



Cherwell
DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

**Report of the Independent
Remuneration Panel
on the Review of Members' Allowances for the
2025/2026 Financial Year**

for

Cherwell District Council

February 2025

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Summary and Recommendations

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The Independent Remuneration Panel (“the Panel”) has carried out a full review of the Cherwell District Council Members’ Allowances Scheme (“The Scheme”). This report sets out the Panel’s recommendations.
- 1.2 The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003, specifically Regulation 19, provide that before an authority makes or amends a scheme of allowances, the authority shall have regard to the recommendations made in relation to it by an independent remuneration panel. The Council is required to have regard to the advice of the Panel on the levels and types of allowances to be paid under the Scheme.
- 1.3 "In 2024, the Panel recommended that the Basic Allowance and all Special Responsibility Allowances be increased in line with the staff pay award, once agreed (rounded up if necessary to ensure 12 equal payments), and backdated to 1 April 2024. This recommendation was approved by Full Council on 26 February 2024. The staff pay award of 4% was agreed in autumn 2024 and then applied to the Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances."
- 1.4. In reaching its recommendations for the 2025/2026 Members’ Allowance Scheme, the Panel has carefully considered all of the submissions and representations made to it and the additional evidence that was available. In accordance with the Panel’s terms of reference, it has looked at the relevant elements of the Council’s existing Members’ Allowance Scheme.
- 1.5 The Panel continues to consider that the increasing complexity, additional responsibilities and burden of local government make it imperative for individuals representing all sections of society to be able to stand for election as councillors.
- 1.6 The Panel believes that this review of the Scheme and the recommendations it has made will give the Council a sound and comprehensive scheme of allowances until it is reviewed again.
- 1.7 The Panel thanked the Democratic and Elections Team who advised and supported the Panel for the information provided to assist in their work.
- 1.8 The Panel thanked Members for completing the Annual Members’ Allowance Survey which saw a significant increase in responses to the survey compared to last year.

2.0 Recommendations to Council

Having given due consideration to the information provided to the Panel, it recommends Full Council agree the following for inclusion in the Members' Allowance Scheme 2025/2026:

- (a) That the Basic Allowance be increased in in line with the 2025/2026 staff pay award (3.5%), rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025.

	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Basic Allowance	£5,040 pa	£5,220 pa

- (b) That all Special Responsibility Allowances be increased in in line with the 2025/2026 staff pay award (3.5%), rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025.

Special Responsibility Allowance	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Chairman of the Council	£5,040 pa	£5,220 pa
Leader of the Council	£16,032 pa	£16,596 pa
Deputy Leader of the Council	£10,344 pa	£10,716 pa
Executive Member holding a portfolio	£7,476 pa	£7,740 pa
Leader of Main Opposition Group	£3,468 pa	£3,600 pa
Minority Opposition Group Leader (6 or more Members)	50% of Main Opposition Group Leader SRA	50% of Main Opposition Group Leader SRA
Minority Opposition Group Leader (2-5 Members)	25% of Main Opposition Group Leader SRA	25% of Main Opposition Group Leader SRA
Chairman of Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee	£4,164 pa	£4,320 pa

Chairman of Appeals Panel	£300 SRA plus £300 per meeting to a capped limit of £1800 per annum	£312 SRA plus £312 per meeting to a capped limit of £1872 per annum
Chairman of Budget Planning Committee	£4,164 pa	£4,320 pa
Chairman of General Licensing Committee / Licensing Acts Committee	£888 pa	£924 pa
Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	£4,164 pa	£4,320 pa
Chairman of Personnel Committee	£1,488 pa	£1,548 pa
Chairman of Planning Committee	£4,980 pa	£5,160 pa
Chairman of Standards Committee	£888 pa	£924 pa

- (c) That the co-optees allowance be increased in line with the staff pay award for 2025/2026 (3.5%) and rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025.

	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Co-optee Allowance	£864 pa	£900 pa

- (d) That Independent Persons allowance be increased in line with the staff pay award for 2025/2026 (3.5%) and rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025.

	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Independent Persons Allowance	£864 pa	£900 pa

- (e) That Dependants' Carers' and Childcare Allowances remain at the current level, paid on the basis of the actual costs incurred up to the maximum hourly rate set out below and to a maximum cap of 40 hours per month, subject to production of receipts and which cannot be paid to a member of the claimant's household.

	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Childcare	£10 per hour	£10 per hour
Dependant relative care	£20 per hour	£20 per hour

- (f) That mileage remain at the current level in line with HMRC approved mileage rates and if any adjustments are implemented by HMRC then the revised rates be applied to Members' travel allowances effective from the date of implementation by HMRC.

	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed level for 2025/2026
Bicycles	20p per mile	20p per mile
Motorcycles	24p per mile	24p per mile
Motor Vehicles	45p per mile	45p per mile
Electric vehicles	45p per mile	45p per mile

- (g) That, having regard to the detailed review of staff subsistence, the rates for subsistence allowance be aligned with the revised maximum staff subsistence levels with claims permitted on approved duties of over 5 hours outside the district* subject to the submission of receipts (*subsistence allowances cannot be claimed for any duties within the district as the basic allowance is deemed to cover all within district expenses).

	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Breakfast	£6.02	£7.50
Lunch	£8.31	£10.50
Tea / coffee	N/A	£4.00
Evening Meal	£10.29	£12.50

- (h) That Democratic Services continue to book overnight accommodation if required.
- (i) That there be no change to the list of approved duties for which claims may be made.
- (j) That Non-Executive Director allowances be increased in line with the staff pay award for 2025/26 (3.5%) rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025 and costs recharged to the relevant company:

	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Non-Executive Directors Graven Hill Village Holding Company Limited and Graven Hill Village Development Company	£4,980 pa	£5,160

- (k) That an in-depth (“root and branches”) review of the Members’ Allowance Scheme be undertaken with implementation to be determined when further information on local government reorganisation, devolution and the Cherwell boundary review is known.

The Panel’s Report

3.0 Introduction

- 3.1 The Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Members’ Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 require local authorities to review their Allowances Schemes and to maintain the Panel to consider and make recommendations on new schemes.
- 3.2 The Regulations set out that the following issues are to be addressed by the Panel:
- Basic Allowance: each local authority must make provision for a basic, flat rate allowance for all elected Members. The allowance must be the same for all Members and can either be paid in a lump sum or in instalments.
 - Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA): each local authority may make provision for the payment of SRAs to elected Members who have significant responsibilities. The Panel has to recommend the responsibilities that should be remunerated and the levels of allowance.
 - Co-optees’ Allowance: each local authority may make provision for the payment of an allowance to co-optees’ for attending meetings, conferences, and seminars.
 - Childcare and dependants’ carers’ allowance: each local authority may make provision for the payment of an allowance to elected Members who incur expenditure for the care of children or dependant relatives whilst undertaking particular duties.

- Travel and subsistence: each local authority may determine the levels of travel and subsistence allowances and the duties to which they should apply.
 - Indexation: each local authority may determine that allowances should be increased in accordance with a specified index and can identify the index and set the number of years (not exceeding four) for which it should apply.
 - Backdating: each local authority may determine that, where allowances are made to an allowance scheme, the allowances as amended may be backdated.
- 3.3 All Councils are required to convene their Panel and seek its advice before they make any changes or amendments to their Members' Allowances Scheme. Elected Members must "have regard" to their Panel's recommendations before setting a new or amended Members' Allowance Scheme.
- 3.4 Following the meeting of the Independent and Parish Remuneration Panel in December 2023, the Panel recommended to Council that the Members' Basic Allowance and all Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) be increased in line with the staff pay award, when agreed, rounded up to give 12 equal payments and backdated to 1 April 2024.
- 3.5 All of the Panel's recommendations for the 2024/2025 Scheme were considered and agreed by Full Council on 26 February 2024. The staff pay award of 4% was agreed in autumn 2024 and applied to Members' Allowances and backdated to 1 April 2024. The 2024/25 Scheme was subsequently updated to reflect the agreement reached on the increase.
- 3.6 This report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (as amended). It outlines the Panel's findings following a review of the District Council's current Allowance Scheme and its recommendations for 2025-2026 in respect of:
- i. the levels of Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)
 - ii. An SRA for Minority Opposition Group Leaders
 - iii. Any adjustments or changes to levels of any other SRAs
 - iv. Co-optees Allowance
 - v. Independent Persons allowance
 - vi. Travelling (mileage) allowances

- vii. Subsistence allowances
 - viii. Dependants' carers' and childcare allowances
 - ix. Non-Executive Directors on Council Owned Companies
 - x. Review of the Members' Allowances Scheme and Indexation.
- 3.7 For information, throughout this report, all year references throughout this report, "2024/2025" and "2025/2026" refer to the financial years. The terms "Members" and "councillors" are used interchangeably throughout the report,

4.0 The Independent Remuneration Panel

- 4.1 The current membership of the Panel is:

Ms Jeanette Baker
Mr Andrew Hodges
Mr David Shelmerdine
Mr Christopher White

- 4.2 The Panel met on 6 December 2024 to consider and agree its recommendations for 2025/2026 financial year. Mr David Shelmerdine sent his apologies for the meeting.

- 4.3 Mr Christopher White was appointed as Chairman of the Panel.

- 4.4 Denzil Turbervill – Head of Legal Services, Natasha Clark - Governance and Elections Manager and Michael Carr - Interim Principal Officer – Scrutiny & Democratic Lead (Clerk), provided the Panel with administrative advice and support.

5.0 Terms of Reference of the Panel

- 5.1 The Panel's terms of reference as originally agreed by the Council when the Panel was first constituted (as amended by the 2003 Consolidating Regulations which relate to the determination of local schemes for travelling and subsistence allowance) are outlined in its reports dated 3 July 2001 and 4 July 2003.
- 5.2 The principal matters on which the Panel can make recommendations are set out in the introduction of this report. As the Panel currently meets annually to review the Scheme and make recommendations for the forthcoming financial year, indexation is not currently applied to the allowance scheme.
- 5.3 It is possible for the Council to apply indexation and for the Scheme to be confirmed on that basis annually for a period of up to four years. In this instance,

Council would need to amend the Terms of Reference of the Independent Remuneration Panel that currently state it meets annually and to agree any level of indexation such as any annual pay award to staff.

6.0 The Panel's Adopted Approach

6.1 Since 2001, the Panel's approach has been that recommendations should be formulated appropriate to the circumstance of the Council, recognising that the roles of Executive and Non-Executive Members are now well-established.

6.2 The following underlying principles continue to form the basis of the Panel's review process:

- i. the allowances should take account, as far as possible, of the amount of time taken by Members to fulfil their roles.
- ii. the scheme should ensure, as far as practicable, that as wide a range of people as possible should be able to stand for election and that they should not be financially penalized in so doing. This, in turn, should increase the likelihood of an inclusive approach to council services.
- iii. the levels of the allowances should not be treated as salary but rather as a level of 'compensation' and recognition of the time and level of responsibility that such public duty requires.
- iv. that an element of Members' time in terms of their work as a Councillor should be treated as voluntary and therefore should not be remunerated.
- v. the assumption that all Members will participate as fully as possible in Council business and play an active role in their Wards and that the importance of these mutually inclusive roles should be reflected in the level of the basic allowance.
- vi. the reviewed scheme should take account of the payments included in the current scheme and any increases which might be recommended should be balanced against the interests of the residents in the District, although we accept that the Council must consider the political implications of the levels of the allowances open to it to pay.
- vii. the reviewed Scheme should continue to be subject to well informed periodic reviews.

7.0 The Work of the Panel

- 7.1 The Panel had previously determined the underlying principles on which the levels of Members' Allowances should be based, as outlined at paragraph 6.2 above.
- 7.2 The Panel's approach required an assessment of the amount of time councillors commit to their duties and their associated workloads in the context of the identified special responsibilities for Executive Members, committee chairmen, the Council Chairman and Opposition Group Leader(s). It is important to highlight that the focus of the review is on the roles rather than the individuals who occupy them.
- 7.3 The Panel was aware of the responsibilities and workloads of Executive members with their specific portfolios.
- 7.4 The Panel noted the additional workload and complexity in the role of the Leader of the Council in leading the political direction of the Council, considerable responsibility for delivering the Council's budget and policy framework and steering the partnership dimension of the Council.
- 7.5 The Panel also had regard to the roles of the Chairman of the Council and Committee Chairmen and Opposition Group Leaders.
- 7.6 As part of its review, the Panel considered the following information which informed its conclusions:
- i. a copy of the Council's Members' Allowances Scheme for 2024/2025
 - ii. a comparison of neighboring authority Members' Allowances
 - iii. comparative data from the Members' Allowances survey undertaken by South East Employers which outlines the basic, special responsibility and other allowance payments made by Council's in the South East Region
 - iv. the overall financial position of the Council
 - v. the general economic climate
 - vi. any recent changes in the roles, responsibilities, and workload of specific Member post
 - vii. a summary of Members' responses to the Annual Survey (further details of the survey are set out in section 8)

- viii. any additional comments Members wished to make in respect of the current allowance scheme
- ix. the discussions with the Members who spoke to the Panel
- x. the increase in cost of living and level of CDC staff pay awards.

8.0 Members' Allowance Scheme Annual Survey

8.1 The Panel continues to place great importance on the information gathered by way of the Annual Survey. The purpose of the Annual Survey is to determine:

- i. the amount of time Members estimate they spend on Council business during an average month
- ii. Members views on the adequacy, or otherwise, of the current levels of Members' Allowances at the Council; and
- iii. whether Members would like to address the Panel in person.

8.2 The Annual Survey had been circulated to all 48 elected Members. 29 surveys were returned, which represents 60% of the Council's membership.

8.3 The Panel was very grateful to those Members who responded to the survey. The Panel believes that the information requested was vital undertaking proper and meaningful review.

8.4 Results from questions 1 – 4 of the 29 surveys received were as follows:

Question 1 – How long have you been a Councillor?

- Less than 1 year 6
- 1 – 4 years 16
- 4 – 8 years 3
- 8 – 12 years 0
- Over 12 years 4

Question 2 – What is your current role?

- Leader of the Council/Leader of Opposition/Group leader 2
- Deputy Leader of the Council Deputy Leader of 4
Opposition/Deputy Group Leader
- Chairman/Vice Chairman of the Council 0
- Executive Member 4
- Committee Chairman/Vice Chairman 2
- None of the above 15

- Prefer not to say

2

Question 3 – What is your employment status?

- Retired 6
- Employed full time 11
- Employed part time 4
- Self Employed 6
- Not Employed 2
- Other 0

Question 4 - How many hours do you spend on Council work each month?

- 0 hours 2
- 10 hours 2
- 15 hours 1
- 20 hours 3
- 30 hours 3
- 45 hours 1
- 50 hours 2
- 80 hours 1
- 90 1
- 100 hours 7

8.5 Questions 5 – 9 sought comments from Members on the level of basic allowance, SRA, travel, subsistence, childcare and dependants' carers' allowances, time commitment and voluntary aspects of time given and any additional comments.

- (a) Of the respondents who responded and receive an SRA, 15 considered that an average of 21 hours per month related to the post for which the SRA was received. Five respondents who receive an SRA gave an answer of other.
- (b) 24 respondents considered that part of their time was given on a voluntary basis.
- (c) With regards to the current rate of member allowances and the workload associated with the role and if it was thought to be adequate:
 - 19 Members thought that the allowance should be increased in line with any cost of living percentage changes in the CDC officer pay rates
 - Six thought it should be increased by an amount not linked to CDC officer cost of living pay awards.
 - None (0) considered the allowance should be frozen at the current level, and

- Three thought that Members' Allowances should be assessed every 4 years and an automatic increase matching the staff annual cost of living pay award is applied.
- (d) One respondent commented on current levels of Basic and Special Responsibility allowances as follows:
- “In my view allowances at CDC are fairly low and should at least increase each year in line with the above, to allow people of working age to undertake senior roles given the time commitment involved, as well as to provide incentive for people from all backgrounds and incomes to participate as councillors”.
- (e) With regards to Dependants' Carers' Allowance, Childcare Allowance, Travel and Subsistence Allowances, respondents made the following comments:
- “No Milage allowance when visiting parish council meeting sorry”
 - “Travel allowance does not seem to keep up with inflation.”
 - “I have children and I find it challenging to claim / organise support in this area using the current scheme.”
 - “Not yet claimed my mileage allowance despite being quite a long way. I'm told by a fellow councillor it is a pain.”
- (f) The following additional comments were made by 13 of the respondents:
- “Allowances should include costs of working from home, personal printers, phones, gas and electricity etc”.
 - “For some portfolio holders the SRA does not compensate for the hours spent on the role.”
 - “CDC councillor allowances are some of the lowest in Oxfordshire. Many dedicated councillors put a significant amount of work into their role. Whilst there is definitely a voluntary aspect, that doesn't mean there shouldn't be fair compensation for the number of hours that are spent working on behalf of the council and residents. In many cases there are requirements to attend meetings at antisocial hours and that should be acknowledged. In some European countries councillors are paid a proper living wage. I think it's about time we started doing the same. That would encourage more people from other backgrounds to become councillors, rather than just those with private wealth or pensions.”
 - “Nothing additional other than to repeat I think the scheme is needed to allow councillors to offset earnings lost elsewhere from the time involved in carrying out our duties.”
 - “Should be in line with OCC.”
 - “I think it should be increased in accordance with other allowances in local government in this category.”

- “Vice Chair should receive some sort of SRA Allowance. Breaking down the hourly rate it works out very low. I appreciate we don't get involved for financial reasons!!”
- “I now realise how important it is to have an allowance scheme, in order to attract people from all walks of life to apply to become a councillor and engage with local politics.”
- “The mileage rate for bicycle travel is 20p / mile (running costs may be a couple of tyres and break blocks - e.g., pennies. Mileage rate for motorcycle is 24p/mile!! (Running costs very similar to a car requiring insurance, VED, MOT, plus a couple of much more expensive tyres and maintenance costs and certified protective clothing! Hardly covered by the 4p a mile difference between a human powered bicycle and a motor bicycle?). Maybe make representation to the Government to get this anomaly corrected please?!”
- “I think some form of regular allowance for those with dependants would be helpful.”
- “Might need to consider, to attract new members in future, more allowances.”
- “Being a councillor cannot be the reserve of the retired and financially secure. Finance puts younger people off entering public life.”
- “the member’s allowance is about right amount.”

8.6 Of the Members who requested to address the Panel, Councillor Barry Wood was able to attend when the Panel’s meeting was scheduled.

9.0 Basic Allowance

9.1 The Panel considered the level of Basic Allowance. It is required in the relevant legislation that a Basic Allowance of the same value be provided to all members of the Council. The allowance is intended to remunerate councillors for their time spent as a councillor, covering incidental costs incurred by them as ordinary members of the Council, including the use of their homes.

9.2 The Panel has previously consistently used the annual pay settlement for Cherwell District Council (CDC) staff as one of their main considerations for recommending adjustment to the levels of the Basic and SRA paid to Members. This year it was again proposed that for the current year the review of the Basic Allowance should reflect the 3.5% increase agreed as part of the staff pay award for 2025/2026.

9.3 Having regard to the various calls on councillors’ time, conscious that a proportion of time is voluntary, the levels of basic allowance paid by comparator councillors, and taking into particular consideration the current economic climate and the comments from the Members’ survey:

The Panel recommends:

- (a) That the Basic Allowance be increased in in line with the 2025/2026 staff pay award (3.5%), rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025.

	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Basic Allowance	£5,040 pa	£5,220 pa

10.0 Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA)

- 10.1 The Panel reviewed the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA).
- 10.2 In line with its recommendation to increase the Basic Allowance for 2024/2025, the Panel agreed that SRA should be increased on the same terms.

The Panel recommends:

- (b) That all Special Responsibility Allowances be increased in in line with the 2025/2026 staff pay award (3.5%), rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025.

Special Responsibility Allowance	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Chairman of the Council	£5,040 pa	£5,220 pa
Leader of the Council	£16,032 pa	£16,596 pa
Deputy Leader of the Council	£10,344 pa	£10,716 pa
Executive Member holding a portfolio	£7,476 pa	£7,740 pa
Leader of Main Opposition Group	£3,468 pa	£3,600 pa
Minority Opposition Group Leader (6 or more Members)	50% of Main Opposition Group Leader SRA	50% of Main Opposition Group Leader SRA
Minority Opposition Group Leader (2-5 Members)	25% of Main Opposition Group Leader SRA	25% of Main Opposition Group Leader SRA
Chairman of Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee	£4,164 pa	£4,320 pa

Chairman of Appeals Panel	£300 SRA plus £300 per meeting to a capped limit of £1800 per annum	£312 SRA plus £312 per meeting to a capped limit of £1872 per annum
Chairman of Budget Planning Committee	£4,164 pa	£4,320 pa
Chairman of General Licensing Committee / Licensing Acts Committee	£888 pa	£924 pa
Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	£4,164 pa	£4,320 pa
Chairman of Personnel Committee	£1,488 pa	£1,548 pa
Chairman of Planning Committee	£4,980 pa	£5,160 pa
Chairman of Standards Committee	£888 pa	£924 pa

11.0 Co-optee Allowance

- 11.1 In considering co-optee allowance, the Panel noted that there are currently no co-optees but agreed a consistent approach to increase this allowance in line with the Basic Allowance and SRA's.

The Panel recommends:

- (c) That the co-optees allowance be increased in line with the staff pay award for 2025/2026 (3.5%) and rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025.

	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Co-optee Allowance	£864 pa	£900 pa

12.0 Independent Persons Allowance

- 12.1 The Council currently has two Independent Persons, who support the Monitoring Officer with code of conduct matters and two Independent Persons who are non-voting members of the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee.
- 12.2 The Panel agreed that a consistent approach to the increase in this allowance in line with the increase for the Basic Allowance and SRAs.

The Panel recommends:

- (d) That the Independent Persons allowance be increased in line with the staff pay award for 2025/2026 (3.5%) and rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025.

	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Independent Persons Allowance	£864 pa	£900 pa

13.0 Dependants' Carers' and Childcare Allowance

- 13.1 In considering the dependants' carers' and childcare allowances, the Panel noted that these allowances were claimed very infrequently but agreed that the availability of the allowances was extremely important to encourage those with families or care responsibilities to stand as a councillor.
- 13.2 The Panel agreed that the dependants' carers' and childcare allowance should be maintained with no change to the rates payable.
- 13.3 All conditions to claim the allowance would remain the same.

The Panel recommends:

- (e) That Dependants' Carers' and Childcare Allowances remain at the current level, paid on the basis of the actual costs incurred up to the maximum hourly rate set out below and to a maximum cap of 40 hours per month, subject to production of receipts and which cannot be paid to a member of the claimant's household.

	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Childcare	£10 per hour	£10 per hour
Dependant relative care	£20 per hour	£20 per hour

14.0 Travelling and Subsistence Allowances

- 14.1 In reviewing the current level of Travelling and Subsistence Allowances, the Panel noted that all travel rates are set at the specified HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC) rates and consequently had no implications for the tax liabilities of Members. Travel rates for motorcycles and motor vehicles are paid regardless of the cc of motorcycle or motor vehicle concerned and remain the

same. These rates remain unchanged. Should the rates change, any change should be applied to the rates in the Members' Allowances Scheme.

- 14.2 In relation to Subsistence Allowances, the Panel had originally agreed that allowances should be paid up to the maximum rates notified by the National Joint Council for Officers index linked to the Retail Prices Index (including mortgages). Since 1996 when the National Joint Council for Officers ceased to produce nationally agreed subsistence rate for local government staff, subsistence rates have been a subject for local determination. The Council had applied the Local Government Association rates. The Panel agreed that the staff levels should be used going forward.
- 14.3 The Panel was advised that a review of the staff Travel and Subsistence policy had been undertaken in the summer with a revised Policy agreed by the Personnel Committee in September 2024.
- 14.4 Noting the review, the Panel agreed that the same maximum subsistence levels should be applied to the Members' Allowance Scheme. With regards subsistence claims, having regard to the staff Policy and comparator councils' Members' Allowances Schemes, the Panel agreed to recommend that claims for subsistence should only be for approved duties outside the district. It was considered that subsistence claims should not be claimed for any approved duties in the district as the basic allowance is deemed to cover all within district costs.
- 14.4 Expenses incurred by councillors appointed as Non-Executive Directors of companies will continue to be paid at the same rate and recharged to the relevant company.

The Panel recommends:

- (e) That mileage remain at the current level in line with HMRC approved mileage rates and if any adjustments are implemented by HMRC then the revised rates be applied to Members' travel allowances effective at the date of implementation by HMRC.

	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Bicycles	20p per mile	20p per mile
Motorcycles	20p per mile	20p per mile
Motor vehicles	24p per mile	24p per mile
Electric vehicles	45p per mile	45p per mile

- (g) That, having regard to the detailed review of staff subsistence, the rates for subsistence allowance be aligned with the revised maximum staff subsistence levels with claims permitted on approved duties of over 5 hours outside the district* subject to the submission of receipts (*subsistence allowances cannot be claimed for any duties within the district as the basic allowance is deemed to cover all within district expenses).

	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Breakfast	£6.02	£7.50
Lunch	£8.31	£10.50
Tea / coffee	N/A	£4.00
Evening Meal	£10.29	£12.50

- (h) That Democratic Services continue to book overnight accommodation, if required.
- (i) That there be no change to the list of approved duties for which claims may be made.

15.0 Non-Executive Directors on Council Owned Companies

- 15.1 In 2018 it was agreed that Members who were Non-Executive Directors (NED) of both Graven Hill Companies (Graven Hill Development Company Limited, (DEVCO) and Graven Hill Village Holdings Limited (HOLDCO)) should receive an allowance comparable to the Special Responsibility Allowance paid to the Planning Committee Chairman.
- 15.2 In line with the recommendations for SRA's, the Panel agreed to recommend a consistent increase to the NED allowance.
- 15.3 Allowances paid to NEDs are paid through Cherwell District Council and recharged to the companies.

The Panel recommends:

- (j) That Non-Executive Director allowances be increased in line with the staff pay award for 2025/2026 (3.5%), rounded up to give 12 equal payments from 1 April 2025 and costs recharged to the relevant company.

	Current level 2024/2025	Proposed 2025/2026 level
Non-Executive Directors Graven Hill Village Holding Company Limited and Graven Hill Village Development Company	£4,980 pa	£5,160

16.0 Review of Members' Allowance Scheme and Indexation

- 16.1 As set out at paragraph 3.2, each local authority may determine that allowances should be increased in accordance with a specified index, can identify the index and set the number of years (not exceeding four) for which it should apply.
- 16.2 The Panel noted that a council can apply an index to their allowances in circumstances where the only change each year is the application of the index. Many authorities have adopted an indexed scheme whereby allowances are amended annually by the reference to the annual pay award for staff at that authority and takes effect from the date on which the staff award takes effect.
- 16.3 Cherwell District Council does not currently have an indexed scheme, rather the Panel meets annually and makes recommendations to Council for consideration as part of the following years scheme.

17.0 Future Review of the Members' Allowance Scheme

- 17.1 At their meeting, the Panel was updated on the Cherwell boundary review the Local Government Boundary Commission for England had commenced. The review would continue over the next two years with all-out elections taking place on new district boundaries in May 2027.
- 17.2 The Panel agreed that a more "root and branches" review of the Members' Allowance Scheme should be undertaken to align with the district boundary review and to be implemented at the elections scheduled for May 2027.
- 17.3 In mid-December, the Government published a devolution White Paper which will result in new single tier local government structures in Oxfordshire rather than the current two tier structure of Oxfordshire County Council and the district councils and city council.
- 17.4 At this stage we do not know what the new arrangements will be but it is understood that the transition may be relatively rapid. Notwithstanding the Local Government Boundary Commission for England has advised that, at present, the Cherwell boundary review will continue.

17.5 In light of the Government White Paper, the Panel had initially considered withdrawing the recommendation to undertake a “root and branches” review of the Scheme. However, having regard to comments from Group Leaders and Deputy Group Leaders who were briefed on the Panel’s recommendations, the Panel has agreed to retain the recommendation with slightly amended wording to allow for flexibility as further information becomes available on local government reorganisation and devolution.

The Panel recommends:

(k) That an in-depth (“root and branches”) review of the Members’ Allowance Scheme be undertaken with implementation to be determined when further information on local government reorganisation, devolution and the Cherwell boundary review is known.

Mr Christopher White (Chairman)
Independent Remuneration Panel
December 2024.