

Surrey County Council

Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel into the Special Responsibility Allowance for Select Committee Task Group Leads

March 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. At its meeting on 13 October 2020, the Council approved the Select Committee Task Group Lead role profile. The Council also approved the Independent Remuneration Panel (the Panel) recommendation that the role should attract a new Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) of £1,530. In approving these items, the Council asked that the Panel review the operation of the Select Committee Task Group Lead, and the associated SRA, in six months' time. The Panel was asked to review:
 - Whether the role was operating as set out in the approved role profile; and
 - Whether the SRA was set at an appropriate level.
2. This report has been prepared for the Council in line with its request. The main body of this report details the Panel's work in forming its conclusions and recommendations. The approved role profile as agreed by the Council is at Appendix A, and the terms of reference for this work is at Appendix B.
3. The Panel's conclusions and recommendations are as follows:
 - **That the purpose, key duties and responsibilities as set out in the role profile are being discharged as set out in that profile;**
 - **That the role has clearly been part of a wider process that has seen enhanced scrutiny which adds value to the work of the Council and benefits the Surrey taxpayer;**
 - **That the role should continue to attract an SRA at its current level (see table below); and**
 - **That opportunities exist to embed and formalise how the arrangements for Task Groups are working, and the Panel provides its observations in the main body of this report.**

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION		
ROLE	2020-21 ALLOWANCE	RECOMMENDATION FROM 1 April 2021
Select Committee Task Group Leads (8)	£1,530	£1,538*
<i>*representing no change apart from the application of CPI as at September 2020 of 0.5 per cent, in line with the Council decision made on 13 October 2020</i>		

4. The Independent Remuneration Panel consists of three members; Bryan Ingleby (Chair), Paul Eaves and Steve Banks-Smith. Panel members all live in Surrey, and are all independent of Surrey County Council and of any political party. In approaching this work, the Panel has met with Select Committee Chairmen and Task Group leads, observed Select Committee and Task Group meetings where possible, and reviewed documentation relevant to the work.
5. This work has been performed and this report prepared in line with the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) Regulations 2003.
6. The panel is grateful for the support provided by Democratic Services for their assistance with this work, most notably Rachel Basham, Member Services Manager. We are also grateful to Members who assisted us with our work.

MAIN REPORT

INTRODUCTION

1. In July 2020, the Independent Remuneration Panel (the Panel) published its Review of Members Allowances 2020. All of the Panel's recommendations were approved, including the removal of the Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) for the Select Committee Vice-Chairman role. An SRA was introduced to reflect a new role, the Select Committee Task Group Lead, and the Council was asked to produce a role profile to outline its responsibilities.
2. At its meeting on 13 October 2020, the Council approved the Select Committee Task Group Lead role profile. When approving the role profile, the Council asked that the Panel review the operation of the Select Committee Task Group Lead, and the associated SRA, in six months' time. The Panel was asked to review:
 - Whether the role was operating as set out in the approved role profile; and
 - Whether the SRA was set at an appropriate level.
3. This report has been prepared for the Council in line with its request. The main body of this report details the Panel's work in forming its conclusions and recommendations. The approved role profile as agreed by the Council is at Appendix A, and the terms of reference for this work is at Appendix B.

WORK DONE BY THE PANEL

4. The Panel conducted a range of enquiries in performing this work. The main activities were:
 - Review of Select Committee papers, task group scoping documents and task group reports;
 - Observation of Select Committees and Task Groups, where possible;
 - Discussions with Select Committee Chairmen and Select Committee Task Group Leads;
 - A drop in session where all Members sitting on Select Committees had the opportunity to give their thoughts to the Panel; and
 - Review of the role profile
5. The Panel is grateful for the assistance of Democratic Services in making the arrangements above, and for the time of Members in assisting the Panel with its enquiries.

FINDINGS – THE ROLE OF THE TASK GROUP LEAD AND ITS IMPACT

6. Task Groups have evolved as part of the enhancement of scrutiny within the Council. Select Committees meeting six times per year have limited opportunity to examine fully more than a few topics. Task Groups allow detailed scrutiny to take place, allowing a more thorough and considered view of the evidence and leading to better outcomes.
7. The role of Task Group Lead is a significant one. It goes considerably beyond the traditional Vice-Chairman role of deputising for the Chairman, which would include helping to plan agendas and working on the management of meetings with the Chairman.

8. From the role profile, Task Group Leads are required to lead Select Committee Task Groups, ensuring groups complete their tasks and report their findings back into the main Committee - and to do so in a way that includes robust evidence gathering work. The Panel is assured that Task Groups are being set up with the Select Committee Vice-Chairmen appointed as lead, that evidence gathering takes place and that the findings are reported back. Task Group Leads, as Committee Vice-Chairmen, also engage in a variety of ways beyond a traditional Vice-Chairman role, typically through representation on external groups. It is clear that this role attracts a spectrum of activity beyond normal main Committee business.
9. The Panel has reviewed a number of such pieces of work and considers that they represent a considerable improvement on the quality of scrutiny within the Council. Some work has an ongoing nature, such as detailed budget monitoring work which the main Committee agenda would not have capacity for. Other work is situational such as the County Hall move, and other pieces of work are substantial and are likely to lead to positive changes in public services, such as the mental health work. Whilst we have named a small number of tasks, all Committees have had a number of Task Groups, and we consider that scrutiny has been improved as a result.
10. The Panel is asked to conclude whether the role is being conducted in accordance with the role profile.

Conclusion 1: The purpose, key duties and responsibilities as set out in the role profile are being discharged as set out in that profile

11. We have not been specifically asked to review the impact of the new arrangements. However, it is clear that the additional work has enhanced both the quantity and quality of scrutiny. It appears to us as observers that scrutiny has a higher profile and influence, and the involvement of opposition groups has been a step forward. All Committees and Task Groups cited officer support as a key part of their success. We have made observations on how Task Groups are being operated and thoughts on how this could be developed further at paragraph 19.

Conclusion 2: That the role has clearly been part of a wider process that has seen enhanced scrutiny which adds value to the work of the Council and the Surrey taxpayer

FINDINGS – THE SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY ALLOWANCE

12. Based on the findings at paragraphs 6 to 11 above the Panel considers that the role of Task Group Lead meets the criteria for a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA). The current SRA is £1,530 and the Panel has considered whether changes should be made to this.
13. The SRA is extremely modest when one considers that an individual will be leading one or more Task Groups through the year in addition to traditional Committee duties and wider engagement. It is a recognition that this is a role that brings value, rather than full compensation for time given. Like all Members' Allowances, it exists to ease the burden of being in the role rather than remuneration for that role.
14. The Panel notes that the role is good for succession planning and also good for Members to obtain skills and knowledge that will serve them well as they progress to Committee Chairman

and other roles during their career as a Councillor. This is particularly relevant when there is a new Council and new Members are considering a career of a minimum of four years.

15. The Panel considered three options:

- i. That the current SRA is modest but appropriate at £1,530
- ii. That there is a significant difference between the Chairman's SRA of £10,200 and the Task Group Lead's SRA of £1,530 which may not reflect fully the increased responsibility and workload assumed by Task Group Leads. Accordingly, the Panel considered a modest increase to the Task Group Lead SRA.
- iii. As per option 2 but acknowledging that there is little justification in the current climate for increased allowances. The Panel considered whether the role represents a redistribution of responsibility within a Committee and therefore whether a modest increase to the Task Group Lead SRA would be appropriate - offset by a reduction in the Chairman's SRA such that there is no overall change in total SRA.

16. The Panel believes that increasing Members' Allowances in the current financial context is not justified, beyond the small annual inflation increase as previously agreed. We do not therefore recommend option 2.

17. In considering option 3, the Panel considered whether the Chairman's responsibility and workload had been diluted through delegation to Task Group Leads. We conclude that this has not happened. Task Groups are doing work that is in addition to what would be achieved by main Committee alone. What is being delegated is the more intensive work that can only be done in a Task Group setting. The output from each Committee has been significantly increased through the existence of Task Groups. The Committee Chairman has overall responsibility and accountability for everything that their Committee produces. We do not therefore recommend option 3.

18. The Panel therefore recommends that the SRA remains at its current level, subject to the annual inflationary increases as previously agreed.

Recommendation 1: That the SRA for the Task Group Lead is retained at its current level and subject to annual inflationary adjustment in line with other Members' Allowances.

FINDINGS – DEVELOPING THE ROLE

19. Although we have been commissioned to make a recommendation on the SRA and its value, our enquiries have led us to a number of observations which we make here to assist the Council in taking this role forwards. These do not have the status of recommendations but the Panel hopes that they are helpful.

20. In general, the role is a fairly new one and working practices across the Committees and their Task Groups vary. This is to be expected given the diverse nature of the work. We have, however, through our observations and conversations with Members, identified current good practice which could be more widely implemented - as well as some opportunities to develop further the approach to Task Groups.

21. Specific points are in the table below.

Table 1: Developing the role

Formalisation of role and expectations. The current expectation is that Committees have two task groups running concurrently at any one time, that Members participate fully in task groups, and that at least one Task Group Lead is from an opposition group. These are desirable characteristics and there is an opportunity to build them into requirements more formally so that they are enduring. For example, adding to the Select Committee Chairman role profile the requirement that a pipeline of work is chosen and allocated to Task Groups.

How work is chosen and allocated. We saw good practice where Select Committees have a potential pipeline of Task Group work included within their forward work plan and that this is reviewed at every meeting.

Interaction with main committee. Good practice is where a Select Committee has a standing item on its agenda regarding Task Group progress, and each Task Group provides a written update on its progress between Select Committee meetings. Select Committees should agree how implementation of recommendations from Task Group reports are to be monitored i.e. whether at Task Group level or at main Committee level.

Expectations of Members. The role profile for a Member includes the requirement to participate in any Committees they are a part of. Securing good Member involvement in Task Groups is key and there is an opportunity to clarify expectations of Members in this regard.

Supporting Members. The Council may wish to review whether Members receive the right level of development and training to support their participation in Task Groups. Such groups tend to look at specialist subjects and Members may not feel sufficiently informed to volunteer or participate. When deciding that a Task Group is the right vehicle for scrutiny, there is an opportunity to identify training needs for Members and whether secondment of third party specialists might be required.

Officer support. The officer support was universally recognised as positive and extremely valuable. Given the ambition of increasing Task Group usage to two per Committee running concurrently, it would be beneficial to ensure that Democratic Services has the capacity to offer full support to what may be up to eight Task Groups running at the same time as Committees.

APPENDIX A: ROLE PROFILE (prepared and agreed by Council)

Select Committee Task Group Lead (Vice-Chairman)

(This role profile identifies responsibilities for Select Committee Task Group Leads that are in addition to those of a county councillor)

Purpose:

- To lead Select Committee task group work and act as a spokesperson
- To ensure task groups complete their task and report their findings
- To encourage broad participation from Select Committee Members
- To lead robust evidence gathering work using appropriate methods to produce recommendations

Key Duties and Responsibilities:

- a) To support the Chairmen and Committee in the identification and prioritisation of relevant scrutiny topics
- b) To uphold principles of good scrutiny: critical friend challenge, independence, service improvement and amplifying local voice
- c) To lead the development of task group scoping, project plans and key lines of enquiry
- d) To ensure task groups employ a robust methodology for gathering evidence
- e) To act as spokesperson for the task group in reporting to the Select Committee and Cabinet where appropriate
- f) To take responsibility for the delivery of the task group's work including a final report and SMART recommendations
- g) To promote the role and impact of scrutiny at the council and beyond

Key Personal Attributes, Skills and knowledge:

A clear understanding of the role of scrutiny and what 'good scrutiny' looks like

Effective leadership skills

The ability to chair meetings and facilitate open discussion

The ability to analyse and grasp complex issues

Political knowledge and awareness

A clear understanding of the operation of the Council and its partner organisations

The ability to work effectively with Council officers, the public, the media and outside organisations

The flexibility and capacity to drive and lead task group work – this is estimated to be the equivalent of at least one day per week

APPENDIX B: TERMS OF REFERENCE

Review Topic: Select Committee Task Group Lead - Role Profile Review
Relevant background: <p>In July 2020, the Independent Remuneration Panel published its Review of Members Allowances 2020. A number of recommendations were approved, including the removal of the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Select Committee Vice-Chairman role. A new Special Responsibility Allowance was introduced to reflect a new role, the Select Committee Task Group Lead, and the council was asked to produce a role profile to outline its responsibilities.</p>
Why this role profile being reviewed: <p>At its meeting on 13 October 2020, the council approved the Select Committee Task Group Lead Role Profile.</p> <p>When approving the role profile, the council asked that the IRP review the operation of the Select Committee Task Group Lead, and its associated Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA), in six months' time.*</p> <p>*In order to report ahead of County Council elections, the review has been brought forward to report in March 2021.</p>
What questions are the group aiming to answer? <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Is the new Select Committee Task Group Lead Role operating as set out in the role profile?2. Does the SRA accurately reflect the responsibility of this new role?
Scope (within / out of) In scope: <p>The operation of the Select Committee Task Group Lead role Its associated SRA and whether this is in line with the responsibilities of the role</p> Out of scope: <p>The performance of individuals undertaking the Select Committee Task Group Lead role</p>

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