

**MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL
INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL**

**REPORT ON MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES
1 APRIL 2024 - 31 MARCH 2025**

MEMBERSHIP

Mid Devon District Council's Independent Remuneration Panel ("the IRP") consists of Jeremy Filmer-Bennett, John Smith and Karen Stone (Panel Chair) all of whom have considerable experience of undertaking reviews for the Council on the matter of Member Allowances or Standards.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 require the Council to have regard to the recommendations of an independent panel in agreeing allowances paid to councillors.
- 1.2 The Independent Panel operates under the provisions of the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (Regulations) 2003. These regulations require that all councils set up independent panels and take account of their advice before agreeing their councillors' allowances scheme.
- 1.3 The IRP met on the 1 December 2023 and were supported by the District Solicitor and Monitoring officer and a Democratic Services Officer.
- 1.4 This report sets out the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the IRP concerning Member Allowances for 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.
- 1.5 In advance of the meeting the Panel received a range of information which it has considered as part of its review including:
 - The South West Councils' survey detailing the allowances paid to councillors in similar local authorities across the South West.
 - The previous IRP report.
 - The current Scheme of Members' Allowances.

- An update on the current governance arrangements at MDDC, following the election in May 2023, and proposals to utilise the Policy Development Groups to greater effect moving forwards.
 - Feedback from current Members on their allowances.
- 1.6 The Panel noted that Mid Devon District Council ('the Council') will carry out a full Fundamental Review during 2024 in order to make recommendations for a Members Allowances Scheme for 2025/2026 onwards. This will have provided sufficient time, following the election in May 2023, to enable new Members to form a view as to their allowances and whether they are appropriate given their workloads and levels of responsibility. The Council will also know more about available government funding, what local government is facing in the future given an impending General Election and what resources will be available.
- 1.7 The Panel recognised the effect of rises in the cost of living on all Members.

EVIDENCE AND FINDINGS

2. SOUTH WEST COUNCILS SURVEY 2023

- 2.1 The Panel considered the benchmarked data collated by South West Council's and continued to be of the opinion that this was an extremely useful tool for ascertaining how the Council compared with other similar local authorities in the region.

3. MEMBER FEEDBACK

- 3.1 The Panel noted that 16 Members had provided their views on Members Allowances for consideration. Feedback had been very wide ranging from the need for a substantial increase to maintaining the status quo, to implementing a tiered system based on certain criteria.
- 3.2 The Panel wished to thank the Members for their important feedback which they would hold 'on file' until the Fundamental Review as well as seeking further views nearer the time.
- 3.3 They also wished to remind Members that at any time a Councillor may, by notice in writing given to the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer), elect to renounce any part of their entitlement to one or more allowances under this scheme.

4. FUNDAMENTAL REVIEW DURING 2024

- 4.1 The Panel requested that during 2024 they conduct a series of interviews with both Members receiving the Basic Allowance only and those also in receipt of an Special Responsibility Allowance to ascertain their views as to whether they feel they are adequately recompensed. All Members will also be sent an initial questionnaire

seeking general and specific feedback. They also wished to consider the Carer's Allowance in greater depth. A better understanding of the governance and committee structure was also requested.

5. MDDC SCHEME OF MEMBERS ALLOWANCES FOR 2024 - 2025

Basic Allowance

- 5.1 The IRP took into account the recent agreed pay settlement and the lump sum offered to staff which was £1,925. The Panel considered that applying this to the Basic Allowance would in effect represent an approximate 32% increase. As such this was not considered to be appropriate. It was then discussed what, if any, increase should be applied to the allowances.
- 5.2 Following discussion the Panel concluded that it was important to maintain a link with the staff pay award.
- 5.3 In doing so the Panel agreed that the % increase applied for 2024/2025 should be based on what has recently been agreed as the staff pay award for 2023/2024 which is the percentage based upon an average of spinal points 2 – 43, which is 6.44%. This would equate to an additional £386.40 p.a. on the Basic Allowance for each Member meaning it would increase from £6,000 to £6,386.40 p.a. The panel considered that for ease this should be rounded up to £6,387 as the NJC do for staff salaries. The Panel felt that this was a far more justifiable amount to recommend especially given rises in the cost of living which were affecting Members as well as the rest of the population.
- 5.4 However the Panel noted that other IRP's were undertaking further work on the appropriateness of attaching the basic allowance to Spinal Column Points and suggested that they would carry out more research during the Fundamental Review.

Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA)

- 5.5 The Regulations provide that SRA may be paid to those Members of the Council who have "significant additional responsibilities" over and above the generally accepted duties of a Councillor. In setting the SRAs, the Panel has in the past concluded that the best approach was to use the Basic Allowance as the starting point and then give a weighting to the role attracting the SRA which could be applied to the Basic Allowance. This is an approach applied by many authorities. The Panel remains of the view that the link between the Basic Allowance and SRA is an important one.
- 5.6 The Panel agreed that they wished to leave a thorough analysis of the SRA until the full Fundamental Review is carried out. For the avoidance of doubt it is recommended that the SRA go up based on the 6.44%

increase on the Basic Allowance. It further recommends that the SRA multipliers agreed by Council last year remain.

- 5.7 As such the following levels of SRA's are recommended to apply from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025:

Position	Current Council approved weightings	Recommended SRA (based upon BA of £6387)
Leader of the Council	2.00	12,773
Deputy Leader's	1.00	6,387
Cabinet Member	1.00	6,387
Scrutiny Committee Chair	1.00	6,387
PDG Chair	0.50	3,194
Audit Committee Chair	0.50	3,194
Planning Committee Chair	1.00	6,387
Licensing/Regulatory Chair	0.25	1,597
Standards Chair	0.25	1,597
Chairman of the Council	0.50	3,194

- 5.8 For the avoidance of doubt, the Panel continues to take the view that Members should only be entitled to claim **one** SRA.

Carer's Allowance

- 5.9 The IRP considers the current Carer's Allowance within the Scheme is still fit for purpose and should remain the same. That is:

- Carers' allowances be calculated on the current basis namely, the actual expenditure up to the national living wage of a person over 25.

However, it was noted that there was very little take up of the Carer's Allowance, not just in this Council but in local authorities generally. They wished to look into the reasons why this might be during the Fundamental Review with a view to seeing whether this needed some adjustment to better reflect the reimbursement needs of the actual caring costs incurred.

It was also noted that there were now a lot more evening meetings. This may be having an impact on caring responsibilities.

Travel and Subsistence Allowances

- 5.10 The Panel continues to recommend that reimbursement of approved mileage remain at the current rates published by HMRC * which for 2023/2024 are):

- 45p per mile for the first 10,000 miles
- 25p per mile thereafter
- 5p per mile per passenger carried (up to a maximum of 4 passengers, payable to the driver)
- 25p per mile for push bikes

(* To be uplifted once the rates for 2024/2025 are known).

All claims to be submitted with receipts.

5.11 The Panel does not consider any changes to the current arrangements are needed and as such subsistence allowances should remain consistent with those for employees which are in line with the current HMRC rates * and are:

- Breakfast £9.71
- Lunch £13.40
- Tea £5.26
- Evening Meal £16.58

(* To be uplifted once the rates for 2024/2025 are known).

All claims to be submitted with receipts.

6. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Independent Remuneration Panel recommends to Full Council that from 1 April 2024 until 31 March 2025:

- The Basic Allowance is increased in line with the recently agreed average percentage increase of the staff pay award which is 6.44% thereby increasing it from £6000 to £6386.40 p.a.
- Special Responsibility Allowances be paid to the following Members at the levels indicated:

Position	Current Council approved weightings	Recommended SRA's (based upon a BA of £6386.40)
Leader of the Council	2.00	12,773
Deputy Leader's	1.00	6,387
Cabinet Member	1.00	6,387
Scrutiny Committee Chair	1.00	6,387
PDG Chair	0.50	3,194
Audit Committee Chair	0.50	3,194
Planning Committee Chair	1.00	6,387

Appendix 1

Licensing/Regulatory Chair	0.25	1,597
Standards Chair	0.25	1,597
Chairman of the Council	0.50	3,194

- c. No Member should be entitled to claim more than **one** Special Responsibility Allowance.
- d. Carers' allowances be calculated on the current basis namely, the actual expenditure up to the national living wage of a person over 25.
- e. That travel allowances be linked to HMRC rates and calculated at the national levels indicated, currently:
- 45p per mile for the first 10,000 miles
 - 25p per mile thereafter
 - 5p per mile per passenger carried (up to a maximum of 4 passengers, payable to the driver)
 - 25p per mile for push bikes
- (* To be uplifted once the rates for 2024/2025 are known).
- f. That subsistence allowances be linked to those of the staff, currently these are as follows in each case up to a maximum of:
- Breakfast £9.71
 - Lunch £13.40
 - Tea £5.26
 - Evening Meal £16.58
- (* To be uplifted once the rates for 2024/2025 are known).
- g. That **all** claims for travel and subsistence reimbursement be accompanied by an appropriate receipt.
- h. That a full Fundamental Review is carried out in relation to the Scheme of Members Allowances for 2025/2026 during 2024.

Independent Remuneration Panel

Jeremy Filmer-Bennett
John Smith
Karen Stone

1 December 2023