

LONDON BOROUGH OF HACKNEY 2018

Members' Allowances Scheme

Report of Sir Rodney Brooke CBE DL

1. In 2015 I reviewed the Members' Allowances Scheme of the London Borough of Hackney, advising the Council on the application of the recommendations of the London Members' Allowances Panel to the Council's Scheme. The Council accepted and implemented the recommendations in my report. The scheme has since been slightly amended on my recommendation.
2. In my 2015 report I considered the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) paid to the Opposition Group Leaders. At that time the SRA paid to the First Opposition Group Leader was £18,063.85 and the SRA paid to the Second Opposition Group leader was £2,294.39. The first opposition group then had four members and the second opposition group three members. In my report I recognised that the first opposition group and its leader have a crucial constitutional role in holding the leadership of the Council to account. I did not believe that the second opposition group has the same constitutional role: it can be selective in the areas it challenges or seeks to influence. There is a justifiable reason for distinguishing between the two roles in terms of the SRAs they attract. The SRAs paid to the two Leaders should not be based simply on the number of members in the group. But given the relative numbers, I took the view that the SRAs paid to the two leaders were disproportionate. Accordingly I recommended (and the Council accepted) that the First Opposition Group Leader should receive an SRA of £12,214.94 and the Leader of the Second Opposition Group an SRA of £8,143.12. These figures are now £12,709.67 and £8,473.12 after adjustment for the pay increase for local government staff for the year 2018-19.
3. At the 2018 borough elections five members of the First Opposition group were elected. No members of the Second Opposition Group were elected. As a result I have been asked to consider the SRA which should now be paid to the Leader of the sole Opposition Group. During my consideration I met the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition Group, Councillors Levy and Steinberger. I have taken their representations into account in formulating my recommendation.

4. As a result of the election, the SRA of £8,473.12 allocated to the Leader of a Second Opposition Group has ceased to be payable. The combined total of the SRAs allocated to the Leaders of the two opposition groups is £21,182.79. This figure is greater than the SRA paid to any member of the Council other than the Deputy Mayor and Cabinet members, who have executive responsibilities. As a comparator, the Chairs of the Licensing Committee and the Planning Sub-Committee receive SRAs of £17,116.26. In its 2018 report, the London-wide Independent Panel recommended that the leader of the principal opposition group should receive a special responsibility allowance of between £16,207 and £29,797. Given these comparators, I do not think that an SRA for the Leader of the Opposition of £21,182.79 is inappropriate. The relatively small number of members of the Opposition group can be argued to increase the workload of the leader in his important constitutional role of challenging the policies of the Mayor and the governing group. He can no longer rely on the smaller opposition group to shoulder some of that burden. Specifically Councillor Levy mentioned the casework required of him by residents who believe a council service or response to be inadequate and that they might get a more effective intervention from an opposition party.

Recommendation

A Special Responsibility Allowance of £21,182.79 should be allocated to the Leader of the Opposition.

Rodney Brooke

11th September 2018