

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	DSFRA/23/26
MEETING	DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY
DATE OF MEETING	11 DECEMBER 2023
SUBJECT OF REPORT	DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY APPROVED SCHEME OF MEMBERS ALLOWANCES 2020-21
LEAD OFFICER	Clerk to the Authority
RECOMMENDATIONS	<p>(a). <i>That the contents of this report be considered alongside the report and recommendations of the Independent Advisor (as attached at Appendix A) and with a view to determining the Allowances Scheme to operate from 1 April 2024 for the 2024-25 and subsequent financial years;</i></p> <p>(b). <i>that, following from (a) above and in accordance with the requirements of the relevant Regulations, the Clerk to the Authority be authorised:</i></p> <p>(i). <i>to arrange for publication as soon as possible of those rates agreed in relation to Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances;</i></p> <p>(ii). <i>to amend the Authority Approved Scheme of Members Allowances to reflect, where required, decisions taken at (a) above.</i></p>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>Regulations require the Authority to determine, prior to the start of each financial year, basic and special responsibility allowances, together with levels for reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses to Members. The Regulations also provide that, where an automatic uprating methodology is used, this should only apply for a maximum period of four years pending a more substantive review.</p> <p>The Authority's Allowances Scheme was last subject to a substantive, independent review to inform allowances to operate from the 2020-21 financial year. Consequently, when setting the Scheme to operate for the current (2024-25) financial year, the Authority authorised the Clerk to commission an independent review to inform setting the scheme for the forthcoming (2020-21) and subsequent financial years (Minute DSFRA/22/25b refers).</p> <p>A copy of the Independent Advisor's report is now duly appended to this paper for consideration.</p>

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	As indicated in the appended report of the Independent Advisor. The Authority's approved revenue budget for 2024-25 will contain provision for the payment of Members' allowances.
EQUALITY RISKS AND BENEFITS ANALYSIS	The contents of this report are considered compatible with existing equalities and human rights legislation.
APPENDICES	A. Report and recommendations of Independent Advisor.
BACKGROUND PAPERS	The Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.

1. BACKGROUND - LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW PROCESS

- 1.1. Regulations require the Authority to determine, prior to the start each financial year, Basic (payable at the same rate to all Members) and Special Responsibility Allowances, together with levels for reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses to Members. The Regulations also provide that, where an automatic uprating methodology is used, this should only apply for a maximum period of four years pending a more substantive review.
- 1.2. Whilst this Authority is not required to have its own Independent Remunerations Panel, it is required to “have regard to” recommendations made by the Independent Remuneration Panels of constituent authorities in relation to the level of allowances payable by those authorities.
- 1.3. This Authority’s Approved Scheme of Members Allowances was last reviewed substantially by an Independent Advisor in 2019 (to inform allowances for a four year period from 2020-21 to 2023-24). At that time, it was considered appropriate to continue to use the services of an Independent Advisor given the sensitivity of this issue and in-keeping with a desire to reflect the impartiality, objectivity and transparency of the arrangements applying to other public authorities.
- 1.4. Applying this rationale again and in line with the decision of the Authority at its meeting on 12 December 2022 (Minute DSFRA/22/25(b) refers), Ms. Bryony Houlden was appointed, following a quotation exercise, to review the allowances scheme in sufficient time to inform its budget setting for the 2024-25 and subsequent financial years. Ms. Houlden is Chief Executive of South West Councils and has considerable experience of Independent Remuneration Panels, serving on the Devon, Exeter, Plymouth and Somerset Panels and chairing the Torbay, Torridge and North Devon Panels. Ms. Houlden also undertook the last three substantive reviews for the Authority in 2012, 2015 and 2019.
- 1.5. A copy of Ms. Houlden’s review, including proposals as to allowances to be paid, is attached to the report at Appendix A.
- 1.6. Financial provision to meet any proposals on Members’ Allowances agreed by the Authority for the forthcoming financial year will be included in the draft 2024-25 revenue budget.

SAMANTHA SHARMAN
Clerk to the Authority