



**Independent Remuneration Panel
Cotswold District Council**

Draft Annual Report and Recommendations May 2023

I. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report is a synopsis of the deliberations and recommendations made by the statutory Independent Remuneration IRP ('IRP' or 'panel') appointed by Cotswold District Council to advise the council on its' Members' allowances scheme and, to submit the recommendations for 2023 - 27 for consideration by the council.

2. BACKGROUND AND REGULATORY CONTEXT

2.1 By law, the Council is required to appoint an IRP, which recommends the level of allowances payable for Councillors over a specific timeframe. The Panel is currently made up of three persons, appointed by Council, who are suitably skilled Members of the public and who are also independent of the District Council.

2.2 The Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 require local authorities to review their Allowances Schemes and to appoint Independent Remuneration Panels to consider and make recommendations on new schemes. The Government's "Guidance on Consolidated Regulations on Local Authority Allowances" outlines the main statutory provisions and gives non-statutory guidance.

2.3 All councils are required to convene their IRP and seek its advice before they make any changes or amendments to their allowances scheme and they must 'pay regard' to the panel's recommendations before setting a new or amended Members' allowances scheme.

2.4 The duties of the IRP include reviewing, and making recommendations about:

- the level of basic allowance paid to elected Members of the council;
- the special responsibility allowances paid to those councillors with extra responsibilities;
- allowances for childcare and dependants' care;
- allowances for travel and subsistence; and
- other aspects of the remuneration package such as IT equipment
- allowances paid to co-opted (i.e. non-elected) Members.
- to consider any other issues brought to the panel's attention during the review, providing it is within the panel's remit and the issues are covered by the 2003 regulations.

2.5 In providing such advice, the panel will have regard to:

- i. The roles councillors are expected to fulfil and the differing roles and responsibilities of portfolio holders;
- ii. The remuneration paid by other local authorities in the South West, specifically comparing and contrasting district councils;
- iii. The current statutory framework for the remuneration of councillors and the scope which the council has to establish and vary its own arrangements, and any commentary on that (professional bodies such as the LGA, section 151 officer and other interested parties);
- iv. The views of councillors; including relevant papers and documents on Members' roles in relation to Members' allowances.
- v. The economic climate and the need for recommendations which could be feasibly met within the existing budget envelope available, and

- vi. Any other consideration that the council obliges the IRP to take into account or brought to the IRP's attention through Member representations.

3. THE PANEL

3.1 Cotswold Council reconvened its IRP in 2022 for the purpose of reviewing the current scheme of allowances and remuneration package.

The panel consists of three Members:

- Jane Winstanley MBE - Chair
- Michael Paget-Wilks
- Stefan Robinson (joined September 2022 replacing Richard Blamey)

The panel is supported by officers.

4. REPORT

4.1 Since the inception of the independent remuneration panel in 2000, the IRP, to date, has reviewed councillors' allowances, with the most recent scheme agreed in 2019 when an increase was applied of 25% to the basis allowance. Prior to this there had not been an increase since 2008 and the IRP considered an increase "critical".

4.2 In order to produce remuneration recommendations the panel found it fit to examine how many hours on average a councillor would spend carrying out their non-political duties.

4.2 As part of their deliberations, the IRP have met considered the remit of the regulations, discussed and received factual briefings from supporting officers. All Members received an online survey of which fourteen completed it. In addition, a representative range of eight elected Members were invited to meet with the IRP for an interview. The panel meetings were independent to enable the panel to consult in confidence and hold its deliberations in private.

5. THE ROLE AND TIME COMMITMENT OF A DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

5.1 Cotswold District Council is made of 34 democratically elected Members from across the district, a mix of political parties and an independent Members. The length of service of Members is also varied, with the newest cohort of Members elected this month. District Councillors have a range of roles within their communities and on the Council. Members undertake casework on behalf of local residents and act as community leaders.

5.2 On the Council, Members attend full Council meetings and may sit on committees, sub-committees and informal working groups. Councillors may also represent the Council on outside bodies. The majority political group or alliance forms the Council's administration (the "Cabinet"), which is responsible for taking most of the Council's major decisions. Currently eight Members serve on the Cabinet including the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council.

5.3 Based on the interviews held with various councillors it is obvious that Members work in different ways, but over 75% have experienced an increase in the time spent on council duties during the Covid-19 pandemic and other recent national and world events such as the "Cost of Living" crisis and war in Ukraine.

5.4 The Panel noted that, at the latest Census in 2021, compared to the previous Census in 2011, Cotswold had seen a 9.5% increase in population to 90,832. This would appear to tie in with the increase in correspondence and contact that Councillors have been experiencing over recent years. Respondents also agreed that there is an ever continuing change in ways that Councillors now

connect with their residents. The vast majority of those stated that both email and social media correspondence were now the main methods of resident communication.

5.5 Many Members are regularly involved with the town and parish councils that fall within the district. Some Members are town or parish councillors (some are also county councillors). All councillors interviewed stated that they have regular contact with town and parish councils on monthly basis.

5.6 The IRP were unable to clarify if this trend of increasing time spent on Council duties will continue post pandemic and as a result the panel would like to reconvene two years from their initial assessment ie 2024/5 to specifically review workloads.

5.7 The 2006 statutory guidance states the importance of some elements of the work of [elected] Members continue to be voluntary – that some hours are not remunerated. The element of unremunerated time often known as the ‘public service discount’ (PSD) recognises the principle of public service. The panel had agreed that the 30% discount previously applied is still relevant and applicable, given the nature and purpose of the role in running for public office.

6. LENGTH OF THE ALLOWANCE SCHEME AND ANNUAL UPLIFT

6.1 The IRP was asked to form a view on the period to be covered by the next allowances scheme and whether an index should be used for annually uplifting allowances. Regulations enable schemes to cover a period of up to four years where an index is relied on for the purposes of annual adjustments to allowances. In 2019, the Council agreed a four year scheme which expires this month.

6.2 The Panel decided to recommend a further 4-year scheme ie 2023/24 – 2026/27 with a mid-term, 2-year review point to review workload. Indexation will be linked to the national pay award for local government employees (known as “green book”). In the event that a cash sum, as opposed to a % increase is awarded, then the average increase in pay of those Publica staff supporting Cotswold DC and staff directly employed by Cotswold DC will be applied, as determined by the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer.

6.3 The index will also apply to Special Responsibility Allowances given that these are calculated as multiples of the basic allowance.

7. BASIC ALLOWANCE

7.1 At the time of writing this report, the basic yearly allowance is £5541.96. This allowance is paid to all 34 Councillors, irrespective of additional responsibilities held that would constitute a payment of a Special Responsibility Allowance. There was a divergence of views from respondents regarding whether this is suitable remuneration.

7.2 The Panel considered the level of the basic allowance in comparison with other district authorities in the South West England Region. The Council’s basic allowance is approximately 1.75% (about £100 per annum) below average.

7.3 The panel recognises and is cognisant of the cost of living emergency declaration within the district and the need for recommendations which could be feasibly met within the existing budget envelope available.

7.4 As a result the Panel didn’t recommend a further increase. However, the Panel did recommend that the level of each allowance is rounded up to the nearest whole pound (£), divisible by 12 when uplifts are applied (in line with the staff pay award calculations).

8. SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY ALLOWANCE (SRAs)

8.1 Some Members have certain roles on the Council which attract a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA). SRAs are paid in addition to the basic allowance in recognition of the additional responsibilities that these Members have and the extra time and commitment that comes with these roles. These include roles such as being a Member of the Cabinet, chairs of committees, and opposition group leaders. SRAs are calculated as multiples of the basic allowance, and will therefore increase in proportion to the basic allowance when uplifts are applied to the basic allowance.

8.2 The Panel considered the levels of SRAs paid for all roles that attract a SRA and, having reviewed benchmarking data concluded that these should be kept at their existing levels. These are set out in Appendix B.

9. OPPOSITION GROUP LEADERS

9.1 Opposition Group Leaders are responsible for the internal management of their political groups and for representing their groups at Council and informal meetings. For the term 2019 – 2023 there was only one opposition group leader, that's no longer the case following the May 2023 election.

9.2 In May 2019, Council agreed:

'to increase the multiplier for the minority group leader(s) to 1; with the division of such sum (in the event of there being more than one minority group) being proportionate to the number of Members in each minority group - to reflect the fact that shadow appointments are not made''.

9.4 The Panel support this approach.

9.5 The Panel considered whether any other roles on the Council should attract an SRA. In view of the survey responses received and interviews conducted, the Panel concluded that the case hadn't been made for introducing any additional SRAs.

10. OTHER ALLOWANCES

10.1 The Panel have identified the need and would like to facilitate through the Members Allowance Scheme, where possible, that the role of district councillor can be open to as diverse a group of individuals as possible. The Panel discussed the level of allowances in this context but concluded that simply increasing the level of allowances alone would not address all of the barriers faced by people who may wish to be a councillor. The level of an allowance that would be genuinely inclusive would need to be more akin to a salary whereas the role of councillor is a public service rather than a form of employment.

10.2 Members may claim travel allowances and carers' allowances when attending meetings. No changes are recommended to carers' allowances or travel and subsistence allowances. However, the Panel would like there to be more publicity of these allowances to Members.

10.3 The Panel noted that the Council currently has few co-opted Members and recommends that no changes are made to co-optees' allowances.

11. MATERNITY, PATERNITY AND ADOPTION LEAVE

11.1 The Panel identified that one way in which an allowances scheme could make a potentially useful intervention, would be by including provision for maternity, paternity and adoption leave. 11.2 Over 71% of survey respondents agreed with this proposition and thought that such an intervention would help to attract a more diverse and varied range of future councillors.

11.3 For most councillors the role is quite flexible and can be combined with work & family commitments. Subject to meeting the "six month rule" (Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 states that a Member of a local authority loses office if they do not attend a meeting at least

once in any six-month period). It is possible for councillors to take a step back from their duties temporarily and to arrange substitutions for meetings, for example, while continuing to receive a basic allowance.

11.4 For Members in receipt of special responsibility allowances, the time commitment is generally higher and anticipated to be more difficult to combine the role with taking a period of maternity, paternity or adoption leave.

11.5 The Panel recommends that any Member stepping down from a role with a special responsibility for the purposes of taking a period of maternity, paternity or adoption leave, should continue to receive 50% of their SRA for six months. The payments would not be subject to the Member being reappointed or re-elected to the role at the end of that period, as that would be a decision for the Leader (if a Member of the Cabinet), the relevant committee or sub-committee or, in the case of an Opposition Group Leader, the political group.

12. ICT ALLOWANCES

12.1 The Panel noted there is an existing allowance of £1200 (£300 per annum) paid to councillors over their 4 year term for the provision of ICT equipment. The allowance is either made monthly over the 4 year term, or in one lump sum at a time of the Member's choosing. This allows Members to purchase a suitable device of their choosing and most Members access meeting papers electronically.

12.2 The Panel considered whether it would be more cost effective and secure for Members to be issued with Council provided devices directly. The majority of Members interviewed preferred to remain with their own device. The Council's ICT Team have confirmed this is a more cost effective solution and have reiterated that this doesn't expose the Council to an increased risk of data protection, cyber or other attempts by hackers to cause damage.

12.3 Although outside their remit, the panel did make a general observation regarding the need for IT training to support Members in undertaking their roles.

13. EMPLOYEE/MEMBER ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

13.1 Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) are employee benefit programmes offered by many employers, including Publica and for the retained Cotswold staff. EAP are intended to help individuals deal with personal or work related problems that might adversely impact their work performance, health and wellbeing. EAP generally include assessment and telephone counselling.

13.2 Cotswold District Council endorsed the Local Government Association's "Debate not Hate" campaign in 2022. This campaign aims to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in their communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the responses and support for local politicians facing abuse and intimidation. Additionally 71% of respondents identified their support to the introduction of an EAP.

13.3 In support of the aims of this campaign and the well-publicised unfortunate abuse of councillors nationally, the panel would like to introduce the EAP as a service for all Members. The total cost for 34 Members is £600 per annum.

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

14.1 With all of the above findings considered, the Independent Remuneration Panel submits the following recommendations to Cotswold District Council:

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.

REMUNERATION PACKAGE ELEMENT	PROPOSED CHANGE – May 2023
Basic Allowance	Maintain alignment to annual staff “green book” pay award for 2023/24, 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27. No change to the annual allowance with the exception of rounding each allowance up to the nearest whole £ equally divisible by 12.
Special Responsibility Allowance	No change to existing multipliers. Round up to the nearest whole £.
Mileage, Fares & Subsistence Allowances	No change
Child Care Allowance	No change
Dependent Carer	No change
ICT provision	No change
Family Friendly Policies – maternity, paternity, and adoption leave.	Introduce Member policies. Any Member stepping down from a role with a Special Responsibility Allowance (and relinquishing all responsibility) for the purpose of taking a period of maternity, paternity, adoption leave or shared parental leave will be entitled to receive 50% of the special responsibility allowance for up to six months.
Employee/Member Assistance Programme	Introduce with immediate effect