillor in a committee-style of governance requires a higher element of meeting attendance and direct involvement in decision making/policy review than is the case in an executive-style authority. This, balanced with the heavy workload of a Stroud councillor in community support and advocacy, needs to be recognised in a robust Basic Allowance.
16. The Panel is aware that members' allowances were never intended to meet all the costs of being a councillor. Indeed, the Government has always held the position that a proportion of the hours worked by elected councillors should be un-remunerated, to reflect the public service element of the role.
17. Within the present legal framework and financial parameters, the allowances Scheme alone will not fully resolve some of the concerns of councillors about creating diversity in the council chamber, resolving career disincentives, and achieving a better Council/ family life balance for councillors.

18. In summary, the Panel wishes the Council to put in place a robust structure of allowances that recognises

- the heavy responsibilities and workload that Stroud councillors perform,
- the difficulty and sensitivity for councillors in managing challenging service delivery;
- the community's growing expectations of its councillors, and
- the potential financial barrier to people from all sectors standing for the Council, if allowances remain as they are.

19. The previous Independent Remuneration Panel continued to use a calculation for the Basic Allowance based on the average salary of members' constituents in a formula which also factored in a calculation of the average hours per week on councillor related duties and which applied a public sector discount.

20. The formula used by that Panel was based on:

12 hours per week (624 per year) to fulfil Council duties
35% public sector discount (*ie the number of councillor hours that should be un-remunerated as public voluntary service*)
£13.32 per hour as the median gross hourly earnings in Stroud District.

21. This formulaic approach is seen as locally relevant and a sound defensible basis for calculating the Basic Allowance for all councillors. However, in our view, some of the elements of this formula are outdated and wholly unrepresentative of how councillors in modern local government operate. The evidence from the members' survey supports this view. Accordingly, the Panel has updated the formula as follows:

- The number of hours per week/year in the formula is inappropriately low and in our view (based on the members' survey) should be no less than **13.0 hours per week / 676 hours per year**
- The public sector (unremunerated hours) discount percentage is too high and should be set at **30%**
- The median gross hourly earnings calculation for March 2022 is now **£14.25**

This gives a calculation as follows:

676 hours (minus 30%) = 473 hours x (£14.25) per hour = £6,740

22. The Panel recognises that a one-off increase of this order is unlikely to find support at a time of financial difficulty and challenging service delivery issues to the community. It therefore proposes that the Council moves incrementally (i.e. £250 per year) towards this aspirational figure, which in the Panel's view is a more sustainable level for the Basic Allowance.

23. Our proposals therefore would be as follows:

2022/23 - £5,726 + £250 = £5,976

2023/24 - £5,976 + £250 = £6,226

2024/25 - £6,226 + £250 = £6,476

2025/26 - £6,476 + £250 = £6,726

24. The Panel is aware that, up to the present, the allowances have been upgraded on a par with whatever annual award is made to staff. We believe that it is necessary to give some firm structure and certainty to the process of moving councillors' Basic Allowance in Stroud towards our aspirational figure. Consequently, we are proposing that the staff award is not applied to the Basic Allowance during this period and that only the fixed increment is added.

25. However, we recommend that, if in 2025/26 there is a significant shortfall for councillors in what they would have been awarded had the staff increments been applied instead, then any shortfall would be made up in that year.

26. The Panel is concerned that for some councillors, the payment of the Basic Allowance has a detrimental impact on their receipt of benefits, to such an extent that they may be significantly worse off than other councillors in terms of the support available through this allowance.

27. We have explored a number of avenues, including a benevolent fund and changes to the way basic allowance is paid. While we are not able at this time to recommend a solution, we are determined to keep this matter under review and have asked Officers to come back to us as soon as possible.

28. RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Basic Allowance for 2022/23 be set at £5,976, wef 1st April, 2022.

29. **RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Basic Allowance be developed incrementally, as shown in para 23, in order to move it towards an aspirational figure that better reflects the roles of a Stroud District Councillor in modern local government.**
30. **RECOMMENDATION 3: That, if in 2025/26 there is a significant shortfall for councillors in what they would have been awarded had the staff increases been applied instead, the Panel be given an opportunity to recommend that any shortfall be made up in that year.**

Special Responsibility Allowances

31. These are the allowances that are awarded to members performing key roles within the Council which have specific and significant responsibilities and/or accountabilities and/or which demand significant time and effort.
32. The Panel has applied the following principles in determining its recommendations:
 - a. the Scheme currently provides for only one SRA to be claimed by a member, even if they hold more than one role that attracts a SRA – a principle that the Panel upholds and recommends should continue;
 - b. the Panel considers what the Council expects of the member role rather than any individual's approach to the role;
 - c. a councillor receiving a robust basic allowance should reasonably be expected to undertake specific roles within the Council that are not overly demanding of time or effort (e.g. the occasional chairing role).
 - d. to qualify for a SRA, the role should satisfy a number of the special characteristics shown at para 33 below;
 - e. the present figures quoted represent the 2021/22 uplift applied to SRAs.

33. In determining our recommendations on these allowances, we have looked at each member role in the context of its primary purpose, the activities related to that role (e.g. meeting officers, media management) and the special characteristics attaching to each as follows:
- Time commitment
 - Specialist skills set
 - Functional leadership (*i.e. agenda management, prioritisation of work; public interface; focus on corporate/Council objectives*)
 - Important decision making
 - Complexity of role
 - Identifiable accountability
 - Direct responsibility for important outcomes
 - Culpability in the role
 - Constitutional relevance
34. At present, special responsibility allowances are set as a percentage of the Leader's allowance or as a percentage relative to another allowance e.g. a vice chair having an allowance that is 50% of that of a chair.
35. The Panel believes that a clearer approach would be to make all special responsibility allowances a percentage of the basic allowance. This would mean that any annual adjustment of the basic allowance would automatically translate into the appropriate adjustment across all other allowances.
36. **RECOMMENDATION 4: That the principle that a member may only claim one SRA be continued.**
37. **RECOMMENDATION 5: That all SRAs be calculated in future as a percentage of the Basic Allowance.**
38. The following paragraphs reflect our consideration of the various member roles.

Leader of the Council

39. The Leader of the Council's role is pivotal in achieving the Authority's strategic objectives. The Leader chairs the Strategy and Resources Committee which has a central role in co-ordinating the work of all committees towards achieving Council objectives. The present SRA for the Leader is £11,095.72.

40. The position of Leader satisfies all of the special characteristics shown above and should therefore command a significant allowance to reflect the pivotal role of strategic leadership on local, sub regional and regional levels.
41. The Stroud Leader's allowance compares reasonably favourably with that of Leaders of other benchmarked Councils. The mean of that group is £10,937. However, when compared to the allowances awarded to Leaders of other Gloucestershire-based District Councils, the Stroud Leader's allowance is well below the mean of that group which is £14,048. For this latter group however, it is important to remember that most of the other Leaders run executive-style authorities where they have personal responsibility for setting the scheme of delegations and are personally accountable. In making this point, we do not undervalue the role of the Leader in a committee-style of governance.
42. Responses to the members' survey offered proposed allowances ranging from the present level to £12,000, £14,000, £20,000 and £23,000.
43. Comparative statistics suggest that the mean Leaders' allowance is approximately 2.6 times the mean Basic Allowance of the listed Councils. Taking a balanced view regarding the absence of executive powers, but the strategic, regional and sub regional context of the Leader's role, the Stroud Leader's allowance should be calculated at 2 x Basic Allowance.
44. The Panel agrees with that approach and that it is appropriate, given all of the evidence, to propose to calculate the Leader's allowance on that basis.
45. **RECOMMENDATION 6: That the special responsibility allowance for the Leader of the Council be set at £11,952 i.e. 200% of Basic Allowance, effective from 1st April, 2022**

Deputy Leader of the Council

46. The Panel has been mindful of the political composition of the Council and its agreed governance arrangements involving a strategic alliance of the Labour, Green and Liberal Democrat Groups on the Council. Within this alliance, the Leader of the Greens has taken on the roles of Deputy to the Leader of the Council and Vice Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

47. The role of Deputy Leader is now recognised within the Constitution of the Council but does not feature within the Scheme of Allowances. This needs to be corrected as the role is of relevance irrespective of the form of political administration.
48. The role is primarily responsible for (a) assisting the Leader to provide effective political leadership of the Council (b) assisting the Leader to give strategic direction to the Council, including the development of overall budgets, strategies and policies; (c) representing the Council as required and (d) deputising in the absence of the Leader in all aspects of the role as prescribed in the Constitution.
49. Given the nature of the alliance arrangement leading the Council, and the way the present Scheme of Allowances is structured, there is no provision for making special responsibility payments to Group Leaders, other than specifically to the main opposition Group Leader. This relates to previous administrative and governance arrangements within the Council. This is dealt with separately in our report, but is relevant here in the context of the Deputy Leader role because, in the current "alliance" arrangement, the holder of that role (which is likely always to be the Leader of one of the Groups in the alliance) will not be entitled to an SRA other than as the Vice Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee.
50. The Panel feels the role of Deputy Leader must be formally recognised in the Scheme of Allowances and that the allowance for this position should be robust enough to represent the strategic nature of the role both as a serving deputy and as a major influence in the strategic leadership of the Council.
51. **RECOMMENDATION 7: That the special responsibility allowance for the Deputy Leader of the Council be set at £5,976 ie 100% of Basic Allowance, effective from 1st April, 2022.**

Chairs of Service Committees (Housing/ Environment & Community Services and Licensing)

52. These positions command a significant allowance under the present Scheme (£6,656.77). Using our list of special characteristics, it is clear that there is a significant time commitment required in managing a Committee's work programme.

53. Fundamentally in our view, the Chairs need to act as the functional leaders for the remit of their committees and have some accountability to the Council for committee outcomes and processes and for the performance of services within their Committee's remit.
54. We are not wholly convinced that this functional lead role, described in para 33, is fully embedded in the culture of the Council. However, we believe this to be something that the Council could and should develop and in no way reflects on the actions of the present office-holders.
55. Direct comparison with other authorities is difficult as Councils operating the committee style of governance are few and the range of their committees varies.
56. Responses from the members' survey proposed allowances for these positions varying from £5,000, the present level, £7,000, £8,000 £9,000 and £12,000
57. We feel the present allowance is a fair reflection of the responsibilities of the Chairs, with a suitable adjustment to fit our overall allowance criteria of SRAs being a percentage of the Basic Allowance. However, this does represent a small reduction on the increase awarded for 2021/22.
58. **RECOMMENDATION 8: That the special responsibility allowance for the Chairs of Service Committees be set at £6,574 i.e. 110% of Basic Allowance, effective from 1st April, 2022;**
59. **RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Council be invited to consider how the functional lead role at member level could be developed through the Chairs of Service Committees, making them more visibly accountable to the Council and the public for the processes of their committees and engaged in leading/monitoring service development and delivery within their respective committee remits.**
60. **RECOMMENDATION 10: That the Council be invited to comment to the Panel in due course on the matter raised in Recommendation 9.**

Vice Chairs of Service Committees and the Development Control Committee

61. The present allowances to all Vice Chairs (£1,331.38/ £1,109.40) fall into the lowest bands of the Scheme. Ordinarily, the Panel would be considering whether the roles represented by those lower bands should attract allowances at all, or whether there was adequate recognition of these roles through a robust Basic Allowance. Furthermore, the Panel believes the differentials between the various Vice Chair roles in those lower bands needs addressing.
62. The role descriptions for the Vice Chairs is clear – the Council believes their role to be an important one and so does the Panel. Evidence from members confirms this. Vice Chairs are responsible for supporting the Chair with the effective management and running of the relevant Committee’s business. Also, they will take the lead in some areas of work, by arrangement with the Chair. They will be routinely consulted by Officers and are active participants in agenda planning and management.
63. We believe the Vice Chair roles carry a time and effort element (particularly attending meetings and briefings), have elements of functional leadership and have constitutional relevance (see para 33). All the Chairs that we engaged with spoke highly of the Vice Chair role, not in relation to the individuals involved but rather in the importance of the role in supporting the Chair and helping to deliver outcomes.
64. With regard to the Vice Chair of the Development Control Committee, this role carries a time and effort commitment and a degree of specialist knowledge in ensuring that the Committee adheres to lawful processes in determining planning matters – all of this in parallel with the Chair’s role.
65. The Panel believes it is important to recognise the special circumstances of Vice Chairs in a committee-style of governance and that the Council has set out in its role description a clear expectation of those holding these positions. The present level of allowances does not in our view reflect that importance. We are therefore minded to recommend a moderate increase and to apply that to all Vice Chairs of Committees (i.e Service Committees and the Development Control Committee).

66. **RECOMMENDATION 11: That the special responsibility allowance for the Vice Chairs of Service Committees and of the Development Control Committee be set at £2,390 i.e. 40% of Basic Allowance, effective from 1st April, 2022**

Chair of Development Control Committee

67. The role descriptions approved by the Council for member roles makes no distinction between the core functions of chairs of committees. However, while the Chairs of Service Committees have budget responsibility, this would not apply to the Chair of Development Control Committee.
68. However, the Panel recognises that the effective management of the development control function at member level is vital to ensure that the risk of challenge to the Council, and the prospect of financial penalty, is minimised. We feel this responsibility is not fully reflected within the Scheme. In our view, and in accordance with evidence offered to the Panel, the Chair of Development Control Committee has equivalent responsibilities to those Chairs with budget responsibilities and there is no justification for such a large differential in allowances.
69. **RECOMMENDATION 12: That the special responsibility allowance for the Chair of the Development Control Committee be set at £6,574 i.e. 110% of Basic Allowance, effective from 1st April, 2022**

Chair of the Council and Vice Chair

70. The Chair of the Council is the civic head of the Council and in that capacity will represent the Council at a number of ceremonial and civic occasions and will chair full Council meetings. At times, the Vice Chair of the Council will be asked to deputise for the Chair either at Council meetings or at functions
71. The present allowances are £3,328.45 for the Chair and £664.95 for the Vice Chair. These allowances primarily reflect a time commitment with some recognition of the skill set required to represent the Council at civic and ceremonial engagements.

72. There is clear evidence of the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the number of events to which the Chair/Vice Chair has been invited or which are hosted by the Chair/Vice Chair. This represents a significant reduction in the time and effort required of the office-holders and, if this was a sustained position, we would be recommending an adjustment to the allowance both of the Chair and of the Vice Chair.
73. The Panel would like to keep this matter under review as the community and the Council come out of the limitations of the pandemic. In the meantime we are proposing to keep the allowances as they are, except for a minor adjustment to reflect our proposed linking of SRAs as a percentage of the Basic Allowance. This does however translate as a small reduction in the allowance for the Vice Chair.
74. **RECOMMENDATION 13: That the special responsibility allowance for the Chair of the Council be set at £3,586 ie 60% of Basic Allowance, effective from 1st April, 2022**
75. **RECOMMENDATION 14: That the special responsibility allowance for the Vice Chair of the Council be set at £598 ie 10% of Basic Allowance, effective from 1st April, 2022**

Chair and Vice Chair of Audit & Standards Committee

76. The Audit and Standards Committee has a dual role as the name suggests. Primarily it is concerned with the sound financial governance of the Council, scrutinising the Council's financial management and ensuring that the Council's business is conducted within the law and the Council's constitution. This includes receiving reports from the Council's internal and external auditors.
77. A complementary role is related to the standards functions of local government – the good conduct of District, Town and Parish Councillors and applying/policing the Members' Code of Conduct. We understand that consideration is being given to a Standards Panel being established within the auspices of the parent Committee. In making our recommendations, we have assumed that this process will remain within the oversight of the substantive committee chair.

78. This committee is the only place within the structure of the Council where any form of scrutiny takes place, with issues being raised by members and officers when some member level analysis is felt relevant.
79. Given the importance of this Committee in contributing to risk management, quality governance and sound standards of conduct, the Panel feels there is no justification for undervaluing the role and for the special responsibility allowances for the Chair and Vice Chair therefore to be any different from equivalent roles for other Committees.
80. In equalising the allowances for Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs, we believe the Council will make clear that good governance and the management of risk are equally as important as good decision making on service policy and delivery.
81. **RECOMMENDATION 15: That the special responsibility allowance for the Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee be set at £6,574 i.e. 110% of Basic Allowance, effective from 1st April, 2022;**
82. **RECOMMENDATION 16: That the special responsibility for the Vice Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee be set at £2,390 i.e. 40% of Basic Allowance, effective from 1st April, 2022.**

Group Leaders

83. At present, the Scheme provides that the main Opposition Group Leader received an allowance of £5,214.52 and the "other opposition group leader" would receive an estimated allowance of £1,105.42. The Scheme contains a qualification that a group must comprise a minimum of 5 x members in order for a Group Leader to receive an allowance.
84. On the face of it, the Scheme's provisions do not cater for the form of strategic leadership currently operating in Stroud District Council. The Council has 3 x groups in a strategic alliance but the scheme does not recognise this nor the group management role of those leaders within the alliance. The Panel has noted that the leader of the largest group has regular engagement with the strategic group leaders on Council-wide matters.

85. The Panel explored the relevance of these allowances as presently structured. Of particular interest was the extent to which the Scheme might, or indeed should, acknowledge that all political group leaders, whether in administration or otherwise, have some responsibility for collective good governance as well as recognising the size and management of the group.
86. Another key piece of evidence was a view that organising political group members was a party political role and not one that should be remunerated through the allowances Scheme. The Panel does not wholly accept that view, recognising the reality of political group structures within local government and the legal status of group size in determining the proportionate allocation of committee places. The Panel believes there needs to be a more equitable representation of the Group Leader governance and political group management roles within the allowances Scheme.
87. Accordingly, we propose a dual level of allowance for group leaders, whether in administration or in opposition. It is a radical approach but one in our view that better reflects how Stroud is working at the moment, as well as meeting alternative forms of administration if and when required. However, if adopted, the Panel would wish to monitor this arrangement and review it if there is any significant change to the political control arrangements.
88. The following table illustrates our proposal and reflects the present leadership arrangements. The table can be adapted to reflect future changes. It should be remembered that there remains in place the "one SRA per member" rule, so not all of these allowances will be taken up.

Group Leader <i>(current arrangements)</i>	Governance Element (25% BA)	75% + (38+ members) (100% BA)	51% - 74% (26-37 members) (75% BA)	25% - 50% (13 – 25 members) (50% BA)	5%-25% (3 – 12 members) (25% BA)	Less than 5% (0% BA)	Total
Leader of Labour group	£1,494			£2,988			£4,482*
Leader of Green group	£1,494			£2,988			£4,482*
Leader of Lib Dem group	£1,494				£1,494		£2,988
Leader of Conservative group	£1,494			£2,988			£4,482

***under the 1 x SRA per member rule, these allowances would not be taken up as the office holders would, under our proposals, receive other (higher) SRA payment.**

89. **RECOMMENDATION 17: That the Council endorse the approach to calculating group leader allowances on the basis of both governance responsibility and group size, using the parameters in the table at para 88 above;**
90. **RECOMMENDATION 18: That the special responsibility allowance for all Group Leaders be set at the rates shown in the table above, effective from 1st April, 2022;**
91. **RECOMMENDATION 19: To note the intention of the Panel to keep this arrangement under review.**
92. **RECOMMENDATION 20: That as a consequence of this arrangement, the Scheme be amended to delete the reference to a 5 x member minimum size for a group leader to receive an allowance.**

Member Champions

93. The Panel has noted that a number of members have been appointed as “Member Champions”. In particular, there are 3 champions for mental health and more recently a member appointed to champion the armed forces (as part of a Gloucestershire County-wide covenant).
94. What is unclear to the Panel is the extent to which the role of champions is to be embedded into the culture of the Council. From evidence received, the panel applauds the concept and has the following observations:
- there appears to be no consistency in how champions are appointed – in our view it should be part of a Council culture of support for the community;
 - clarity is needed about the rights, powers and responsibilities of member champions within the Council and in the community;
 - officers will need clarity about the expectations on them to support the member champions in their role in terms of information and guidance;
 - where these roles have developed elsewhere, they have covered such areas as disability, climate, older people and human rights and have structured support and in some cases special responsibility allowances;
 - there are different models of engagement and powers – we understand full guidance about the role is available from South West Councils.
95. Despite some member comments proposing an allowance for this role, the Panel does not feel in a position at this time to recommend any allowance for member champions but would urge the Council to consider adopting a clear framework within which these member roles can operate and hopefully develop.
96. **RECOMMENDATION 21: That the Council be invited to comment to the Panel on how it sees the role of member champions evolving in the future;**
97. **RECOMMENDATION 22: The Council be urged to consider establishing a clear structural and constitutional framework within which member champions can operate, in order to maximise their effectiveness;**

98. **RECOMMENDATION 23: That no allowance be recommended at this time for member champions but that this matter be kept under review by the Panel in the light of any further information coming from the Council.**

Overall implications of our recommendations

99. The table below sets out how our recommended allowances compare with those at present, as upgraded in accordance with the 2021/22 award.
100. It should be noted that the Scheme will provide for only one SRA to be claimed per member, so not all of the listed allowances would be taken up.

Role	Present £ Rounded up/down	Present totals	Panel Recs £	New total £
Basic Allowance x 51	5,726	292,026	5,976	304,776
Leader x 1	11,096	11,096	11,952	11,952
Deputy Leader	0	0	5,976	5,976
Chair Service Cttees x 3	6,657	19,971	6,574 (x3)	19,722
Chair Dev Control Cttee	5,547	5,547	6,574	6,574
Chair Audit Cttee	5,547	5,547	6,574	6,574
Chair Council	3,328	3,328	3,586	3,586
Vice Chairs S+R/Service Cttees (x 4)	1,331	5,324	2,390 (x4)	9,560 ++
Vice Chairs DC/Audit (x2)	1,109	2,218	2,390 (x2)	4,780
Vice Chair Council	665	665	597	598
Group Leader Cons	5,215	5,215	4,482	4,482
Group Leader (Lib Dem)	0	0	2,988	2,988
Group Leader (Greens)	0	0	4,482	4,482 ++
Group Leader (Lab)	0	0	4,482	4,482 ++
Member champions	0	0	0	0
TOTALS		350,937		390,532
++ Amount deducted for allowances not taken up re 1 x SRA rule				11,354
			TOTAL	379,178

			Difference	28,241
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101. Our recommendations present a financial shortfall of £28,241 over the present members' allowances total figure. We make no apology for this. The largest elements of the increase are the start of the phased uplift in the Basic Allowance and the recognition in the Scheme of the role of Deputy Leader.
102. It is important in our view that the due diligence and heavy responsibilities placed on elected members running a significant and relatively unique Council like Stroud must be recognised with robust allowances. We also hope that the allowances Scheme as proposed will contribute in part to attracting high calibre people to stand for public office.
- 103.** The Panel has been greatly impressed with the calibre of councillors who have commented to us and who have addressed us personally. We have responded to the evidence provided about anomalies and other issues by offering this package of proposals.

Travel and Subsistence

104. The primary comments received about travelling and subsistence were about raising the rate per mile, principally for car usage but also for other modes of transport. Currently, the Scheme provides the following allowances:
- Cars and Vans – 45p per mile
 - Motorcycles – 24p per mile
 - Bicycles – 20p per mile
 - Passenger supplement – 5p per passenger
105. The Panel would always wish to encourage environmentally aware forms of transport with appropriate incentives to encourage public transport/bicycle usage and walking.
106. Given that there has been no change in the HMRC rates for travel that apply before a tax impact, we do not feel able to recommend any change at present. The Panel looks forward to these rates being upgraded to keep in line with the significant raise in transport costs.

107. With regard to subsistence levels, there was no strong representation that these were inadequate, though some members felt they should more realistically represent the cost of meals and that the figures should be rounded up.
108. The Panel concurs with this view that the current allowances for expenses has not kept pace with food prices. The current subsistence expenses are as follows :
- Over 5 hours – 1 meal
Between 1 to 12 hours – 2 meals
More than 12 hours – 3 meals
- Breakfast £5.30
Lunch £7.20
Tea £2.80
Evening meal £9.10
109. Although these rates are not out of line with other bodies, the Panel feels they do not reflect the current cost of meals. We feel able to recommend a modest increase in the allowances to at least go some way to addressing the present situation.
110. **RECOMMENDATION 24: That no change be made to travel allowances but that the situation continue to be monitored;**
111. **RECOMMENDATION 25: That the following uplift in subsistence allowances be made:**
- Breakfast - £5.83**
Lunch - £7.20
Tea - £3.08
Evening meal - £10.01
- and that, in line with HMRC practice, a ceiling cap of £22 per day be confirmed.**

Dependent Carers' Allowance

112. There is little doubt that one of the difficulties faced by serving councillors is dealing with domestic care cover while attending Council and constituent business. Where there is not an available family member, the councillor will resort to other providers – whether voluntary or paid.
113. It is essential that the Scheme of Allowances makes robust provision for this. Even though the take up of Dependent Carers' Allowance is low, the Scheme must give clarity about councillors' rights in this regard. Some who offered evidence to the Panel stated that there was little awareness of the dependent carers' provisions and some training on what the provisions were and how to claim would be helpful.
114. The strongest criticism was levelled at the "Living Wage" provision in the Scheme. It was felt that the actual cost of providing basic and specialist care for dependents should be met. The Panel is strongly of this view also.
115. In addition, the Panel felt that the pandemic had demonstrated how many people had relied on the comfort of their pets. For some, enabling care for their pets while undertaking Council duties would be a helpful change to the present Scheme.
116. Again, we would recommend that actual costs incurred for engaging (for example) a dog walker be permitted under the scheme, subject to appropriate verification of costs incurred and nature of the care provided.
117. **RECOMMENDATION 26: That dependent care expenses be met on the basis of actual costs incurred, subject to appropriate verification as to the nature of the care provided, the qualification of the carer engaged and consideration of a reasonable maximum payment;**
118. **RECOMMENDATION 27: That the Scheme of Allowances be amended to include provision for meeting the expenses of essential pet care;**
119. **RECOMMENDATION 28: That officers of the Council devise appropriate wording amendments to the Scheme of Allowances to reflect these changes;**

120. **RECOMMENDATION 29: That the Council take steps to raise awareness among candidates and serving councillors about the provisions of the Dependent Carers' Allowance and of the circumstances under which it can be claimed.**

Approved Duties for the purpose of making Expenses Claims

121. The Panel has considered the approved duties against which travelling and subsistence and dependent care expenses can be claimed. The aim is to provide much greater clarity about this, including broadening the range of activities for legitimate claims.
122. Part of this proposal is to include greater provision for councillors to claim expenses for attending meetings as ward councillors and generally as observers. We would like the emphasis to be towards accommodating any reasonable attendance of the member rather than the expectation on the member to try to justify the claim. Of course, in recommending this, we would expect all reasonable auditing checks to remain to include a proportionate use of officers time.
123. Attached at an **Appendix A** is the proposed amended list of approved duties.
124. **RECOMMENDATION 30: That the revised list of approved duties for the purpose of claiming travel and subsistence and dependent carers' allowances, as set out in the Appendix be adopted.**

Graham Russell, Chair of Panel

LIST OF APPROVED DUTIES for the purpose of Travel and Subsistence and Dependent Carers' claims

	Attendance at:
1.	formal properly convened meetings of the Council, its Committees and Sub Committees and any other authorised meeting of these bodies or event organised by these bodies (including extraordinary meetings/joint committees) where the councillor (a) has been appointed by the Council as a member, a substitute or a representative; or (b) is exercising a constitutional right to attend and/or to speak; or (c) is a ward councillor; or (d) is otherwise attending in an observer capacity only.
2.	ad hoc formally constituted working groups/panels/task and finish groups/Boards where the councillor is (a) a named member of the body or (b) is formally invited to attend and/or participate.
3.	meetings of bodies to which the Council makes appointments and to which the councillor has been appointed, except where the body itself pays allowances. <i>(This relates to meetings of the body itself, its standing committees or sub committees but not to other activities of the body)</i>
4.	formal meetings convened by other authorities where the member has been appointed as the Council's representative. (This shall include attendance at 1 x meeting a month of each Parish Council within a member's ward)
5.	meetings of any local authority association of which the Council is a member where the councillor is the appointed representative or nominated substitute.
6.	any conference or other event of a similar nature (i.e. full day events), where prior approval of the [Chief Executive] has been given in writing.
7.	any Council premises, site or other agreed location, for a meeting agreed with either a member in receipt of a Special Responsibility Allowance or an Officer for the purpose of discussing matters relating to Council business in which it is reasonable to expect the councillor to have an interest.
8.	briefing meetings at the invitation of an Officer.
9.	briefing meetings preceding formally convened meetings of the Council, Committees, Sub Committees, Panels and Working Groups
10.	any training, member development or awareness raising event organised by the Council.
11.	a gathering of members to which candidates for senior Officer posts are asked to make presentations, where such attendance has been approved in writing by the [Chief Executive].

12.	any civic or ceremonial event at the invitation of the Chair of the Council, or the [Chief Executive]
13.	site visits arranged on behalf of the Development Control Committee in pursuance of the business of that Committee.
14.	tender opening meeting where invited by an Officer to attend.
15.	appraisal meetings for senior Council staff, as an approved representative.
16.	<i>(by Chairs and/or Vice Chairs of Committees, Leader of the Council/Deputy Leader, Chair/Vice Chair of Council)</i> at formal and informal meetings and other events, not specifically referred to above, provided that such attendance is in connection with the discharge of the Council's functions.
17.	any other meeting, function or event approved in advance by the [Chief Executive] for the purposes of, or in connection with, the discharge of the functions of the Authority.
18.	any Political group meeting held on Council premises, to a maximum of 15 meetings in any financial year
	Performance of:
19.	duties not referred to above, and carried out by a member holding an office for which a Special Responsibility Allowance applies.
20.	any particular duty for which express authority is given by or on behalf of the Council in case of emergency.
21.	Such other duty, not otherwise referred to, for which prior approval has been given by the [Chief Executive] or other authorised Officer, in consultation with the Leader.

Members will qualify where they necessarily incur expenditure on travelling and subsistence or dependent care for the purpose of enabling them to perform an approved duty as defined above.

Where approval is required in writing, where possible it must be approved beforehand. The claim will clearly show the attendance event, member attending, date and time, associated costs and the authorising officer.