A CREDITORS' GUIDE TO ADMINISTRATORS' FEES

ENGLAND AND WALES

1 Introduction

1.1 When a company goes into administration the costs of the proceedings are paid out of its assets. The creditors, who hope eventually to recover some of their debts out of the assets, therefore have a direct interest in the level of costs, and in particular the remuneration of the insolvency practitioner appointed to act as administrator. The insolvency legislation recognises this interest by providing mechanisms for creditors to determine the basis of the administrator's fees. This guide is intended to help creditors be aware of their rights under the legislation to approve and monitor fees, explains the basis on which fees are fixed and how creditors can seek information about expenses incurred by the administrator and challenge those they consider to be excessive..

2 The nature of administration

2.1 Administration is a procedure which places a company under the control of an insolvency practitioner and the protection of the court with the following objective:

- rescuing the company as a going concern, or
- achieving a better result for the creditors as a whole than would be likely if the company were wound up without first being in administration,

or, if the administrator thinks neither of these objectives is reasonably practicable

- realising property in order to make a distribution to secured or preferential creditors.

3 The creditors' committee

3.1 The creditors have the right to appoint a committee with a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5 members. One of the functions of the committee is to determine the basis of the administrator's remuneration. The committee is normally established at the meeting of creditors which the administrator is required to hold within a maximum of 10 weeks from the beginning of the administration to consider his proposals. The administrator must call the first meeting of the committee within 6 weeks of its establishment, and subsequent meetings must be held either at specified dates agreed by the committee, or when a member of the committee asks for one, or when the administrator decides he needs to hold one. The committee has power to summon the administrator to attend before it and provide information about the exercise of his functions.

4 Fixing the administrator's remuneration

4.1 The basis for fixing the administrator's remuneration is set out in Rule 2.106 of the Insolvency Rules 1986, which states that it shall be fixed:

- as a percentage of the value of the property which the administrator has to deal with,
- by reference to the time properly given by the administrator and his staff in attending to matters arising in the administration, or
- as a set amount.

Any combination of these bases may be used to fix the remuneration, and different bases may be used for different things done by the administrator. Where the remuneration is fixed as a percentage, different percentages may be used for different things done by the administrator.

It is for the creditors' committee (if there is one) to determine on which of these bases, or combination of bases, the remuneration is to be fixed. Where it is fixed as a percentage, it is for the committee to determine the percentage or percentages to be applied, and where it is a set amount, to determine that amount. Rule 2.106 says that in arriving at its decision the committee shall have regard to the following matters:

- the complexity (or otherwise) of the case;
- any responsibility of an exceptional kind or degree which falls on the administrator;
- the effectiveness with which the administrator appears to be carrying out, or to have carried out, his duties;
- the value and nature of the property which the administrator has to deal with.

4.2 If there is no creditors' committee, or the committee does not make the requisite determination (and provided the circumstances described in paragraph 4.3 do not apply), the administrator's remuneration may be fixed by a resolution of a meeting of creditors having regard to the same matters as apply in the case of the committee. If the remuneration is not fixed in any of these ways, it will be fixed by the court on application by the administrator, but the administrator may not make such an application unless he has first tried to get his remuneration fixed by the committee or creditors as described above, and in any case not later than 18 months after his appointment.

4.3 There are special rules about creditors' resolutions in cases where the administrator has stated in his proposals that the company has insufficient property to enable a distribution to be made to unsecured creditors except out of the reserved fund which may have to be set aside out of floating charge assets.

In this case, if there is no creditors' committee, or the committee does not make the requisite determination, the remuneration may be fixed by the approval of –

- each secured creditor of the company; or

- if the administrator has made or intends to make a distribution to preferential creditors –

- each secured creditor of the company; and
- preferential creditors whose debts amount to more than 50% of the preferential debts of the company, disregarding debts of any creditor who does not respond to an invitation to give or withhold approval,

having regard to the same matters as the committee would.

Note that there is no requirement to hold a creditors' meeting in such cases unless a meeting is requisitioned by creditors whose debts amount to at least 10 per cent of the total debts of the company.

4.4 A resolution of creditors may be obtained by correspondence.

5. Review of remuneration

5.1 Where there has been a material and substantial change in circumstances since the basis of the administrator's remuneration was fixed, the administrator may request

that it be changed. The request must be made to the same body as initially approved the remuneration, and the same rules apply as to the original approval.

6. Approval of pre-administration costs

6.1 Sometimes the administrator may need to seek approval for the payment of costs in connection with preparatory work incurred before the company went into administration but which remain unpaid. Such costs may relate to work done either by the administrator or by another insolvency practitioner. Disclosure of such costs must be included in the administrator's proposals and should follow the principles and standards set out in section 7.

6.2 Where there is a creditors' committee, it is for the committee to determine whether, and to what extent, such costs should be approved for payment. If there is no committee or the committee does not make the necessary determination, or if it does but the administrator, or other insolvency practitioner who has incurred pre-administration costs, considers the amount agreed to be insufficient, approval may be given by a meeting of creditors. Where the circumstances described in paragraph 4.3 apply, the determination may be made by the same creditors as approve the administrator's remuneration.

6.3 The administrator must convene a meting of the committee or the creditors for the purposes of approving the payment of pre-administration costs if requested to do so by another insolvency practitioner who has incurred such costs. If there is no determination under these provisions, or if there is but the administrator or other insolvency practitioner considers the amount agreed to be insufficient, the administrator may apply to the court for a determination.

7 What information should be provided by the administrator?

7.1 When fixing bases of remuneration

7.1.1 When seeking agreement for the basis or bases of remuneration, the administrator should provide sufficient supporting information to enable the committee or the creditors to make an informed judgement as to whether the basis sought is appropriate having regard to all the circumstances of the case. The nature and extent of the information provided will depend on the stage during the conduct of the case at which approval is being sought. The appendix to this guide sets out a suggested format for the provision of information.

7.1.2 If any part of the remuneration is sought on a time costs basis, the administrator should provide details of the minimum time units used and current charge-out rates, split by grades of staff, of those people who have been or who are likely to be involved in the time costs aspects of the case.

7.1.3 The administrator should also provide details and the cost of any work that has been or is intended to be sub-contracted out that could otherwise be carried out by the administrator or his or her staff.

7.1.4 If work has already been carried out, the administrator should state the proposed charge for the period to date and provide an explanation of what has been achieved in the period and how it was achieved, sufficient to enable the progress of the case to be assessed and whether the proposed charge is reasonable in the circumstances of the case. Where the proposed charge is calculated on a time costs basis, the administrator should disclose the time spent and the average charge-out rates, in larger cases split by grades of staff and analysed by appropriate activity. The administrator should also provide details and the cost of any work that has been sub-contracted out that could otherwise be carried out by the administrator or his or her staff.

7.2 After the bases of remuneration have been fixed

The administrator is required to send progress reports to creditors at specified intervals (see paragraph 8.1 below). When reporting periodically to creditors, in addition to the matters specified in paragraph 8.1, the administrator should provide an explanation of what has been achieved in the period under review and how it was achieved, sufficient to enable the progress of the case to be assessed. Creditors should be able to understand whether the remuneration charged is reasonable in the circumstances of the case (whilst recognising that the administrator must fulfil certain statutory obligations and regulatory requirements that might be perceived as bringing no added value for the estate). Where any remuneration is on a time costs basis, the administrator should disclose the charge in respect of the period, the time spent and the average charge-out rates, in larger cases split by grades of staff and analysed by appropriate activity. If there have been any changes to the charge-out rates during the period under review, rates should be disclosed by grades of staff, split by the periods applicable. The administrator should also provide details and the cost of any work that has been sub-contracted out that could otherwise be carried out by the administrator or his or her staff.

7.3 Disbursements and other expenses

7.3.1 Costs met by and reimbursed to the administrator in connection with the administration should be appropriate and reasonable. Such costs will fall into two categories:

- Category 1 disbursements: These are costs where there is specific expenditure directly referable both to the administration and a payment to an independent third party. These may include, for example, advertising, room hire, storage, postage, telephone charges, travel expenses, and equivalent costs reimbursed to the administrator or his or her staff.
- Category 2 disbursements: These are costs that are directly referable to the administration but not to a payment to an independent third party. They may include shared or allocated costs that can be allocated to the administration on a proper and reasonable basis, for example, business mileage.

Category 1 disbursements can be drawn without prior approval, although the administrator should be prepared to disclose information about them in the same way as any other expenses. Category 2 disbursements may be drawn if they have been approved in the same manner as the administrator's remuneration. When seeking approval, the administrator should explain, for each category of expense, the basis on which the charge is being made.

7.3.2 The following are not permissible:

- a charge calculated as a percentage of remuneration;
- an administration fee or charge additional to the administrator's remuneration;
- recovery of basic overhead costs such as office and equipment rental, depreciation and finance charges.

8 Progress reports and requests for further information

8.1 The administrator is required to send a progress report to creditors at 6-monthly intervals. The report must include:

- details of the basis fixed for the remuneration of the administrator (or if not fixed at the date of the report, the steps taken during the period of the report to fix it);

- if the basis has been fixed, the remuneration charged during the period of the report, irrespective of whether it was actually paid during that period (except where it is fixed as a set amount, in which case it may be shown as that amount without any apportionment for the period of the report);
- if the report is the first to be made after the basis has been fixed, the remuneration charged during the periods covered by the previous reports, together with a description of the work done during those periods, irrespective of whether payment was actually made during the period of the report;
- a statement of the expenses incurred by the administrator during the period of the report, irrespective of whether payment was actually made during that period;
- the date of approval of any pre-administration costs and the amount approved;
- a statement of the creditors' rights to request further information, as explained in paragraph 8.2, and their right to challenge the administrator's remuneration and expenses.

8.2 Within 21 days of receipt of a progress report a creditor may request the administrator to provide further information about the remuneration and expenses (other than pre-administration costs) set out in the report. A request must be in writing, and may be made either by a secured creditor, or by an unsecured creditor with the concurrence of at least 5% in value of unsecured creditors (including himself) or the permission of the court.

8.3 The administrator must provide the requested information within 14 days, unless he considers that:

- the time and cost involved in preparing the information would be excessive, or
- disclosure would be prejudicial to the conduct of the administration or might be expected to lead to violence against any person, or
- the administrator is subject to an obligation of confidentiality in relation to the information requested,

in which case he must give the reasons for not providing the information.

Any creditor may apply to the court within 21 days of the administrator's refusal to provide the requested information, or the expiry of the 14 days time limit for the provision of the information.

9. Provision of information – additional requirements

The administrator must provide certain information about time spent on a case, free of charge, upon request by any creditor, director or shareholder of the company.

The information which must be provided is –

- the total number of hours spent on the case by the administrator or staff assigned to the case;
- for each grade of staff, the average hourly rate at which they are charged out;
- the number of hours spent by each grade of staff in the relevant period.

The period for which the information must be provided is the period from appointment to the end of the most recent period of six months reckoned from the date of the administrator's appointment, or where he has vacated office, the date that he vacated office.

The information must be provided within 28 days of receipt of the request by the administrator, and requests must be made within two years from vacation of office.

10 What if a creditor is dissatisfied?

101 If a creditor believes that the administrator's remuneration is too high, the basis is inappropriate, or the expenses incurred by the administrator are in all the circumstances excessive he may, provided certain conditions are met, apply to the court.

10.2 Application may be made to the court by any secured creditor, or by any unsecured creditor provided at least 10 per cent in value of unsecured creditors (including himself) agree, or he has the permission of the court. Any such application must be made within 8 weeks of the applicant receiving the administrator's progress report in which the charging of the remuneration or incurring of the expenses in question is first reported (see paragraph 8.1 above). If the court does not dismiss the application (which it may if it considers that insufficient cause is shown) the applicant must give the administrator a copy of the application and supporting evidence at least 14 days before the hearing.

10.3 If the court considers the application well founded, it may order that the remuneration be reduced, the basis be changed, or the expenses be disallowed or repaid. Unless the court orders otherwise, the costs of the application must be paid by the applicant and not as an expense of the administration.

11 What if the administrator is dissatisfied?

11.1 If the administrator considers that the remuneration fixed by the creditors' committee is insufficient or that the basis used to fix it is inappropriate he may request that the amount or rate be increased, or the basis changed, by resolution of the creditors. If he considers that the remuneration fixed by the committee or the creditors is insufficient or that the basis used to fix it is inappropriate, he may apply to the court for the amount or rate to be increased or the basis changed. If he decides to apply to the court he must give at least 14 days' notice to the members of the creditors' committee and the committee may nominate one or more of its members to appear or be represented on the application. If there is no committee, the administrator's notice of his application must be sent to such of the company's creditors as the court may direct, and they may nominate one or more of their number to appear or be represented. The court may order the costs to be paid as an expense of the administration.

12 Other matters relating to remuneration

12.1 Where there are joint administrators it is for them to agree between themselves how the remuneration payable should be apportioned. Any dispute arising between them may be referred to the court, the creditors' committee or a meeting of creditors.

12.2 If the administrator is a solicitor and employs his own firm to act on behalf of the company, profit costs may not be paid unless authorised by the creditors' committee, the creditors or the court.

12.3 If a new administrator is appointed in place of another, any determination, resolution or court order which was in effect immediately before the replacement continues to have effect in relation to the remuneration of the new administrator until a further determination, resolution or court order is made.

12.4 Where the basis of the remuneration is a set amount, and the administrator ceases to act before the time has elapsed or the work has been completed for which the amount was set, application may be made for a determination of the amount that should be paid to the outgoing administrator. The application must be made to the same body as approved the remuneration. Where the outgoing administrator and the incoming administrator are from the same firm, they will usually agree the apportionment between them.

13. Effective date

This guide applies where a company enters administration on or after 1 November 2011.
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Appendix

Suggested format for the provision of information

Professional guidance issued to insolvency practitioners sets out the following suggested format for the provision of information when seeking approval of remuneration. However, the level of disclosure suggested below may not be appropriate in all cases, and will be subject to considerations of proportionality. In larger or more complex cases the circumstances of each case may dictate the information provided and its format.

Narrative overview of the case

In all cases, reports on remuneration should provide a narrative overview of the case. Matters relevant to an overview are:

- the complexity of the case;
- any exceptional responsibility falling on the administrator;
- the administrator's effectiveness;
- the value and nature of the property in question.

The information provided will depend upon the basis or bases being sought or reported upon, and the stage at which it is being provided. An overview might include:

- an explanation of the nature, and the administrator's own initial assessment, of the assignment (including the anticipated return to creditors) and the outcome (if known);
- initial views on how the assignment was to be handled, including decisions on staffing or subcontracting and the appointment of advisers;
- any significant aspects of the case, particularly those that affect the remuneration and cost expended;
- the reasons for subsequent changes in strategy;
- the steps taken to establish the views of creditors, particularly in relation to agreeing the strategy for the assignment, budgeting, and fee drawing;
- any existing agreement about remuneration;
- details of how other professionals, including subcontractors, were chosen, how they were contracted to be paid, and what steps have been taken to review their fees;
- in a larger case, particularly if it involved trading, considerations about staffing and managing the assignment and how strategy was set and reviewed;
- details of work undertaken during the period;
- any additional value brought to the estate during the period, for which the administrator wishes to claim increased remuneration.

Time cost basis

Where any part of the remuneration is or is proposed to be calculated on a time costs basis, requests for and reports on remuneration should provide:

- An explanation of the administrator's time charging policy, clearly stating the units of time that have been used, the grades of staff and rates that have been charged to the assignment, and the policy for recovering the cost of support staff. There is an expectation that time will be recorded in units of not greater than 6 minutes.
- A description of work carried out, which might include:
  - details of work undertaken during the period, related to the table of time spent for the period;
  - an explanation of the grades of staff used to undertake the different tasks carried out and the reasons why it was appropriate for those grades to be used;
  - any comments on any figures in the summary of time spent accompanying the request the administrator wishes to make.
- Time spent and charge-out summaries, in an appropriate format.

It is useful to provide time spent and charge-out value information in a tabular form for each of the time periods reported upon, with work classified (and sub-divided) in a way relevant to the circumstances of the case

The following areas of activity are suggested as a basis for the analysis of time spent:

- Administration and planning
- Investigations
- Realisation of assets
- Trading
- Creditors
- Any other case-specific matters

The following categories are suggested as a basis for analysis by grade of staff:

- Partner
- Manager
- Other senior professionals
- Assistants and support staff

The level of disclosure suggested above will not be appropriate in all cases, and considerations of proportionality will apply:

- where cumulative time costs are, and are expected to be, less than £10,000 the administrator should, as a minimum, state the number of hours and average rate per hour and explain any unusual features of the case;
- where cumulative time costs are, or are expected to be, between £10,000 and £50,000, a time and charge-out summary similar to that shown above will usually provide the appropriate level of detail (subject to the explanation of any unusual features);
- where cumulative time costs exceed, or are expected to exceed, £50,000, further and more detailed analysis or explanation will be warranted.