

From: Philip Fox [philinfox@yahoo.co.uk]  
Sent: 09 August 2008 13:33  
To: Matthew Berry  
Subject: Re: Review of Members Allowances Scheme

Dear Matthew,

Pse can you convey the following to Dr. Kiernan re the Allowance panel.

1. Re members' allowances. There is a greater demand on members now to participate in the fuller running of the council. More Scrutiny meetings are being designed to accommodate the growing list of issues requiring scrutiny and attention - hoisted by the increase of work being done by the cabinet and thus the mirror-effect taking place - so that we can keep pace with all the internal and external changes taking place. E.g. - the huge internal Review of staff and the effect it will undoubtedly have on staff and the smooth running of council. Members have requested constantly to be provided with IT equipment to sustain their role, but this still has not been addressed. It is something of an anomaly that a big council like Blaby still cannot budget for this essential part of the job. We still request hard-copy communication but more and more we are offered, perhaps for convenience and expediency - emails etc. That being the case, where an officer can easily access email equipment as part of their job, making it easy for them to communicate - members are still in the 'dark-ages'. We members meanwhile, are expected to have our own equipment and to use it and the resources to drive it from our own resources. Some members do not have computers, even of their own and this too seems to be discriminatory. To do the job properly members should either be compensated or equipment purchased for them. Accessing the info from the joint members room is also unfair in that travel has to take place to find out any messages if a member has no IT. The increasing inter-action between the tax-payer and their councillors needs IT. Customers are now accustomed to emailing information/ complains/ queries etc and expect a high-level of response. This is achievable via IT and not telephone and hard-copy. Perhaps the Allowance Board can consider this aspect of allowances/ requirement for members?
2. Although there is a regular review, annually, of members' allowances, it does seem that in only linking the basic allowance to alleged inflation members suffer a real cut - why?- because increases in petrol, cost-of-living items linked to council work, take their toll. I think therefore that an increase of say 2% on top of nominal inflation increases would be right and appropriate at this time.
3. As you may know, members from each political group have served for a long time on the shadow Housing Board called Three Oaks (now the proper Board) on behalf of the council. These meetings are not just set at Blaby but are regularly called through-out not only the district but even outside the district. The number of meetings during this difficult transition period has increased. Whilst some members have had compensation if they serve on Planning or Standards, this is NOT the case for members

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serving on this essential Board - please remember they are representing the council and shall continue to do so AFTER transfer is completed. It would be appropriate that as they are council reps, they should be given a special allowance. We have councillors who do a great job re being 'champions'. Are not the Board members, approved by the Leader and council, as important? Their input to the Board is essential if the business of council is properly conducted and represented. Perhaps an allowance of 1k per member per annum? Seems fair and in accord with other allowances. Our tenants deserve to be represented fully.

4. I believe all other allowances should remain, esp. special allowances. They are an integral part of our scheme and are an 'incentive' to councillors who may aspire to taking on further responsibilities.
5. It is important that the allowance system be sustained. In a time when senior officer/staff pay is increasing via increasing challenges that demand up-lifts, members too should feel they are valued and essential to the operation of council. It is right to say that any consideration of discriminatory changes (cuts) to members allowances should be rejected. To maintain a council where democratic participation prevails requires 'equal' recognition (within fair limits) of both staff AND councillors. I do hope the Board appreciate this point.

Very many thanks for reading my input. I do hope it has been useful. Thank you for taking the time to review these matters.

Cllr. Phil Fox