



Tuesday, 12 March 2024

(1) MEMBERS OF THE AVON FIRE AUTHORITY

Councillors B Massey, B Nutland, L Brennan, R Eddy, P Goggin, R Hardie, P Hulme, P May, Y Mohamud, R Moss, R Payne, M Riddle, O Saini, S Smith, J Stansfield, D Thomas, R Tucker, A Varney, D Wilcox and M Williams
Police and Crime Commissioner: M Shelford
Independent Person: J Mason

(2) APPROPRIATE OFFICERS

(3) PRESS AND PUBLIC

Dear Member

You are invited to attend a meeting of the **Avon Fire Authority** to be held on **Wednesday, 20 March 2024** commencing at **14:00 hrs.**

The meeting will be held at **Main Conference Room (above Reception), Admin Building, Police and Fire Headquarters, Valley Road, Portishead, BS20 8JJ.** Parking is available on site.

In order to ensure COVID-19 guidance is adhered to risk assessments have been undertaken for live meetings to identify and put in place, the measures required ensuring that meetings take place safely. Further information is available on our website [Avon Fire Authority](http://www.avonfire.gov.uk).

Please note that this meeting will be video recorded and published on our YouTube channel (see the Notes on the next page).

Yours sincerely

Amanda Brown
Clerk to the Fire Authority

PROVIDING AVON FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE



Clerk to Avon Fire Authority
PO Box 37, Police and Fire HQ, Valley Road, Portishead, Bristol BS20 8JJ
Telephone 0117 926 2061 Extension 231 the.clerk@avonfire.gov.uk



Notes

Attendance Register – Attendance will be recorded by the Democratic Services Assistant and recorded within the Minutes of the Meeting.

Code of Conduct – Declaration of Interests: any Member in attendance who has a personal interest in any matter to be considered at this meeting must disclose the existence and nature of that interest at the commencement of that consideration, or when the interest becomes apparent. A Member having a prejudicial interest must withdraw from the meeting room or meeting whilst the matter is considered.

Contact: for any queries about the Meeting please contact Democratic Services on 0117 926 2061 ext. 231; or by e mail at the.clerk@avonfire.gov.uk; or in person at Police and Fire HQ, Valley Road, Portishead, Bristol, BS20 8JJ (by appointment during normal office hours only).

Emergency Evacuation Procedures: these will be advised at the start of the Meeting if appropriate.

Exempt Items: Members are reminded that any Exempt Reports as circulated with this Agenda contain exempt information and should therefore be treated accordingly. They should not be disclosed or passed on to any other person(s). Members are also reminded of the need to dispose of such reports carefully and are therefore invited to return them to the Clerk at the conclusion of the Meeting for disposal.

Inspection of Papers: any person wishing to inspect Minutes, Reports, or a list of the background papers relating to any item on this Agenda should contact Democratic Services as above.

Public Access: under Standing Order 21 and providing 2 clear working days' notice has been given to the Clerk (the.clerk@avonfire.gov.uk) any resident or representative of a business or voluntary organisation operating in Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset or North Somerset Council may address the Fire Authority or one of its Committees (for no more than 5 minutes) by submitting a written petition or statement. If preferred, the Chair or Clerk can read out a written statement on the individual's behalf. There is a time limit of 30 minutes for all Public Access statements.

Reports: reports are identified by the relevant agenda item number.

Substitutes (for Committees only): notification of substitutes should have been received from Group Leaders by the Clerk prior to the meeting.

A G E N D A - Avon Fire Authority Wednesday, 20 March 2024
14:00

Pages

UPDATED 01.05.2024 PARAGRAPH 6.24 - APPENDIX 1 INDEPENDENT
REVIEW BY SOUTH WEST COUNCILS FEBRUARY 2024

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INDEPENDENT REVIEW

AVON FIRE AUTHORITY MEMBERS'
ALLOWANCES SCHEME

February 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Avon Fire Authority ("the Authority") commissioned an Independent Review of their Allowances scheme following the last review in 2021.

In reaching the recommendations in this Review the independent advisor did not make judgements taking account of budgetary pressures but recognised that there were ongoing financial pressures which Members will wish to take this into account in considering their decisions.

It is important to emphasise that Allowances are not intended as salaries but are intended to recognise the time commitment of Members whilst continuing with the principle of 'public service' whereby the work of Members continues to be voluntary - that some hours are not remunerated. This must be balanced against the need to ensure that financial loss is not suffered by Members and ensure that people are encouraged and able to come forward to serve the community.

The recommendations are outlined below, these have been arrived at following the review of evidence including from the survey of Members and interviews alongside benchmarking information.

RECOMMENDATION 1: The Basic Allowance be set at £3,156

RECOMMENDATION 2: The policy of allowing only one SRA per Member (at the highest rate applicable) should remain in place.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The multiplier of 4.3x Basic Allowance be continued for setting the Special Responsibility Allowance of the Authority Chair. This results in an Authority Chair's Allowance of £14,861 in 2024/25 (assuming the Basic Allowance is increased as per the recommendation above).

RECOMMENDATION 4: A multiplier of 2.2x Basic Allowance be introduced for setting the Special Responsibility Allowance of the Authority Vice Chair. This results in a Vice Chair's Allowance of £6,899 in 2024/25 (assuming the Basic Allowance is increased as per the recommendation above).

RECOMMENDATION 5: A multiplier of 0.66x Basic Allowance be introduced for setting the Special Responsibility Allowance of the Group Leaders. This results in a Group Leaders Allowance of £2,082 in 2024/25 (assuming the Basic Allowance is increased as per the recommendation above).

RECOMMENDATION 6: No Special Responsibility Allowance should be paid to Committee Chairs.

RECOMMENDATION 7: No Special Responsibility Allowance should be paid to Committee Vice Chairs.

RECOMMENDATION 8: The allowance for the Local Pensions Board should be set at 0.15x basic allowance giving an allowance of £473 from 1st April 2024.

RECOMMENDATION 9: From 1st April 2025 uprating of Allowances should continue to be linked to any annual increase agreed by the NJC for Local Government Services (Green Book). In the event of a flat-rate increase arising from the Green Book pay award in any future year, the automatic uprating applied should be the percentage increase on the Green Book allowances. [For avoidance of doubt the uplift should not apply to the Allowances for the year from 1st April 2024].

RECOMMENDATION 10: The Allowance for the Independent Person and Independent Member on AGOC should remain the same at £1,000 pa and £210 per quarterly meeting respectively, plus appropriate expenses.

RECOMMENDATION 11: travel expenses should continue to be paid for Members and Independent Persons on duties specified under the current Schedule 2 in line with HMRC rates. Subsistence should continue to be paid in line with the rates for employees. Members should continue to claim these within three months of being incurred [Any increases or decreases to HMRC rates should automatically be reflected in the payment to Members in the future].

RECOMMENDATION 12: The next full Review should take place to inform the Allowances Scheme which will take effect from 1st April 2028. Members may wish to consider an earlier review in relation particularly the Vice Chair of Committee Allowance and the Independent Member of AGOC.

ADVISORY RECOMMENDATION 13: The Advisor supports and encourages the implementation of the Governance Review recommendation agreed by the Authority that *"The Authority's training and development programme should be revised to ensure that it provides Members with the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to exercise their governance roles effectively"*.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Avon Fire Authority (the Authority) is a body corporate and as such is required to have a scheme of Allowances. These Allowances are set under *The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003*. In setting the level of Allowances the Authority must have regard to the recommendations made by any Independent Remuneration Panel in relation to any local authority that nominates Members to the Authority. Fire authorities are not required to set up their own Independent Remuneration Panel but may conclude that some external, independent advice is appropriate.
- 1.2. Avon Fire Authority decided to appoint an Advisor to undertake a review. The Advisor and author of this report, Bryony Houlden, is Chief Executive of South West Councils. The Advisor undertook the 2021 review, she has also been the Independent Advisor to Devon and Somerset FRS in their reviews since 2012. In addition, she is currently Chair of the Torbay Council, North Devon Council and Torridge Council Independent Remuneration Panels, is a member of the Cornwall Council, Devon County Council, Exeter City Council, Somerset Council, South Hams District Council, Plymouth City and West Devon Borough Council Panels. She is an advisor to the Bristol City Council, Bath and NE Somerset and North Somerset Panels.
- 1.3. Under the regulations Fire Authorities must not rely on just adjusting Allowances in line with an index for longer than four years, this Review is being undertaken earlier than the four-year timeline because of the governance changes that have occurred making a Review timely.
- 1.4. In developing the recommendations, the Advisor was helped by input from Members. Half of the 20 Members submitted responses to a questionnaire about the current Scheme. 5 Members were also interviewed including the Chair and Vice Chair.
- 1.5. In undertaking the Review the Advisor was grateful for the excellent and helpful support of Amanda Brown, Clerk & Monitoring Officer, Avon Fire Authority and Emma Bowen, Democratic Services Assistant.

2. Background

- 2.1. Avon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service provides emergency and protection services to the communities of Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. The Service covers an area of 134,753 hectares and a population of over one million.
- 2.2. The Service employs around 800 people; this includes around 500 Wholetime firefighters, 120 On-call firefighters, 35 Control staff and 120 Support Staff.
- 2.3. The Fire Authority consists of 20 councillors appointed by the Councils in proportion to the number of people entitled to vote in their respective

areas: Bath & North East Somerset: 3 Members; Bristol: 8 Members; North Somerset: 4 Members; South Gloucestershire: 5 Members. Members set the strategic direction, set and oversee the budget and ensure the delivery of the overall objectives.

- 2.4. The Full Authority meets quarterly including the AGM in June, the meeting scheduled for February each year is for Members to approve the annual budget.
- 2.5. The supporting structure of the Fire Authority's work has recently changed following an Independent Governance Review. The Review was considered by the Fire Authority at an Extraordinary meeting on 25 April 2023 and as a result the the structure was changed to reduce the number of Committees from three to two:
 - ▶ Policy and Resources Committee (PRC). The Chair of Avon Fire Authority is automatically the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee;
 - ▶ Audit, Governance and Oversight Committee (AGOC), which meet quarterly. The Vice Chair of the Fire Authority is automatically the Chair of the Audit, Governance and Oversight Committee. There is an Independent member of this committee.
- 2.6. Both the PRC and AGOC have Vice Chairs.
- 2.7. There are also two Member representatives on the Local Pension Board which meets twice a year. Members have to receive specialist training.

3. Purpose

- 3.1. The purpose of this Review is to provide recommendations (together with the rationale for those recommendations) covering the following issues:
 - ▶ The level of the Basic Allowance for 2024/25;
 - ▶ The level and number of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) for 2024/25;
 - ▶ The Independent Person Allowance;
 - ▶ An appropriate mechanism for annual uprating of the Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances from 2025 onwards;
 - ▶ The level of travel and subsistence reimbursement from April 2024.

4. Methodology

- 4.1. In producing the Report the following have been considered:
 - i. The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) Regulations 2003 and the Guidance issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government;
 - ii. Review of Avon Fire Authority's Governance Arrangements and Committee Terms of Reference;

- iii. Fire Authority Appointments and Appointments to Committees 2023/24;
- iv. The current Avon Fire Authority Allowances scheme;
- v. The Allowances schemes for the constituent authorities: Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire;
- vi. Evidence obtained directly from Members all of whom were invited to complete a questionnaire and interviews with some Members;
- vii. Benchmark data on current Fire and Rescue Authority Allowances schemes across England;
- viii. Guidance: A practical guide for those involved in the work of Independent Remuneration Panels produced by SW Councils.

5. Basic Allowance

- 5.1. The current Basic Allowance from 1 April 2023 is set at: £3,020. This reflects the staged increases recommended in the last independent review aimed at bringing the Allowances more in line with benchmarking information as Avon Fire Authority was below the average of all benchmarking groups at the time.
- 5.2. As set out in the Guidance (referred to at 4.1 (viii) above) the Basic Allowance is intended to: *"recognise the time commitment of all councillors, including such inevitable call on their time as meetings with officers and constituents and attendance at political group meetings. It is also intended to cover incidental costs such as the use of their homes"*. The Basic Allowance paid *"must be the same for each councillor"* and it cannot be based on measures such as attendance at meetings or any judgement on a Member's contribution to the work of the Authority.
- 5.3. In setting the level of Allowances the Guidance suggests considering the rate at which, and the number of hours for which, councillors ought to be remunerated - with an important emphasis on some element of the work continuing to be voluntary- the *"public sector ethos"*. This *"public sector ethos"* must be balanced against encouraging participation and ensuring that financial loss is not suffered. There is no set approach or amount recommended to take account of the "public sector" element. Where a discount is applied these range up to 33% in the most recent survey undertaken by SW Councils.
- 5.4. In the survey, Members were asked to indicate the average number of hours per week they spend on Avon Fire Authority business (excluding any role for which they were paid an SRA). Answers varied from two hours a week to six hours. This top level is lower than reported in the 2021 survey (which had a larger number of responses). Members commented that the workload was very variable, sometimes spending almost no time and then on other occasions meetings seemed to follow in quick succession and require a considerable number of hours. The average hours estimated was just over 3½, slightly down from 4½ at the last review. It is worth noting that a similar exercise in the review of Devon and Somerset FRS Allowances in 2023 ranged from 1 to 20 hours and comments included the fact they were difficult to estimate as the workload was very variable.

- 5.5. The survey asked Members whether they thought the Basic Allowance was currently at the right level. 6 respondents agreed it was with only 2 thinking it was too low. In interview there were comments about the need for the Basic Allowance to be set at a 'reasonable rate' to allow a range of Members, some with employment, to engage. When asked if they felt the current Allowance adequately met the expenses incurred in performing their Fire Authority duties all but one Member felt that it did.
- 5.6. In looking at how to establish an appropriate Basic Allowance background, information has been gathered about the constituent authorities and benchmark data from fire authorities.
- 5.7. The constituent authorities set their Allowances in different ways, including use of staff or average salaries for the area and then applying a formula using hours worked and applying a 'public service discount' recognising that Allowances are not salaries. All four contribute to the annual South West survey of Allowances so are likely to also have regard to this benchmarking information. The Basic Allowance in the four constituent authorities range from £10,225 to £15,169. The Guidance does not specifically suggest that this is an appropriate benchmark group for Fire Authorities given the different nature of the activities and business but it is a useful background figure - and as all the Members of the Authority will be in receipt of one of these Allowances it sets further context.
- 5.8. Benchmark data is perhaps more relevant from other combined fire and rescue authorities. The data obtained is the most up to date available on websites with the majority dating back to 2022/23 but the Allowances for Devon and Somerset Fire Authority are those that have been agreed from 1st April 2024. This reveals a range of basic Allowances from £1,158 - £6,569 with the average basic Allowance being £3,098.
- 5.9. If different benchmark groups are taken from within the whole fire and rescue authority data set, there are other permutations. First, a geographic benchmarking group from the "South West": Dorset & Wiltshire and Devon and Somerset which produces an average of £3,773 [NB the other Fire Authorities in the South West, Gloucestershire and Cornwall are part of the Local Authority so have not been included]. Second a benchmark group of authorities used in the last review with broadly similar sized population: Derbyshire and Derby City; Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland; Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire and Cheshire which produces an average of £3,754 (website data).

Table 1:

	Combined Fire Authorities Average/median (includes Avon)	SW Authorities (Devon/Somerset & Dorset/Wiltshire - excludes Avon)	"similar sized" FRA (Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Cheshire excludes Avon)
Average/median	£3,098/£3,139	£3,773	£3,754/£3,631
RanQe	£1,158-6,569	£3,346 -£4,200	£3,188 - £4,567

- 5.10. The range of the combined fire authorities is wide. It is worth noting that at the last review Avon Fire Authority was substantially below the average but is now much closer to the average although still below. Similarly at the 2021 review it was found that the Avon Fire Authority Allowance was less than half the average of the SW authorities and the 'similar sized' grouping whereas now the Basic Allowance is closer to the average. These averages are, of course, likely to increase in 2024 which is the year this Review is making a recommendation about.
- 5.11. Following the last review Allowances have been increased in two stages and have also risen in line with officer pay settlements, the recommendation below is that this approach to the annual uplift continues but for the coming year the pay settlement has not been decided so cannot be used as a guide to the recommendation. Account has however been taken of the CPI rate for September (6.7%) which is used to set most working-age benefits.
- 5.12. As noted previously it is not the role of the Advisor to consider budgetary pressures although budget concerns and austerity clearly provide a backcloth to the Report and its conclusions. The Advisor in making a recommendation has also taken account of the views of Members: there was not a strong push by Members for the Basic Allowance to be substantially uprated, indeed the majority of Members felt the Allowance was currently at the right level. The Advisor has also noted that there was a low response rate to the questionnaire perhaps reflecting that Members are broadly content with the scheme.
- 5.13. However, it is important that the Authority's Allowances do not start to fall back which would then be likely to require a substantial recalibration and increase in future years. It is also clear that the Avon Fire and Rescue Service is facing considerable challenges and this means there is a key role for the Authority in ensuring improvements and it will be important that Members are fully engaged.
- 5.14. It has been difficult with the range of figures to identify an appropriate level, but the Advisor has concluded that an increase of 4.5% would be justifiable against benchmarking, moving Avon Fire Authority just above the median of the Combined Authorities benchmark group.
- 5.15. **Recommendation 1: The Basic Allowance be set at £3,156.**

6. Special Responsibility Allowances

- 6.1. Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) are payable to those Members who have significant additional responsibilities. The Regulations stipulate the grounds upon which an SRA can be paid but do not prohibit the payment of more than one SRA to any one Member. It is often, though, the adopted practice to limit the number of SRAs payable to any individual Member to one. Avon Fire Authority has adopted the policy of only one Special Responsibility Allowance and the Advisor believes this should continue as the policy.

6.2. **Recommendation 2: The policy of allowing only one SRA per Member (at the highest rate applicable) should remain in place.**

6.3. For 2023/24 the Special Responsibility Allowances were set at:

Table 2:

Chair of the Authority	£12,981
Vice Chair	£3,036
Group Leaders	£2,415
Chair of Committee (although as the Committee chairs are the Authority Chair and Vice Chair no Allowances are being paid)	£3,020

6.4. Benchmarking information is also helpful in considering SRAs.

Table 3:

	Combined Fire Authorities (Includes Avon)	SW Authorities (Devon/Somerset & Dorset/Wiltshire-excludes Avon)	"similar sized" FRA (Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Cheshire)
Chair:			
Average	£13,261	£14,537	£15,598
Range	£8,952 - £23,231	£11,900- £17,175	£10,139- £23,231
Vice Chair:			
Average	£6,901	£7,124	£8,964
Range	£3,036 - £16,593	£5,950- £8,298	£3,350 - 16,593
Group Leaders			
Average	£2,047	Not Paid	£2,085
Range	£ 0 -£5,788 [No Allowance paid in some FRA hence £0 and the average has been calculated to include those paying nothing]		£1,053 - £3,000

6.5. The benchmarking data shows that as with the Basic Allowance there is considerable variation across the Fire Authorities and so the figures have to be treated with some caution.

6.6. SRAs are often set by reference to the Basic Allowance with a multiplier assessed for each post which attracts a SRA. This has been the most common practice across the South West and can be helpful in providing transparency. This approach is suggested to continue in setting the Authority's Allowances as set out below.

Authority Chair

- 6.7. The Authority Chair's Allowance is currently £12,981. There was strong evidence of the commitment and contribution of the Chair, who is a long serving Member. Following the Governance Review the Chair now is also Chair of PRC. The Chair also participates in Ministerial meetings, visits Fire Stations and supports the work of the Authority in a number of other ways.
- 6.8. As in the last Review, other Fire Authorities are regarded as providing the best comparator as set out *above*. They show that the Chair's Allowance is still below all the averages. Evidence suggests the role of the Authority Chair will continue to have a high level of commitment and responsibility particularly given the current challenges facing the Authority.
- 6.9. However, in the survey 70% of Members felt that the Chair's Allowance was set at the right level.
- 6.10. There is currently a multiplier of 4.3x Basic applied for the Chair's Allowance. Taking account of the considerations *above*, the conclusion of the Advisor is that this remains appropriate subject to the recommendation on the increase in the Basic Allowance is agreed.
- 6.11. **Recommendation 3: The multiplier of 4.3x Basic be continued for setting the Special Responsibility Allowance of the Authority Chair. This results in an Authority Chair's Allowance of £14,861 in 2024/25** (assuming the Basic Allowance is increased as per the recommendation above).

Authority Vice Chair

- 6.12. The Authority Vice Chair's Allowance is currently £3,036. The current Vice Chair and Chair clearly work well together, and this relationship is key. The Vice Chair is there to step in when necessary to substitute for the Chair although it is understood this happens infrequently. Since the last Review the Governance changes mean that the Vice Chair now also Chairs a Committee: AGOC.
- 6.13. In looking at benchmarking evidence, this Authority's Vice Chair Allowance is the lowest of any Combined Fire Authority identified in the research.
- 6.14. The survey results showed 60% of Members regarded the Vice Chair's Allowance as too low. At the time of the last Review, it was not felt there was sufficient evidence to make a substantial change to the Vice Chair's Allowance. However, the Governance changes have given the Vice Chair more responsibility with the chairing of a Committee. There was also evidence in the interviews that the Vice Chair was carrying more responsibility. It therefore seems appropriate to recommend an increase in the Vice Chair's Allowance to make it more closely aligned with the *average* across all Fire Authorities.

- 6.15. **Recommendation 4: A multiplier of 2.2x Basic Allowance be introduced for setting the Special Responsibility Allowance of the Authority Vice Chair. This results in a Vice Chair's Allowance of £6,899 in 2024/25** (assuming the Basic Allowance is increased as per the recommendation above).

Political Group Leaders

- 6.16. The Group Leaders Allowance is currently £2,415. The survey responses showed that 70% of Members felt this was about right but others felt it was either too high or too low. In the interviews there were mixed views and evidence suggested that Members felt that the Authority worked well together with a common focus and there was little need for political group activity although it was felt helpful to ensure Group Leaders were engaged in agenda setting discussions for the Authority meetings. Group Leaders also have a role in supporting the Clerk in engaging with Members, encouraging engagement and attendance. There was evidence provided in interview that the role of the Group Leaders may not be as substantial as the Vice Chairs role on the new Committee Structure.
- 6.17. This Allowance is above all the benchmarking groups averages. As noted, six Fire Authorities pay no Allowance for Group Leaders. Eleven Fire Authorities that do pay Political Group Allowances differentiate between the Group Leaders of the second largest Group and minority Groups. The figures used in Table 3 are based on the Allowances for the second largest political group where there is differentiation. The average of the Allowances paid in the eleven authorities for the minority Group Leaders is £1,229. Currently three are two Groups of 6 members, with Labour holding the Chair and the Liberal Democrats the Vice Chair. The Conservatives have 5 Members and the Green Party 3 Members. The evidence of the activity of Group Leaders in Avon Fire Authority did not suggest there should be this differentiation on size of Group but this might be an issue to explore in future reviews when more evidence could be gathered about the work involved in this role in general.
- 6.18. Based on the evidence, the Advisor is of the view that the Allowance for Group Leaders should be reduced to bring it closer to the average of the Combined Authorities (£2,047) and Similar Sized Authorities (£2,085).
- 6.19. **Recommendation 5: A multiplier of 0.66x Basic Allowance be introduced for setting the Special Responsibility Allowance of the Group Leaders. This results in a Group Leaders Allowance of £2,082 in 2024/25** (assuming the Basic Allowance is increased as per the recommendation above).

Committee Chairs

- 6.20. Following the Governance review the Chair of the Authority is now automatically the Chair of Policy and Resources Committee (PRC) and the Vice Chair is automatically the Chair of Audit, Governance and

Oversight Committee (AGOG). There is therefore no need for a separate allowance.

- 6.21. **Recommendation 6: No Special Responsibility Allowance should be paid to Committee Chairs.**

Committee Vice Chairs

- 6.22. The Authority has not paid Vice Chairs of Committees in the past. Under the new structure the Committees are chaired by the Authority Chair and Vice Chair. The Survey results showed 60% of Members thought that the Vice Chairs should receive an Allowance in recognition of the work they were doing. Evidence from interviews was mixed as to whether there was a case for paying such Allowance. As noted above, in interview it was suggested that the role of Vice Chair of a Committee was likely to be more onerous than that of a Group Leader.
- 6.23. Benchmarking evidence only identified two Fire Authorities paying Allowances to Committee Vice Chairs at £1,031 and £781. The Advisor picked up little evidence that the role was sufficiently onerous and significantly more responsibility than the wider membership of the Group. At this point there did not seem a strong case to introduce an Allowance for this role. However, this is a new structure and the role is new so it maybe that the issue should be revisited before the next four yearly review is required.
- 6.24. **Recommendation 7: No Special Responsibility Allowance should be paid to Committee Vice Chairs.**

Local Pension Board Member

- 6.25. There are two Member representatives on the Board, they have not previously been remunerated but has been suggested their role has a level of responsibility that might merit an SRA although the meetings are only twice a year.
- 6.26. There is little benchmarking available but two of the Fire Authorities in benchmarking groups do pay an allowance: Derbyshire and Devon and Somerset. Both set the Allowance at 0.15x Basic Allowance and it is suggested this might be an appropriate level for Avon Fire Authority.
- 6.27. **Recommendation 8: The allowance for the Local Pensions Board should be set at 0.15x basic allowance giving an allowance of £473 from 1st April 2024.**

7. Uprating Mechanism

- 7.1. The recommendations set out above on Allowances apply to the Allowances to be introduced for 2024. In subsequent years an uprating mechanism is required. The Allowances have previously been subject to an annual uplift linked to the non-uniform staff pay award. The survey showed 90% of Members agreed this approach should continue. In the last two years the pay increase has been a flat rate which has made the

appropriate amount for the uplift less clear. The recommendation address that issue should it arise again.

7.2. **Recommendation 9: From 1st April 2025 uprating of Allowances should continue to be linked to any annual increase agreed by the NJC for Local Government Services (Green Book). In the event of a flat-rate increase arising from the Green Book pay award in any future year, the automatic uprating applied should be the percentage increase on the Green Book allowances. [For avoidance of doubt the uplift should not apply to the Allowances for the year from 1st April 2024].**

7.3. This uprating would not apply to the Independent Person's or Independent Member of AGOCs Allowances as set out in Section 8.

8. Independent Person's Allowance and Independent Member of AGOC

8.1. The Allowance for the Independent Person was increased to £1,000 in advance of the last Review reflecting recruitment difficulties. There was some evidence that the workload is low, but unpredictable but as this is a role that needs to be filled, the Advisor is recommending the maintenance of the level of the Allowance.

8.2. The Authority has recently appointed an Independent Member to sit on AGOC. They are paid £210 per quarterly meeting plus expenses as appropriate. There was a comment in the survey that this was too low but as it has only recently been set the recommendation is no change but this might be an issue that Members want to revisit earlier than the 4-yearly review.

8.3. **Recommendation 10: The Allowance for the Independent Person and Independent Member on AGOC should remain the same at £1,000 pa and £210 per quarterly meeting respectively, plus appropriate expenses.**

9. Travel and Subsistence

9.1. Members are entitled to claim Travel and Subsistence when undertaking duties specified in Schedule 2 of the current scheme.

9.2. The rates for travel are currently in line with HMRC approved travel rates. Members are also able to claim subsistence which is paid on the same basis as for employees.

9.3. **Recommendation 11: travel expenses should continue to be paid for Members and Independent Persons on duties specified under the current Schedule 2 in line with HMRC rates. Subsistence should continue to be paid in line with the rates for employees. Members should continue to claim these within three months of being incurred [Any increases or decreases to HMRC rates should automatically be reflected in the payment to Members in the future].**

10. Next Review Date

10.1. Under the regulations Fire Authorities must not rely on just adjusting Allowances in line with an index for longer than four years, this Review is being undertaken earlier than the four-year timeline because of the governance changes that have occurred making a Review timely. There is no reason that a full Review should be needed before four years although as noted above the Authority may want to visit specific issues such as Vice Chair of Committees Allowances and the Independent Member of AGOC earlier than 2027/2028.

10.2. **Recommendation 12: The next full Review should take place to inform the Allowances Scheme with effect from 1st April 2028 but Members may wish to consider an earlier review in relation particularly the Vice Chair of Committee Allowance and the Independent Member of AGOC.**

11. Other Issues

11.1. The last Review in 2021 commented on how to ensure all Members were performing and participating to an appropriate extent and development support for Members. During the interviews for this Review there was again reference to not all the Members fully engaging or understanding the important agenda and issues facing the Authority.

11.2. **Advisory Recommendation 13: The Advisor supports and encourages the implementation of the Governance Review recommendation agreed by the Authority that *"The Authority's training and development programme should be revised to ensure that it provides Members with the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to exercise their governance roles effectively"*.**

**Bryony Houlden
February 2024**