

# ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



<b>COMMITTEE</b>	<b>AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>30 OCTOBER 2023</b>
<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES AND DRAFT SCHEME OF ALLOWANCES 2024/25</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	<b>PAUL BREMBLE, HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES</b>
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>EXEMPT INFORMATION</b>	<b>NONE</b>
<b>ACTION</b>	<b>FOR NOTE AND RECOMMENDATION</b>

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 An independent review of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Members' Allowances Scheme was held in accordance with the *Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003* (SI 1021) ('the 2003 Regulations') as they apply to Combined Fire Authorities (or CFAs).
- 1.2 The last review was held in 2019, and it was approved by the Fire Authority on 24 October 2019 that the indices were utilised for four years effective from 1 April 2020 (min ref 24), or until the Authority requires a further review, whichever is sooner.
- 1.3 Members may also be aware that the Scheme of Allowances is indexed to the annual local government increase for allowances (Green Book staff). The Fire Authority approved on 15 February 2023 new rates for allowances updated by 4.04% and was backdated to 1 April 2022.
- 1.4 The report sets out the findings of the Independent Review of Members' Allowances by South-East Employers, and updated Scheme of Allowances effective from 1 April 2024 for note and recommendation to the Fire Authority.

## 2. RECOMMENDATION

That Audit and Governance Committee:

- 2.1 **NOTE** the findings of the Independent Review of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Scheme of Allowances (Appendix A and B);
- 2.2 **RECOMMEND** that the Fire Authority, subject to any future indexation that may be applied **APPROVE** the draft 2024/25 Scheme of Allowances (Appendix C) from effect of 1 April 2024;

### **3. REPORT**

- 3.1 This is the fifth independent review of Members' Allowances for the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority. The review was commissioned to provide recommendations on the number and level of allowances. In line with good practice, the Authority has chosen once again to seek independent advice that has followed the principles undertaken by the statutory independent remuneration panels (or IRPs) that are required to review the allowances' schemes of the nominating councils at least every 4 years.
- 3.2 South-East Employers was commissioned to undertake the review and their findings are set out in Appendix A and B. South-East Employers held interviews on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> September 2023 with five Members to obtain a qualitative sense of whether those roles and responsibilities had evolved since 2019. Wayne Bowcock; Chief Fire Officer and Paul Bremble, Head of Corporate Services were also interviewed to obtain background information on the current and future challenges for the Authority and the impact on the workload of Members.
- 3.3 No changes were made to the methodology of the review in comparison to the review made in 2019, except for an increase in Members average workload / minimum time input per year from 18 days in 2019, to 19 days in 2023. This was used, alongside the average gross daily rate of remuneration for full-time employees by place of residence in Berkshire in 2022 to determine the revised basic allowance and special responsibility allowance, as set out in paragraphs 24 to 26 in Appendix A.
- 3.4 Should Members wish to accept the recommendations set out by South-East Employers, Officers have updated the Scheme of Allowances to reflect the recalibrated rates. The draft Scheme of Allowance for 2024/25 is attached at Appendix C.
- 3.5 Subject to Member approval, in line with previous years, the draft Scheme of Allowances for 2024/25 shall be adjusted annually in line with percentage allowance increase agreed by the NJC for Local Government Services. Adjustment of the allowance shall take effect from the beginning of the financial year the index is applied to staff.

### **4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS**

- 4.1 Sustainability: We will ensure that we provide a financially sustainable and environmentally friendly service to our communities.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The current budget for Members' Allowances (Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances) is £97,259. Depending on the allocation of Special Responsibility Allowances, the total amount payable in 2024/25 is estimated to be in the region of £98,496.
- 5.2 Costs will be incurred in publishing a notice that the Authority has made a Scheme of Members' Allowances in a newspaper circulating in its area as required under the 2003 Regulations. The cost is estimated to be in the region of £400.

## **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The making or amendment of the Members' Scheme of Allowances is a function reserved to a meeting of the Authority. A scheme must be made by the Authority before the beginning of each year to which it applies and, in so doing, have due regard to the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panels (IRP) of the constituent authorities when considering its own Scheme of Members' Allowances and confirm that it has done so when it gives public notice of the Scheme of Allowances.
- 6.2 An amendment may be made by the Authority in year. Regulation 10(4) of the 2003 Regulations provides that "A scheme may make provision for an annual adjustment of allowances by reference to such index as may be specified by the authority and where the only change made to a scheme in any year is that effected by such annual adjustment in accordance with such index the scheme shall be deemed not to have been amended".

## **7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The Authority's Scheme of Members' Allowances does not include any element for meeting costs incurred by a Member who has to arrange care in order to carry out their function as a Member of the Fire Authority. The Local 2003 Regulations exclude CFAs from including such a provision in its Scheme. All RBFA Members have been appointed by one of the six Unitary Authorities in Berkshire and are entitled to claim "dependent carers' allowances" from their appointing authority.

## **8. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 No risk implications have been identified.

## **9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE**

- 9.1 Not applicable.

## **10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION**

10.1 The Chief Fire Officer, Head of Finance and Procurement and Monitoring Officer were consulted during the preparation of this report.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

11.1 Fire Authority minutes, 24 October 2019 (minute reference 24)

## **12. APPENDICES**

12.1 South-East Employers Independent Review – Appendix A

12.2 South East Employers comparable data – Appendix B

12.2 24/25 Draft Scheme of Allowances – Appendix C

## **13. CONTACT DETAILS**

13.1 Paul Bremble, Head of Corporate Services [bremblep@rbfrs.co.uk](mailto:bremblep@rbfrs.co.uk)

13.2 Fayth Rowe, Democratic Support Lead [rowef@rbfrs.co.uk](mailto:rowef@rbfrs.co.uk)