

To: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority

From: Monitoring Officer – Ms Shahin Ismail

Presenting officer(s): Monitoring Officer - Ms Shahin Ismail

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Date: 10 February 2023

Appointment of an Independent Remuneration Panel

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Fire Authority to appoint an independent remuneration panel (IRP) to review its scheme of allowances.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Authority is asked to:

2.1.1 agree the appointment of an IRP to review the scheme of allowances and note the associated costs,

2.1.2 extend the current Members' Allowances Scheme until the outcome(s) of the IRP are known and agreed.

3. Risk Assessment

- 3.1 Legal – the Authority are required under the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 to put in place a compliant scheme for the payment of allowances to its Members. Failure to do so would place the Authority in breach of its legal duty.
- 3.2 Political – the scheme of allowances must be published and should be set with regard to recommendations made by an IRP or other agreed mechanism.
- 3.3 Economic – the Authority has duties to ensure it complies with legislation and that such a scheme is managed efficiently, effectively and cognisant of any National Joint Council (NJC) pay awards and index linking.

4. Background

- 4.1 Historically, the most cost effective method of reviewing Member allowances (required every four years) has been to ask Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) to consider Authority requirements as part of its own review cycle. However in 2017 CCC rejected the report findings of an IRP and approved an alternative scheme which did not consider the Authority. This also came at a time when the

future governance of the Authority was under consideration by the then Police and Crime Commissioner. In view of this and the ongoing uncertainty, the Authority has agreed twelve month extensions of their existing scheme since financial year 2018/19. During this time there have been three uplifts in line with NJC pay awards and minor wording amendments as the consequence of wider work on the constitutional documents (Minute 15 of the Authority meeting held on 4 November 2021 refers).

- 4.2 Whilst the Government White Paper is still awaited, it is now known that the current Police and Crime Commissioner does not wish to pursue his predecessor's course of action and therefore the future of the Fire Authority is more certain than it has been previously. At its meeting in February 2021 the Authority discussed and approved the current scheme but as local elections loomed it resolved that 'early in the life of the new Fire Authority, options and costs for a review of its allowances scheme' should be presented (Minute 164 of the Authority meeting held on 11 February 2021 refers). At its meeting in the following February, the Authority resolved unanimously to receive a report from the Monitoring Officer on the options and costs of an IRP, or other mechanism, to determine future allowances as soon as practicable (Minute 28 of the meeting held on 10 February 2022 refers). The recommendation at Paragraph 2.1.1 above seeks to achieve this.
- 4.3 As previously stated, the Authority is required to make a scheme of allowances for its appointed Members. The process for making and reviewing such schemes is strictly regulated in order to ensure that the public can have confidence in the independence, openness and accountability of the process involved. At the heart of this process is the requirement that the Authority scheme is reviewed every four years by an independent, appropriately qualified entity.
- 4.4 Research has concluded that the only realistic option to achieve an independent review is to engage a subject matter expert to lead a panel in a review of the current scheme of allowances. The Regulations (Part 4, Regulation 20 (2)) require an IRP to consist of at least three members.
- 4.5 It is therefore recommended that Mark Palmer from East of England LGA is appointed to lead a panel in an independent review. Mr Palmer has experience in this area and has worked successfully with both primary authorities within Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire District Council and several other fire and rescue services. He is able to draw on a small pool of individuals who have experience within both primary authorities, the Combined Authority and other public bodies. Together they will conduct the review based on the specific duties required of this authority's Members and benchmark against other authorities within the family group and wider sector.
- 4.6 As the current scheme of allowances, approved in February 2022, covers the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 it will require extending until the findings of the IRP are known and agreed thus the recommendation at Paragraph 2.1.2.

5. Review Process

- 5.1 Subject to the approval of the recommendation at Paragraph 2.1.1 above and preliminary discussions with Mr Palmer, the process will commence mid-March as follows;
- key interviews with Chief Fire Officer, Fire Authority Chair and Vice Chair, other Committee Chairs,
 - questionnaire shared with all Fire Authority Members (based on current scheme and relevant inputs) via an email link with a ten day response window,
 - comparative work with other fire and rescue authorities within the family group and wider sector.
- 5.2 The IRP will submit a report of their findings and recommendations to the Authority in June 2023. At that time, it will be open to the Authority to accept the recommendations in full, part or amend them.
- 5.3 The process will take no more than five days at a cost of £850 per day and will be drawn from the 2022/23 democratic services budget.

Source Documents

- Fire Authority Minutes – various
- Member Allowances Scheme 2022/23
- Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003

Location:

Fire Service HQ, Hinchbrook Cottage, Brampton Road, Huntingdon

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