

## Independent Remuneration Panel

London Borough of Lewisham

16 June 2008

Councillor Barry Anderson  
Chair of Council  
London Borough of Lewisham  
Town Hall  
Catford  
London SE6

Dear Councillor Anderson,

### **Member development**

I am writing to you in your capacity as its Chair, to bring to the attention of Council for consideration at its next meeting on 30 June this letter which I have written on behalf of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP).

### **Background**

You will be aware that, in the general context of its advisory role on members' allowances, the IRP has been considering the issue of member development and performance. Following consideration of an IRP report on this issue in October 2007, the Council referred my panel's recommendations to its Constitution Working Party (CWP) and the Cross Party Working Group on Member Development (CPWG) for comment.

### **Recent meeting of IRP**

The views of the CWP and the CPWG were reported back to the IRP when it met on 10 June. In relation to the IRP proposals on member development, we are encouraged by the extent to which the CWP and the CPWG accept our recommendations. We note that there is agreement about the need for an effective system of member development, with personal development plans for each member. We also note that formal role descriptors have been drawn up for members and that a process is in place for identifying individual needs and helping members develop

competencies to fulfil the different roles they have as councillors. These two groups of Council should be congratulated for their forward thinking on these issues as should Council for its progressive decision to pilot a system of 360 degree assessment of members aimed at identifying individual strengths and development needs. Council deserves further congratulations for achieving accreditation under the London Member Development Charter.

The IRP also made recommendations about ways in which members could give account of their activities. We are pleased that there is support for a continuation and enhancement of Executive Question Time. We are also pleased that the Mayor and Deputy Mayor have very recently attended the full Overview and Scrutiny Committee to give account for, and answer questions about, their performance and that there is support for an annual report from Overview and Scrutiny bodies to the full Council. We commend the CWP and CPWG for the positions they have taken on these points.

### **CWP and CPWG concerns**

That said, we understand that the CWP and CPWG have concerns about some of the other proposals which emerged from the IRP's October 2007 meeting. They were unhappy about the proposal that each member should produce an annual resume of their activities as councillors for publication on the Council's website. They argued, not unreasonably as we now think, that if such an annual resume were drafted by members themselves as proposed, it would not be an objective assessment and could raise compliance problems with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Publicity, particularly at election time. We accept the legitimacy of these concerns and the practical problems associated with implementation of our October 2007 proposal in this area.

A second concern of the CWP and the CPWG related to the IRP proposal that copies of future annual performance assessments should be made available to the IRP. An underlying fear here was that this might encourage the development of a direct link between performance and levels of members' allowances. The CWP and the CPWG expressed the view that the arbiter of member performance was the electorate through the ballot box and that the measurement of performance could not be separated from this ultimate democratic sanction.

The IRP is not without sympathy for this concern. However, as we have developed our role since 2001 we have become anxious to avoid two particular dangers in the way we go about our work. The first, which we now know the CWP and CPWG are also sensitive about, relates to a system of performance-related pay creeping in through the back door. The second is that IRP deliberations and decision-taking are carried out in an increasingly detached ivory tower by a group which has little knowledge or understanding of what the real world of Council activity is actually like – not least its challenges and responsibilities and its checks and balances.

With regard to the first challenge, I would like to reassure all Councillors that the IRP will never allow (by accident or design) the present system of members' allowances to develop into a system of performance-related rewards. We will remain constantly on guard and resist this albeit remote possibility. With regard to the second danger,

we wish to seek your help and cooperation. It was our awareness of this possibility that lay behind our 2007 proposal that copies of future annual performance assessments be made available to us. Our increasing awareness of the danger of becoming remote was also the reason why we decided that all IRP members should be encouraged to attend from time to time Council and Council committee meetings as observers.

### **Formal request**

We hope you will recognise the need for some formally agreed mechanism for keeping the IRP informed about how the new system of member development is working. Our specific suggestion is that CWP and the CPWG consider at their next meetings practical and effective ways of fulfilling this need which would be acceptable to the full Council.

### **Conclusion**

All in all we are very encouraged by the response to our October 2007 proposals. We look forward to receiving from the CWP and CPWG or indeed the full Council a response to our single request as we endeavour as professionally as possible to continue our advisory role on members' allowances.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Mills

Sir Ian Mills  
Chair – Independent Remuneration Panel