

Submission to Allowances Panel. Cllr Ross Willmott

Over the years I have made a number of submissions to the panel that considers members' allowances and much of what I have previously said I still believe applies, however there are some changes in the political structure that need to be taken into account.

Constant factors

1. **That being a councillor is still a part time role.** I know that some of my colleagues have argued that the core role of councillor has somehow become a full time role. Indeed some treat it as a full time job. However this has never been the case and there have been no substantial changes in the role to make it more onerous. In fact the sweeping away of the 'old committee' system removed much of the need for time consuming meetings and most councillors are still far removed from that level of work. The majority of members sit on one scrutiny commission and at the most two. These meet every 6-8 weeks. Some members also sit on planning and licensing and various appeal hearings. We have been running Community meetings successfully for nearly 4 years now. There is considerable officer support for members in this role and it gives us all a powerful platform for community leadership. These meet 3-4 time per year. We still apply the convention of having most meetings in the evening allowing people to undertake full time work. Most members do surgeries once or twice a month.

Most significantly there are now more members who successfully combine these core duties with full time work. Of course some members take on more duties and therefore spend more of their time on council work. But this is up to them.

Roughly speaking the basic allowance can be seen at the moment as giving someone the ability to take one day a week off a full time job which pays around £50k pa without losing income. If this is coupled with the principle that some of the time we spend, we give as volunteers then it is difficult to see a case for significant increase in the Basic Allowance.

2. **The same applies for Cabinet members/Assistant mayors, Chairs of Planning, and Licensing .** Despite what was said during the election that Cabinet/Ass mayors would be full time posts there does not appear to be any full time cabinet members. I understand that some cabinet members still work although this may now be part time, and that others choose not to as they did when they were Cabinet members previously. This is the same for all members who hold other positions as Chair or Vice Chair of various committees. So the principle that they can still do other work still applies.

However it is clear that these roles carry more responsibility than a back bench councillor and the allowances have always reflected that. The principle still applies that the Panel should take into account the amount of time and responsibility of

these positions. I understand that Ass mayors don't have delegated authority as cabinet members did previously as the mayor as taken all of the executive authority.

It is hard to see any argument for any major change here. Unless there is clear evidence that some cabinet members are working full time or have greater responsibilities. Or that the work of the Chairs of Planning and licensing has increased. If so then there would be an argument for increasing their allowances which I would support.

What has changed

1. **We now have an Elected mayor and a new scrutiny system and the main points I make is there is not a significant difference from the responsibilities and power of council leader, and there are some changes in scrutiny responsibilities.**

The Elected mayor has in fact very similar powers and responsibilities to that of the former post of Council Leader. The main difference is that they are elected directly by the people and not their peers. Most significantly the provision in the Localism Bill for mayors to take on the role of chief executives has been removed. Therefore along with it goes the main argument for any large increase in allowance.

In June Baroness Hanham told the Lords: "At Second Reading I indicated that we would listen to noble Lords' concerns about shadow mayors and mayors as chief executives. We are keen to build on the common ground and consensus that the Bill has enjoyed.

"I should therefore like to say at this stage that when we reach the debate on mayoral provisions, the Government will be pleased to support amendments that have the effect of deleting from the Bill mayoral management arrangements; that is, **mayors as chief executives** and the concept of shadow mayors."

I have heard it argued that the mayor is different in providing strategic leadership to the city and council. However this is no different from what it says in the job description for the post of leader: "internal and external leadership, to act as the public face, represent outside the council, in the media, to local people, and at a regional and national level"

But I also know from having been leader of the council for 8 years that it is what I did. Set the strategic direction where did the 25 year vision for council and city, come from, I represented city nationally in Westminster, internationally, even at UN in New York!

So with regard to strategic leadership the mayor and leader are the same.

I have always held the view that the leader or mayor should be paid at the same level as a Member of Parliament which is the best comparator. (approx £65k) I can see no argument for changing this view.

2. **Scrutiny** The new system of scrutiny has set up a main Overview Select Committee on which sit all the chairs of seven Scrutiny Commissions. Each Commission has the role of scrutinising the work of the asst mayors and developing policy in these areas.

The current allowances have been transferred from the previous system of task groups. Etc.

The Overview Select Committee has taken on the role of the former Performance and Value For Money Select Committee and the Overview Scrutiny Management Board. It also has the role, through its chair and vice chair of organising and managing the work of scrutiny. It is the primary committee for scrutinising the Mayor and deputy mayor. The Chair has become the first point of contact for the media, and other groups and individuals wishing to question, challenge, and hold to account the mayor. It has just been agreed that the vice chair of OSC is also the Chair of the Transport Commission and that the Chair of OSC is its vice chair. This was to give a specific role to the vice chair of OSC and minimise the need for creating new posts needing allowances.

In this period of setting up scrutiny there has been a great deal of work, but I expect this to change to a more regular routine of 2-3 days per week. However the combining of the two main previous scrutiny committees into the new OSC will increase both the responsibilities and work of this committee and its chair.

Fortunately I currently have the time to devote to this role and would not personally seek an increase in allowance. However I can only see the role of the Chair of OSC growing if it is to be done properly, as it sits naturally opposite that of the mayor. Indeed if we had a formal political opposition it is the role most likely to be occupied by the leader of the opposition group. (under the previous arrangements we reserved the senior scrutiny posts for the political opposition). So the allowance should reflect this to enable any holder of this post to undertake the role fully. I would judge it to be a similar workload to that of a cabinet member/ass mayor.

Similarly there may be an argument for an increase in the scrutiny commission Chair allowances, as there are now fewer posts but still the same workload.

I would apply the same principle throughout that these positions do make it difficult to undertake full time work and therefore the allowances need to reflect this otherwise we will only ever get those people taking these roles who are not working full time.

Of course we are in difficult financial times and any increases will not be easy to propose or implement. I have always thought, however, that the work of the Allowances Panel should be done properly by basing its findings on the facts of the situation. In the end it will be up to politicians to decide if the political climate enables us to implement the findings.