

Cllr. Geoffrey Welsh
Leader of the Liberal
Democrat Group & Chairman
of the Scrutiny Commission
Blaby District Council
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Leicestershire
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The Chairman
Independent Remuneration Panel
Blaby District Council

Ref Independent Remuneration Panel Review

11th September 2011

Dear Sir,

I received correspondence from Blaby District Council indicating that you are about to undertake a review of the current allowance scheme.

I would like to make a submission to assist you in your work and deliberations.

My overriding comment is that you remain independent. The work of the panel since its inception following the introduction of the legislation has been of a very standard indeed. My second plea is that the scheme is not changed or altered but rather reviewed as is.

I fear that you will yet again come under pressure to reduce the allowance to two specific members of this council. These being the leaders of the two minority groups and their separate roles in terms of political balance and challenge and their separate work in scrutiny.

I have repeatedly seen proposals from the majority group to reduce our two allowances. This may be under the guise of a need to lower overall expenditure in these difficult times or suggesting that that you look at another way of comparing responsibility. The end result always sought is to reduce our allowances.

It is my belief that responsibility allowances reflect both the responsibility of the role and even more so the work, time and effort expended by a member.

In terms of my specific allowances, the work of a minority group leader and that of the Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission is quite separate and different. In fact it is vital to separate these two functions. The former is to ensure that political opposition is in place to challenge and invigorate the work of the lead group and to ensure that the democratic wishes of the population are carried out. The second function is to ensure that the scrutiny role as defined in the local government act of 2000 is fully delivered. This role is to support the work of the cabinet executive and ensure that Blaby is a high performance council offering best value. The two must be separate and clearly distinct.

The Leader of the Council and his deputy are remunerated at a level higher than that of other cabinet members. They carry out the normal role of a cabinet member and on top of this carry out a political role in terms of delivering the manifesto of the lead group and managing the political process attached to this. In this case the roles can be combined, as there is no conflict.

The workload in terms of hours undertaken and the seriousness I attach to my two roles is well known to the panel from previous meetings and discussions and I will not regurgitate again the finer details unless you ask for such.

In the absence of the old Audit Commission, the work of scrutiny at Blaby is even more critical and beneficial. It is scrutiny who now offers the role of critical friend to the cabinet. This role is non-political and non-partisan. It delivers challenge on performance and helps develop new policy. It holds the executive to account through call in. The majority of the members of the scrutiny commission and the associated working parties are members of the majority conservative group. This makes my role as chairman difficult and challenging. I have to keep this role separate to my group leader role. I have a very large work load and fulfil the role to a high standard. This has led to Blaby winning national awards and commendation.

I think that to lower my allowances at the moment would send absolutely the wrong message in terms of the role and responsibility of scrutiny.

It is my belief that the current scheme is wholly founded on good evidence including comparison with close members of our family of councils. The current allowances are correct and reflect correctly the work of different groups and individuals in this Council. I further believe that the panel should resist any pressure to change the scheme but should remain steadfast and proud of the work and deliberations of the past.

I hope these comments are helpful to the panel.

Yours sincerely

Cllr. Geoff Welsh
Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission.
Blaby District Council.