

MEETING	Democratic Services Committee
DATE	29 November 2016
TITLE OF THE REPORT	Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Consultation
PURPOSE	To receive the observations of the Democratic Services Committee in response to the consultation.
RECOMMENDATION	Submit observations
AUTHOR	Councillor Tom Ellis, Chair of Democratic Services Committee Geraint Owen Head of Democratic Services

1. The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales is responsible for determining the salaries and costs payable to councillors for carrying out their duties. The Panel publishes draft proposals, which are consulted upon, every year.
2. A copy of the full consultation can be seen by clicking on the following link:
<http://gov.wales/irpwsb/home/?skip=1&lang=en>
3. As usual, there is not much to discuss in the recommendations as they take the usual approach to the salaries and costs paid to each councillor. However, attention is drawn to the main suggestions which deserve attention:
 - a) **Basic salary:** This year, for the first time since 2013, an increase of £100 per annum is recommended for the basic salary of an elected member (£13,400 up from the current £13,300). This would be an increase of 0.75%.

In order to give some context, it should be noted that the Panel's decision in its report in 2009, when setting the members' salary base, links payments with median gross earnings of full-time workers living in Wales. The basic salary was determined on a level which was three fifths of the all-Wales Medial Salary, recognising that there is an unpaid contribution to public service. As a result of financial restrictions on the public sector and local authorities specifically, it has not been possible to maintain the link with median earnings in Wales. On the original basis, namely 3/5 of the average, the annual basic salary would now be more than £14,700.

Recommendation - to support the proposal to increase the basic allowance from £13,300 to £13,400

- b) **Care costs:** Members will be aware that there is provision for reimbursing members and co-opted members for costs associated with arranging care for children or dependents in order to allow members to carry out official business. There is a duty on the Council to promote this reimbursement. It should be noted that, once again this year, no claims have been made for this reimbursement in Gwynedd.

There has been no change to the amounts that can be claimed, but there are two main considerations for the reimbursement element for the care allowance that the committee should consider.

b i) That they should be referred to as "reimbursement for care costs" rather than "care allowance"

b ii) In relation to publishing care costs reimbursements, the Panel has decided to give two choices to relevant authorities, namely

- a) Publish details of the amounts reimbursed to named members (as at present)
- b) Publishing the total amount reimbursed by the authority over the course of the year but without attributing the payments to any named member

Recommendation - The provision for reimbursing members for care costs are available in order to allow more people from different backgrounds to be able to take up a role as an Elected Member. In order to facilitate more eligible members to claim this assistance, the following is recommended:

- *Support the proposal that they should be referred to as "reimbursement for care costs"*
- *Support the proposal that the total amount reimbursed by the authority of the course over the year should be published, but without attributing the payments to any named member (as in bii – b above)*

The Panel are also asked to ensure that Freedom of Information Requests in the future would not mean that authorities would need to divulge the information of reimbursement for care costs per individual, and to include this in the final guidance.

c) Absence due to long-term sickness of a recipient of a higher salary: This year, the framework has been amended to include arrangements for a situation when the recipient of a higher salary is absent due to long-term sickness. The arrangements roughly correspond with the Family Absence regulations, which allow the recipient of a higher salary who is absent, to continue to receive financial remuneration for the post held for a specified period of time, if the authority so decides. It also provides for the elected member who deputises to be eligible to receive the higher salary which is appropriate for the post. These arrangements involve an addition to the maximum of higher salaries that are permitted for however long the deputation arrangement lasts.

Recommendation - support the new arrangements for the sickness absence of a recipient of a higher salary.

Ch) Record reasons for absence from committees: The Panel is considering if the reason why elected Members are absent from committees should be recorded and published. The Panel is considering this in response to comments made by Elected Members who have noted that they are, at times, unable to attend a committee meeting due to the requirement to be at another external committee to represent the Council, therefore this should be acknowledged.

Recommendation – support the recommendation to record the reason of absence from committees where a Member is representing the Council at another meeting. It must be noted that the information would have to be provided by the Member themselves.

- d) **Panel Members to address a Full Council meeting:** The Panel meets annually with the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee and the Head of Democratic Services to discuss matters concerning remuneration. In addition, the Panel have expressed an interest in hearing the views of all Elected Members, and are eager to discuss with the Full Council during the Autumn of 2017.

Recommendation – support the request and invite the Panel Members to discuss with the Full Council.

4. The Committee's observations are invited