

From: Ben Watts, General Counsel

To: Selection and Member Services Committee, 25 November 2021

Subject: Member Remuneration Panel Report – Matter Arising

Status: Unrestricted

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## 1. Introduction

- a) On 4 November, County Council agreed its Members Allowances Scheme for 2021-25. As per the regulations, Members had before them a report of the independent Member Remuneration Panel (MRP). The MRP recommendations focused mainly on the detail of the Members Allowances Scheme. However, several issues came up during their work that they wished to draw to Members' attention and to ask the Members consider them.
- b) Along with agreeing matters directly related to the Members Allowances Scheme, County Council also agreed the following recommendations of relevance to this Committee<sup>1</sup>:
- That Member attendance at meetings will be tabulated and published as soon as is practical;
  - That the Selection and Member Services Committee be asked to consider whether there is anything in how we operate which militates against a more diverse membership; and
  - That the Selection and Member Services Committee also be asked to consider what additional information could be published to give a more accurate picture of Member contribution as well as how to better promote the Dependents' Carers' Allowance.
- c) The Appendix to this report contains extracts from the MRP report most relevant to the above recommendations.
- d) The first one, on publishing Member attendance at meetings, is being progressed by staff in GLD. Practice in this regard varies across Councils and it is generally accepted that there is not a direct correlation between meeting attendance and the value of the work of an individual Member.

## 2. Diversity

- a) The relevant extracts from the MRP report, pages 6 and 26, are as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=113&MId=8752&Ver=4>

- Diversity – Greater ambitions for More Diverse Representation.** Our analysis of Kent demographics compared to the KCC Member population shows that the Kent population is significantly under-represented in terms of female participation, under-represented in the under-49 years age group and over-represented in the 65+ age group. Notwithstanding the efforts already in play to pursue equality and diversity objectives, the Panel believe it is in the interest of the electorate to be served by KCC Members more broadly aligned with the Kent population than is currently the case. The Panel feel these areas may therefore benefit from more focussed attention and recommend the Council consider establishing a dedicated ‘Lead Member’ role for Diversity to champion ambitions for Equality and Diversity, with a strong focus on creating a more inclusive working culture amongst Members. Whilst there is a view that better diversity is not necessarily within the control of Members, creating a more inclusive working environment, which encourages input from all Members at times and places to better suit those with for example family commitments and employment, will lead to better diversity longer term. Alternatively, we recommend the Council consider a Cabinet Member be given specific accountability for these initiatives and that this role be written into the Cabinet portfolio chosen. **(Detailed rationale provided on page 26)**

**DIVERSITY - GREATER AMBITIONS FOR MORE DIVERSE REPRESENTATION**

The following overviews a comparison of Kent county-wide demographic compared to that of Kent County Council Member. Dimensions of diversity used have been based on information in the public domain and therefore is limited on some aspects including gender definitions, sexual orientation, disabilities and religion. The following table shows the comparison covering age and gender\*.

DIVERSITY PROFILE - KENT POPULATION V KCC MEMBERS (Percentages)								
POPULATION (18 Years +)	AGE			GENDER IDENTITY		ETHNICITY		DISABILITY
	UNDER 49	50 - 64	65+	MALE	FEMALE	WHITE	BLACK / MINORITY	
KENT GENERAL PUBLIC	48.3	25.6	26.2	49	51	93.7	6.3	
KCC MEMBER POPULATION	11.3	36.3	52.5	74	26			

The average age of Kent population (all ages) is 41.2. The average age of KCC Members is 63.5 (as at March 16, 2020)

The table shows the Kent population is significantly under – represented in terms of female participation and younger age groups. We feel it is in the interest of the Kent electorate to have the elected Member population as closely aligned with the general population demographic to ensure:

- The interests of all demographic groups in Kent are well represented and Members with first-hand experience of needs and concerns of various groups can provide informed contribution to Council activity
- KCC accesses and fully leverages the talent and experience present in all demographic groups
- Both the letter and the spirit of KCC’s Equality and Diversity policy principles are fully enacted

We note efforts already in play in various council activities to pursue equality and diversity objectives. However, whilst the Council’s policy emphasises equality and diversity issues are the responsibility of all Members, the KCC Constitution does not appear to make it clear which Cabinet portfolio takes the lead in co-ordinating effort and resource in this complex area.

We therefore recommend the Council consider establishing a dedicated ‘Lead Member’ role for Diversity to champion ambitions for Equality and Diversity and ensure focus and attention on these wide-ranging issues. We would envisage that a key accountability of the role would be to embed behaviours to promote a more inclusive culture amongst Members in their day-to-day activities to help attract and retain a more diverse Member profile and ensure that contribution is encouraged, respected and valued from such a diverse profile.

Illustratively, pending fuller evaluation, we have included an SRA for this role of £22,798 in our costings, equivalent to that of the Lead Member for Partnerships, (see table, page 28) to show that, inclusive of this SRA level, our overall proposals achieve a cost reduction.

Alternatively, the Council may wish to consider giving specific accountability for co-ordinating Equality and Diversity issues to a Cabinet Member and ensure that this role be written into the Cabinet portfolio chosen. Arguably this could be within the remit of the Cabinet Member for Communications, Engagement and People.

\*Population data derived from: <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-Kent/population-and-census#tab-1>

\*Age data derived from: [https://www.kent.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/14725/Mid-year-population-estimates-age-and-gender.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/14725/Mid-year-population-estimates-age-and-gender.pdf)

### 3. Transparency

a) The relevant extracts from the MRP report, pages 6 and 27, are as follows:

- **Transparency Issues.** We consider it important that KCC is as transparent as possible with information it maintains regarding Member workload - particularly in relation to attending formal Council meetings. Though this in no way reflects the total contribution Members make, it is information that should be available to the public in an easily accessible format. Our benchmarking indicates that KCC is out of step in terms of making attendance information available to the public.  
Given this information is already held by KCC but is simply not displayed, we recommend that KCC website is updated to include this information. **(Further details provided on page 27)**

#### **TRANSPARENCY ISSUES**

One of the considerations of the Panel has been the matter of Member workload. Throughout our discussions and interviews we have considered the actual time that elected Members spend on their duties, whether they hold positions of special responsibility or not.

Though Member workload has an inherent form of recognition through Special Responsibility Allowances, this obviously does not apply to Members who do not hold such roles. A backbench Member could be one of the most active on the authority, but this is not measured or acknowledged in any particular way within the Allowances scheme.

However, we recognise Member workload is challenging to quantify in this respect, given the various elements that can comprise core Member duties - from attending formal Council meetings, to meeting with residents, organisations and dealing with casework. It is not possible, nor indeed practicable, to adopt a policy which would directly link Allowances to such a complex web of duties and responsibilities.

However, we do consider it important that the authority is as transparent with the information it does maintain about Member workload - particularly in relation to attending formal Council meetings. Though this in no way reflects the total contribution Members make, it is information that should be available to the public in an easily accessible format. During the course of benchmarking information between other authorities and Kent, it became apparent that the authority is out of step in terms of making attendance information available to the public.

Out of the 12 districts/borough councils in Kent, 10 provide clearly tabulated information on Member meeting attendance on their respective Modern.gov\*/Member pages only Ashford, Dartford and Medway (a unitary authority) do not. Such information is also provided by the neighbouring county authorities in East Sussex and Surrey. In order to locate the same level of information in Kent, residents would have to manually search the minutes of every authority meeting for each Member, which would be incredibly time-consuming.

Given this information is already held by the authority but is simply not displayed, we recommend that Kent County Council's website is updated to include this information, which can be easily integrated into the Modern.gov system. It is a simple but effective measure of transparency which reveals, at least in part, an element of a Member's workload and commitment to the authority, an example of which is adopted by Surrey County council. \*

\*Example of 'Mod.gov good practice: Surrey County Council's [Member page](#)

- b) The link to the Member pages at Surrey referred to in the extract is:  
<https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/mgFindMember.aspx>

#### 4. Dependents' Carers' Allowance

- c) The relevant extracts from the MRP report, pages 5 and 21, are as follows:
- **Dependent Carer's Allowance.** Our review of the Peer Group showed that KCC are broadly within the range paid by other Councils, and we do not therefore make any recommendations for change on the hourly amount claimable. However, given the low take-up of the Allowance, we recommend raising the level of awareness of claim amongst prospective Members as part of the roadshow on 'Becoming a Councillor' and amongst new Members through the Induction process, and ensure that the Allowance is appropriately highlighted in these initiatives. **(Further details provided on page 21)**

##### DEPENDENT CARER'S ALLOWANCE

Most Councils in the Peer Group examined, offer Dependent Carer's Allowance and Childcare Allowance. Hourly rates published varied between the range from £5.50 to £15.57 (for childcare) and from the minimum hourly wage to £20.24 for adult care. The ability to claim was consistently prescriptive and required receipts based on actual expenditure. KCC are broadly in the range, so we do not make any recommendations for changes to the hourly amount claimable.

A minority of Councils capped the Allowance. This ranged from £50.33 per day to £3621 (Childcare) and £7654 (Dependant). However, it appears a cap is somewhat irrelevant when considering that few Members claim the Allowance, either in Kent County Council or elsewhere <sup>2</sup> (One KCC Member did so FY19-20) and we decided against recommending the introduction of any cap.

We therefore recommend:

- To raise awareness of the existence of the claim availability amongst Members through the New Member Induction process.
- There should be exclusions on claiming dependency Allowance for adult care in the event a Councillor receives a Carer's Allowance from the Department for Work and Pensions.

#### 5. Recommendation

The Selection and Member Services Committee is asked to:

- a) Note that Member attendance at meetings will be tabulated and published as soon as is practical;
- b) Consider what additional information could be published to give a more accurate picture of Member contribution;
- c) Consider whether there is anything in how the Council operate which militates against a more diverse membership; and
- d) Consider how to better promote the Dependents' Carers' Allowance.

## **6. Background Documents**

Full report of the Member Remuneration Panel:

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s106957/Appx%20%20MRP%20Report.pdf>

## **7. Report Author and Relevant Director**

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