

## WEST DEVON MEMBERS' ALLOWANCE SURVEY 2023 - COMBINED RESPONSE SUMMARY

### Section 1 – Basic Allowance

1. The basic allowance for councillors is intended to recognise the time commitment of the role including (but not limited to) travel to meetings, meeting preparation, attendance, meeting with officers and residents and case work. The allowance should also cover incidental costs such as use of councillors' homes. Government guidance also states the role of an elected councillors must in part be viewed as an unpaid voluntary service.

On the basis of the above, do you think the basic allowance for the role of a Borough Councillor is:

Significantly too low 3  
Too low 6  
About right 2  
Too high  
Significantly too high

2. If you think the basic allowance is either too 'high' or too 'low' please state at what level the basic allowance should be paid?

*We should be comparable/bench marked to similar authorities – based on this consideration needs to be taken of which quartile we feel is appropriate to our situation in West Devon.*

*The allowance should rise with inflation every year to ensure we get a range of people standing for election to become councillors. And to ensure those on low incomes do not experience hardship when using their home as a workspace.*

*We should be comparable to similar authorities – in the middle of the range (eg 3rd quintile)*

*In my experience most Councillors work 10 – 20 hours a week, week in week out, including setting one day a week aside for Council business. It is sometimes complex, sometimes difficult, sometimes unpopular work which requires a great deal of organisation, commitment and application. I understand the Government guidance but if we are to encourage high quality candidates from across the community to be candidates then we should be prepared to, at least, compensate people for the opportunity cost of undertaking this important work. 15 hours per week at £10 per hour (way too low a figure in my view) equates to £7,800 per annum which ought to be the starting point for our consideration. I'd also point out that councillor colleagues in larger district councils are remunerated better than my colleagues on WDBC, simply because, it seems, the Council's overall budget is larger. We still carry out the same job description and the same work with our constituents, officers etc. and to be paid less for that that someone doing the same job seems inherently unfair.*

*The cost of living and the increase in fuel is affecting my bank balance adversely. Working from home means it has to be kept warm.*

*This needs to reflect current inflation when being reviewed to encourage younger working people to stand for council without loss of income.*

*Too low for all councillors and specifically for two groups:*

- a. Members of DM&L. These councillors have to commit to a massive amount of time for frequent committee meetings and site visits. Further, their training requirement is mandatory and greater than the typical councillor. I do not sit on this committee and have no desire to so sit, meaning, my comments here are purely objective. I would suggest that all members receive additional basic allowance of 50% and an uplift for each site visit undertaken, of a fixed £50 per visit, to recognise those who fulfil their obligations over those who perhaps take a back seat.*
- b. Vice Chairs of committees. Vice chairs are required to make the same degree of commitment as is the Chair. There are occasions when I, as a VC am required to substitute for the Chair. Thus, the VC shares the responsibility for which the Chair is remunerated and should be similarly recognised financially, all be it at a lower level (maybe 50%).*

*The danger of keeping allowances low are that it will not attract professionals into the roll, while I appreciate that it is a delicate balance between that and being seen to have a mind to the appearance to tax payers and value for money. I don't think it is appreciated, on a public level, the level of work and commitment involved in being an effective member.*

**3. The basic allowance covers costs such as printing, telephone calls and home broadband – are there any additional cost that you incur in your role that are not covered by the basic allowance or Travel and Subsistence Scheme? If so, what are they and approximately how much do they cost per year?**

*The expenses include cost of care for dependents. However, the level at which this is set (minimum wage at £10.33 per hour currently) is significantly below the actual cost of provision of care support. This is currently costing me over £1,000 per year after claiming the allowable expense. This probably will deter people with significant caring duties from seeking to be councillors. The hourly for claims should be significantly increased based on some benchmarked / objective measure of care costs.*

*No, and I don't think those identified costs are significant – I have broadband anyway..*

*No*

*These costs have all risen sharply over the last few years. There is also an implicit 'etiquette' rule with regard to appropriate standards of dress. In my case, I have purchased new shoes and other items of clothing specifically*

**4. What is the average number of hours per week you need to perform your role as a West Devon Borough Councillor?**

Less than 5 hours per week	
<b>5 to 10 hours per week</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>10 to 15 hours per week</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>15 – 20 hours per week</b>	<b>2</b>
20-25 hours per week	
25-30 hours per week	
<b>30-35 hours per week</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>More than 35 hours per week</b>	<b>1</b>

(Please note: this does not apply to duties you undertake as a member of the town or parish council or for which you receive a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA))

**5. Historically, the Panel have compared allowance schemes from comparable local authorities as a factor in determining allowances, do you have any suggestions for an alternative to update the allowances?**

*Is this bench marked? If so, the council should be advising the Panel on what is an appropriate quartile for West Devon to be placed in. See my answer to question 2.*

*Compare to minimum wage levels to ensure the allowance is not too low. We know all councils are cash strapped so allowances are likely to be kept at a low rate.*

*The council should guide the panel as to whereabouts in this list of local authorities allowance rates it should be. For example, should we be in the top quartile, or bottom quartile or whatever.*

*I would expect the comparison to take into account when the allowances in the benchmarked councils were set to enable them to be adjusted for inflation in the comparison.*

*The better way could be to agree an indexation formula from the current rates. This formula could say something along the lines of:*

*Current rates (set at whatever date they were set) indexed by the lower of*

*a) CPI*

*b) Average staff wage rises in the public sector or local government or in WDBC staff (whichever is felt to be appropriate).*

*We then do a reasonableness check the answer against other comparable authorities. If they fall into the relevant quartile (see above) then we go with that number. If higher we reduce to the middle of that quartile, if below we accept the allowance level produced by the indexation.*

*No, except that the whole sector should, perhaps, be compared against comparable jobs elsewhere.*

*Actual Inflation costs could be considered*

**6. For re-elected Members: Has the role of Borough Councillor changed significantly during the terms of Office you have served**

**Yes: 6**

**No: 2**

**If Yes, in what way:**

*There are many more emails than previously*

*I have greater responsibilities, much more travelling is entailed in this as well as more attention to appearance and dress. The work is also during weekends and many evenings.*

*Although it is definitely more political*

*People are expecting a response more swiftly. Some residents are very rude.*

*I've noticed the teaching profession does not call councillors councillor but "hey guys"*

*The amount of information which is sent to councillors is increasing +++*

*There is the feeling that "well I sent you an email ....."*

*There is a feeling that taking time off out of the office is not always acceptable from some members of the public*

*Involved with more external organizations. Become vice chair on a committee taking more time.*

*A higher level of training and responsibilities needed and a greater commitment.*

*Far more time consuming than before. This I would put down to not just politics, which might be to blame for the housing crisis and the climate emergency, but also the pandemic and extra economic pressures due to the overseas conflicts.*

**7. Do you foresee the role of a Borough Councillor changing further in the near future (eg increasing use of Remote meetings/changing levels and methods of engagement with Town & Parish Councils and Residents etc)?**

*If hybrid working to allow voting to take place, this will have an impact on the Council*

*I am not sure at this point; however I do see a point where being 'Social media literate' is going to be key. We may even be there, and I think that training for this should be provided to help with greater engagement and avoid some of the pit falls of it*

*Don't know, but our engagement with residents is a key role and this needs to increase.*

*Increased use of remote meetings is already having an impact and is a useful technological development. That does require Councillors to have some additional technical skills.*

*I sincerely hope that face to face meetings are not removed, however, as getting people together, knowing and understanding each other, having informal discussions etc. are all beneficial to the operation of the Council, the formulation of creative answers to problems, protection of Councillors and officers' mental health etc.*

*I also hope that there will be genuine devolution of powers and resources to a local level – if that does happen there is even greater need for good, effective local councillors.*

*Yes. The formality and historic smartness of councils has all but gone.*

*Many councillors are very informal, officers don't refer to councillors as "Councillor".*

*There is a change in attitude. It is very different from 2007 when I started.*

*Personally, I think the way West Devon borough council currently works is great.*

*The important meeting for decision making being in person with live streaming for the public. With other small working groups having the choice of in person or remotely over teams works extremely well. Therefore, I only see this developing slightly on the remote communication side in the near future.*

*I do not like remote meetings as a rule. I hope that the trend in this direction is reversed.*

*Yes, there is a greater expectation, in my experience, from the parish councils to explain procedures and decisions taken by the borough.*

*Not necessarily but more emphasis could be placed on later meetings to attract working councillors.*

**8. In addition to the number of hours worked by councillors, are there any other factors you think should be considered by the panel when determining the basic allowance?**

*I have fought for 20 years for the members of the DM&L Committee to be paid more than the basic allowance. In their role they must keep free 1 Tuesday and 1 Thursday free for planning meetings and site visits. The reading of the agenda and looking up things on the planning portal all take time, other members don't have to do this painstaking level of preparation for meetings. Potentially these members must give up 26 days for the committee. Many of them also serve on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.*

*Councillors need to engage in relevant training to be able to carry out their roles, as in the case of the DML committee, which can have a direct impact on someone's lives or livelihood. There for the increased degree of responsibility should be reflected in the basic allowance for this committee, but only after the appropriate training of the group.*

*The spread of hours over the week and during evenings.*

*Councillors should make a commitment to engaging in relevant professional training for their roles. For example on planning, finance, and other areas. It is unreasonable for us to be expected to make decisions without having a sound knowledge and theoretical base for this. This means that individual 'training plans' should be agreed and funded by the council.*

*Yes, the complexity and difficulty of the work, the community leadership and visibility that is required and the lack of job security in an elected post – every 4 years you can lose your role often through no fault of your own and, unlike MPs, no compensation is available. In addition, the “allowance” that is received is often below minimum wage, carries no pension entitlement and yet is taxed. Either it should be an allowance or it should be pay with all of the benefits that go with it.*

*Yes. Trying to attract people who aren't ancient, on pensions or benefits.*

*If we are going to attract a broader spectrum of councillors' society needs to recognise the work that we do. It was financially silly of me becoming a councillor and having to leave nursing because the shifts didn't fit with meetings.*

*My choice, but it was stupid of me! 😊 Financially, however I have enjoyed being a councillor and helping residents.*

*I wish there had been a pension with the job.*

*For all members, there should be a minimum attendance at Council per month in order to qualify for a full allowance. Medical and exceptional compassionate exceptions should apply. This should be set relatively high, 80% plus to avoid rewarding those who are not properly committed. Below this figure, a basic 50% should be applied.*

*The growing complexity and expectations of members to understand the changing policies especially with planning etc.*

*My argument continues to be that some councillors put a lot of hours into their elected roles whilst others do very little. I don't know how this can be reflected in remuneration unless there was councillor appraisals done?*

**9. Do you think the current basic allowance may present a barrier to those who may wish to stand for election?**

*Yes particularly for younger people who are still working, especially as we meet during the day. Most of our councillors are retired and often in receipt of good personal pensions, so the allowance is a bonus. For a younger person with a young family, it does put them off joining. Giving up one day a week of their working life is costly and the Council allowance does not compensate for this. People end up using holiday leave to attend meetings. The age demographic is most notable on the DM&L Committee*

*Yes, I do not feel that the remuneration covers the costs of carrying out the role especially in terms of lost earnings, potential child/adult care costs. This potentially disenfranchises a large proportion of the community. It could even be seen as discriminating against certain groups within the community which we are seeking to engage. The cost-of-living crisis have exacerbated this further, and we need to ensure allowances reflect what has been happening. Simply because most councillors may be able to 'subsidise' the costs of being a councillor due to individual circumstances this should not preclude an allowance truly reflecting the costs of being a councillor.*

*It is not at a level where a working person could afford to drop a day of their main job to take part. Evening council meetings would impact on office time and the home time of otherwise employed people*

*The current basic allowance is too low and presents significant challenges to potential candidates. For example:*

- 1. A self employed councillor will often be losing income through council and related duties. The allowance at it stands will not recompense someone for this loss.*
- 2. Employed people with family /mortgage commitments etc who are not supported by their employer face great financial challenges. This differentially affects younger people.*

*This also means that:*

- 1. councillor in this situation may just 'skimp' on their the time spent on their duties to council and their constituents.*
- 2. A whole segment of the population will be effectively excluded from standing, and the representatives of the people will be skewed to contain only those who can afford to be councillors. This is very bad for democracy.*

*Yes, I think it has done so and will continue to do so. Consider the low numbers of young people of working age who put themselves forward as candidates.*

*Yes as above*

*Yes -Particularly for those younger people that are in full-time employment and need to take leave of absence to attend meetings. There is a need to attract younger people to the role of councillor so there is a wider range of opinions across the age democratic of the council.*

*It may do in some cases, specifically self-employed people. Unless they are adequately remunerated for a day's lost productivity a week, it may not be possible for them to commit the time away from their income generating endeavours.*

*Yes*

## **Section 2- Special Responsibilities Allowance (SRA)**

**10. Do you currently receive an SRA?**

**Yes: 7**

**No: 4**

**11. Do you think the SRAs under the existing scheme are set at a fair level? If you believe the scheme has inconsistencies, please be specific.**

*The only scheme I think should be amended is DM&L. The vice Chairman is expected to be at every DM&L meeting, site meeting and the briefing prior to the DM&L Committee*

*Not enough knowledge to comment*

*SRA does not account for the many hours travelling and preparing for engagements as well as cover for home responsibilities.*

*I am unable to comment on any inconsistencies other than to guess that certain committees may require a higher level of technical competence, experience and effort than others. However, I think that it would be difficult to differentiate on this basis. I chair a committee which requires a high level of professional skill (for which I am qualified).*

*Before I chair a committee of say 2 hours I will have read the papers twice, had an in depth briefing from officers, and identified the relevant issues and established how and who should address them. This takes at least 1 day in addition to each meeting.*

*Further there are internal and external briefings, technical and professional updates, and meetings which I have to attend to maintain a wider view of the relevant professional and national issues relevant to the committee. This is difficult to quantify but represents many days of effort.*

*Yes, I think the multiples are about right.*

*I think it depends on the councillor. Some councillors work really hard.*

*Yes*

*No, see answers above:  
D&ML, Vice Chairs of committees, and below those leading working groups*

*Yes, though there are no SRA for vice chairs*

**12. Are there any other roles which you think should be in receipt of an SRA? If so, please give reasons.**

*Please see answer to Question 8*

*This should depend on the perceived/agreed level of responsibility. Where a committee has potentially more impact on a group or individual then it can be justified. Such as the DML. However, this should reflect need for compulsory training and engagement, not just reflect longer hours. This should be addressed separately.*



*The DML councillors do need to be available for a range of meetings and site visits so this should be recognised in the Allowance provision.*

*Members of D M & L have to put in more time and attend more meetings to carry out their duties I think they should be in receipt of a SRA.*

*No*

*Can't think of any. If a vice chairman has to do the work of a chairman regularly, then they should receive income.*

*The role of vice chair of planning committee should receive some degree of SRA as that person must be prepared to chair some meetings and site visits if the chair is not available and, is involved with other aspects. For example, the monthly briefing and any decisions made by the committee that needs to be further ratified after the meeting with the officer responsible and head of planning for the application. To ensure committee decisions are fully complied with on the decision notice being issued by the officer.*

*Those who are required to lead sub-committees and working group types This involves a deal of time and often falls to those already loaded with responsibilities*

*DM&L committee members should definitely receive an SRA their workload is far greater than any of the other committees I have sat on.*

### **13. What is your view on limiting the number of SRAs per person?**

*Mixed. In the current make-up of the Council, the opposition leader and deputy are not remunerated for their roles as leaders because they both serve on the Hub. In my personal view even 25% uplift would recognise those roles*

*If a person does the jobs appropriately then why not. Some sort of Performance Management review maybe required to ensure they have fulfilled their roles. However, I would think that anymore than two would be excessive and also led to a narrowing of the range of expertise available to the council as a whole.*

*The SRAs are attached to the role so removing this would be to the detriment of any councillor prepared to take on a range of roles.*

*I am not sure of the reasoning behind this decision. If a person is doing 2 roles, why should they not get an SRA for each (if the roles each require separate effort)*

*There is a limit to what each person can actually do so SRA's per person should be limited.*

*I think it's the correct policy.*

*Some councillors are very good and if they are doing the work, they deserve to be paid.*

*I don't think having a sub-optimal councillor in a post, is a good thing. They shouldn't get paid if they aren't doing the job.*

*If someone does the work, they should be remunerated regardless. There should be a balancing rule that members may not hold more than one SRA position to avoid those with leadership positions possibly abusing them in self-interest.*

*Correct*

*I don't think that is necessary. If Councillors are willing and capable and their skillset's suit the roles it is surely better for the Council and the public to have people in roles they are capable of doing rather than just because they have been around for a while.*

### **Section 3 – Group Leaders' Allowance**

#### **14. Do you think Group Leaders should receive an allowance?**

**Yes: 6**

**No: 4**

*Unsure it would depend on what would be expected of the role.*

**If Yes, do you think there should be a minimum number in the Group for an allowance to be payable? If so what size should the Group be?**

*Five*

*If they play a role in leading/organising a group to the benefit of the council and it's decision-making progress then 2 is a suitable number.*

*Leaders of larger groups should be paid an SRA to manage this role, it takes time and effort to undertake this role.*

*Paid for a group of 3 and over which gives a Hub seat entitlement*

*As currently agreed - 3*

*It should be a significant grouping – probably around 10 councillors (1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the Council)*

*Six*

*This is something that any member should be willing to absorb as a standard requirement. I do not see that group leaders add value to the council. They merely corral like minded folk together. In my view, all should be acting independently of political persuasion, in the interests of the local electorate collectively. It is fundamentally wrong to impose national political dogma at a local level where the main aim is delivery of essential services.*

*1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the council*

## Section 4 – General

### 15. Do you have any other comments/observations to make on the Members Allowance scheme generally including travel, subsistence and carers allowances?

*The subsistence allowance is not in tune with the cost of living and they all need to be raised in line with reality*

*See 3. Above re carers allowance*

*Don't think so. Do councillors who have had to step down from senior roles because of family commitments warrant carers allowance? I've never asked.*

*The current mileage allowance for the use of private vehicles have not risen to my knowledge For at least 40 years this by no means covers the cost of running the basic vehicle today when you take into consideration insurance, fuel and maintenance costs.*

*Travel and subsistence should reflect the actual costs. It should not, in the case of subsistence, require that a member spends the bare minimum but at a level in keeping with role, responsibility and status.*

### 16. Would you like to be interviewed by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) during the review?

*Yes*

*Not high on my agenda of fun things to do but if needed.*

*Not particularly, but happy to be spoken to.*

*I'd be happy to be interviewed but don't think I would have much to assist their survey.*

*I would be happy to attend.*

*Don't mind*

*Should they wish to interview me I would have no objection.*

*Yes*

*Happy to be*