

Scheme of Members' Allowances 2025/26 - report and recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel

Executive Member: Councillor Bill Revans, Leader of the Council

Executive Director: Alyn Jones, Executive Director – Resources, Strategy and Transformation and Interim Monitoring Officer

Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposals in relation to the Members Allowances 2025/26 for the Somerset Council. The proposals have been developed in consultation with the Somerset Independent Remuneration Panel (“the Panel”) following their review of the proposed Scheme of Member’s Allowances 2025/26.
- 1.2 Each local authority is required to appoint and maintain an Independent Panel to make recommendations to the Council on members’ allowances. The Council must have regard to the Panel’s recommendations before making decisions in relation to members’ allowances but doesn’t have to accept them. Where the Council doesn’t accept the Panel’s recommendations it should give reasons for not doing so.
- 1.3 There is legal uncertainty as to whether receipt of an allowance paid by the Council may amount to a disclosable pecuniary interest when considering council business. A number of local authorities have obtained legal opinion from differing Kings Counsel and those opinions are split. In the circumstances, a number of local authorities have advised their members to err on the side of caution, as a failure to declare a pecuniary interest may amount to a criminal offence.
- 1.4 Ahead of the Council meeting on 5 March, the Monitoring Officer will issue guidance to all members regarding the process for seeking a dispensation.

Recommendations

- 1.5 Council is recommended to:
 - i. Thank the Panel for its report and recommendations set out in Appendix 1;
 - ii. Consider the Panel’s recommendations prior to determining the Scheme of Members’ Allowances 2025/26 and the draft Scheme of Members’ Allowances 2025/26 (set out in Appendix 2);
 - iii. Authorise the Monitoring Officer to finalise and publish the Scheme of Members’ Allowances 2025/26 to reflect the Council’s decision.

Reasons for Proposals

- 1.6 The arrangements for determining allowances for elected members are set down in statutory regulations - the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (SI 1021) and subsequent amendments to the regulations (SI 2003/1022 and SI 2003/1692).
- 1.7 The Council must have regard to the Panel's recommendations before making decisions in relation to members' allowances but doesn't have to accept them.

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Main report and supporting information

Background and purpose of report

- 1.8 The Independent Remuneration Panel's responsibility is to review the Council's Scheme of Members Allowances. The Panel makes recommendations to Somerset Council to ensure that allowances are set at the appropriate level to undertake the elected member role and sufficiently attractive to all who would wish to serve as an elected member of Somerset Council.
- 1.9 In February 2024, the Panel recommended the Scheme of Members Allowances for 2024/25 to Somerset Council. The Council adopted the Panel's recommendations and set the Basic Allowance, subject to increases in-year at the same percentage increase as the average Somerset Council officer pay award. The Basic Allowance is now £16,135 per annum. The Council also adopted the Panel's recommendations for the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) for various roles (Chair of Council, Leader of the Council, Chairs of various committees, etc).
- 1.10 As part of its review, during 2024/25, the Panel has:
- Met with political Group Leaders to get an understanding of the councillor's workloads and time commitments, with and without SRAs.
 - Reviewed comparator data from peer councils which are similar to Somerset Council although none are identical, some of which have been established for some time to offer a useful insight into the roles of a unitary Councillor (see table 1 below).
- 1.11 The Panel has completed the review, and its report is set out in Appendix 1.

Table 1 - Basic Allowance – Comparator information (Based on figures for 2024/2025 where available)

Authority	Basic Allowance	Difference in allowance	Population	Number of Councillors
Buckinghamshire	£14,805	-£1,330	553,000	147
Cornwall	£16,378	-£243	586,210	87
North Yorkshire	£17,000	-£865	615,491	90
Somerset	£16,135		576,852	110
Wiltshire	£15,869	+£266	510,300	98

- 1.12 The Panel recognises that the Council is still relatively new in its form and function and further evolving. The Panel is aware that the Council declared a financial emergency in November 2023 and is facing significant financial and demand-led pressures.

The Panel recommends that the Basic Allowance for 2025/26 should continue to be set at £16,135 per annum and be increased in-year at the same percentage increase as the average Somerset Council officer pay award for 2025/26.

- 1.13 The Panel has also reviewed the Special Responsibility Allowances for existing roles. From the interviews and feedback with members, the Panel has not been able to identify any significant changes to responsibilities for the roles receiving SRAs and therefore it does not propose any changes to the current SRAs for the Scheme of Members' Allowances for 2025/26.
- 1.14 The Panel considers there to be a need to include Special Responsibility Allowances for the Harbour Management Advisory Committee Chair and the Human Resources Committee Chair. It is recommended these are added to the Scheme in 2025/26.
- 1.15 The Panel acknowledged that the Council had a number of partnership boards including the Somerset Rivers Authority and the Local Community Networks. However, it noted these were not always chaired by Somerset Councillors and as such could not be included in the Scheme of Allowances.
- 1.16 **In respect of Special Responsibility Allowances, the Panel recommends:**
- i. that it is not proposing any changes to the current multipliers of Basic Allowance for each respective role as set out in Annex 2 of its report.**
 - ii. That the position of Chair of the Harbour Management Advisory Committee be added to the Scheme in 2025/26 with a remuneration at band 6.**
 - iii. That the position of Chair of the Human Resources Committee be added to the Scheme in 2025/26 with a remuneration at band 6.**
 - iv. To add a note to the Scheme to state there was no provision in the Scheme for allowances to be paid to the Chair of any partnership boards which the Council may sit on.**
- 1.17 In respect of Travel and Subsistence Allowances the Panel recommends that rates are set in line with rates of travel and subsistence claimable by Council employees.
- 1.18 The Panel reviewed the comparator data for co-opted member allowances and considers that the existing allowance of £1,000 per annum should continue for 2025/2026.
- 1.19 The Panel recommends that the Scheme of Members' Allowances 2025/26 continues to include a Parental Leave and Carers' Allowance in line with the current Somerset Council 2024/25 scheme.
- 1.20 The Panel continues to recommend that the role of the Independent Remuneration Panel member should remain as voluntary and that no allowance is claimable.

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

- 1.21 The Medium-Term Financial Plan includes provision for members allowances, expenses and subsistence payments for 2025/26.

Other options considered

- 1.22 The Council must consider the recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel when considering agreeing its Scheme of Members Allowances.

Key considerations for the Council

Consultation and feedback

- 1.23 Political group leaders have been consulted on the recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel.

Financial and Risk Implications

- 1.24 Financial: The 2024/25 budget allocation for Members Basic and Special Responsibilities Allowances is £2,418,700. It is highlighted that during 2024/25 there has been a reduction in the number of Executive Lead Members and Associate Lead Members which has delivered a saving.

A pressure bid of £116,700 for Members Allowances has been included as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to meet the estimated costs of the Panel's recommended increase to allowances in line with estimated average percentage increases for staff pay awards in 2025/26. This would provide a total 2025/26 budget allocation for Members Basic and Special Responsibilities Allowances of £2,535,400.

- 1.25 Risk: The risks are reputational rather than legal. The Council does not have to accept the Panel's recommendations but where it chooses not to do so it should give reasons that can be part of the record of the meeting. The Council is required to give reasons where it chooses not to accept Panel recommendations on allowances.

Legal and Procurement Implications

- 1.26 Legal: The legal requirements are set out in the report.

The proposed Members' Allowance Scheme complies with the relevant provisions of the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003; the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government Act 2000.

As soon as reasonably practicable after the making of a Scheme, copies of the Scheme have to be made available for inspection at the Council's office and a notice has to be published in a local newspaper.

HR / Workforce Implications

- 1.27 No specific implications have been identified.

Equalities Implications

- 1.28 Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the council has a duty when exercising its functions to have “due regard” to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act and advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not. This is the public sector equality duty.

When setting the Scheme of Members’ Allowances, consideration needs to be given as to how the allowances enable the Council to attract high quality candidates to stand as councillors, from a wide variety of backgrounds, whilst also ensuring that financial barriers to anyone who wishes to stand for election are minimised.

The proposed Scheme of Members’ Allowances relates to all 110 elected members across all 55 electoral divisions. It applies to all 110 members equally.

Other implications

There are also no specific sustainability, community safety, health and well-being or social value implications.

Background Papers

Independent Remuneration Panel report and recommendations – Appendix 1
Local Authorities (Members’ Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003

Scheme of Member Allowances 2024 – 2025 (published on the Council’s website)

Report assurance checklist

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	Alyn Jones	19/2/25
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	20/2/25
Workforce (*)	N/A	
Asset Management (*)	N/A	
Executive Director	Alyn Jones	19/2/25
Executive Lead Member	Cllr Bill Revans	14/2/25
Consulted:	Councillor Name	
Local Division Members	N/A	
Opposition Spokesperson(s)	All political group leaders	14/2/25