

Councillor Remuneration Questionnaire – key findings

Background

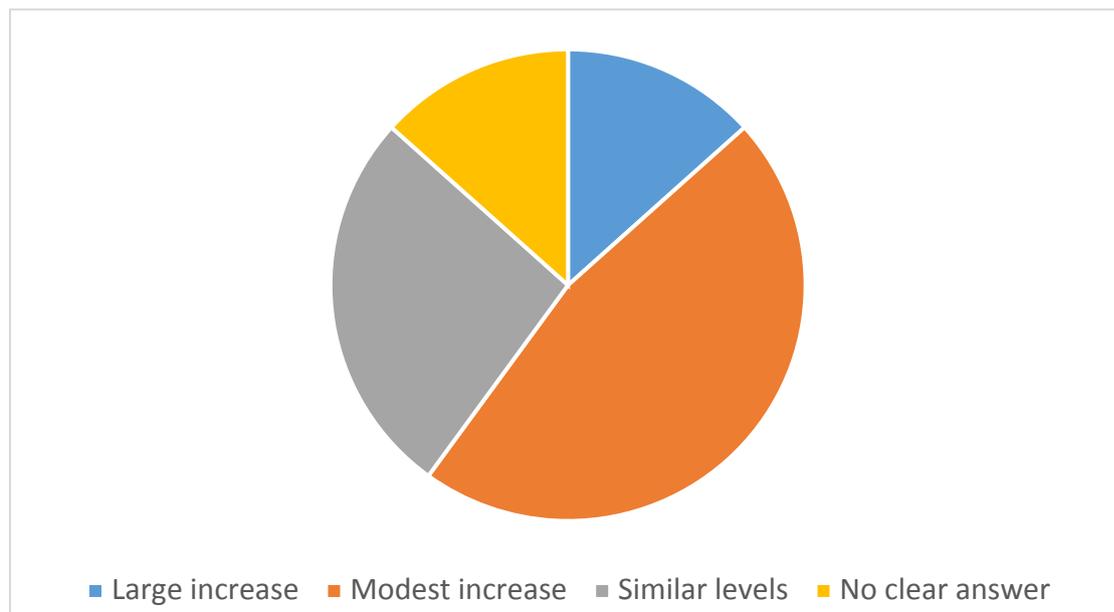
In November 2018, all West Suffolk Shadow Councillors were asked to complete a questionnaire providing their thoughts on the current and future remuneration of West Suffolk Councillors. Councillors were also provided the opportunity to meet the Remuneration Panel 1:1 if they wished.

In addition to the summary below, the Remuneration Panel have received and considered the responses submitted by all Councillors.

Q1 - What do you think the rate of basic allowance (that all Councillors receive) should be for the new Council – and why?

Of the 5 Councillors that answered this question directly, the answers were £5,800 to £7,000 per annum.

The answers have been analysed to show those that supported a substantial increase (>20%), a modest increase, a similar level to present or didn't provide a clear answer. A modest increase (orange) was the most favoured answer.



Q2 How do you believe the role of a Councillor will change in the new Council? Please comment on both your ward role and SRA role, if you hold one.

Themes from the answers were as follows:

- A minority of Councillors didn't believe there would be a significant impact; the new Council was a transition and not a radical change
- On the other hand, some Councillors felt that the workload would significantly increase, with one suggesting the work for some SRA recipients would double.
- In general, there was a feeling that there would be an increase in work due to having fewer councillors overall and more parishes to cover in rural areas; the impact of the growth agenda meaning that the communities were increasing in size;
- Comments were also made relating to the general role of the councillor – their role in delivering services with reduced funding or managing community expectations given government policies in areas such as planning.

Q3. What do you think of the current members allowance scheme? Do you believe there are improvements or areas of clarity that could be provided to help Councillors?

- Responses mostly focussed on expense claims – a desire for Councillors to be able to claim for undertaking their ward work, and also some desire for being able to claim for political group meetings.
- There was also some misunderstanding with Councillors wanting to be paid based on attendance (which is not allowed under regulations)
- There was also some commentary on Special responsibility allowances and ensuring these are meaningful and reflect work done in future

Q4. How does the role of Councillor impact on your day-to-day life? We would particularly welcome thoughts on:

- a) For Councillors who work or have other regular commitments, can your role as Councillor be readily accommodated?**
- b) In what ways does it impact on your general lifestyle – do you have to make compromises as a result of your role? Or does the role of Councillor complement / add fulfilment to your life?**

- The responses to this question had a theme that as a Councillor, your private life often has to come second to your Council commitments. Many Councillors reported instances of this.

- There were also some comments that being a Councillor can be a 24/7 exercise – residents approaching in the supermarket or contacting you at any time of day.
- There were some concerns that the levels of pay do deter working people from being a Councillor

Q5 What do you believe are the most challenging aspects of being a Councillor? What responsibilities do you feel being a Councillor places on you?

- Some Councillors felt the most rewarding, and frustrating part of the role was dealing with ward work – good when you can help people, frustrating when you can't.
- Councillors also noted the degree of hostility they can face from members of the public who don't understand the role, and in particular the need to do the right thing, rather than popular things.
- Some Councillors also noted that the role could be unpredictable, and the scale and responsibility can be significant – there is almost too much involved.

Q6 Do you strongly feel there are any particular things must be in the scheme or should be excluded from the scheme?

- Several Councillors didn't answer or were not clear about the question.
- Some particular things mentioned were ensuring that the scheme helps working councillors – covering their mileage and childcare costs
- A couple of councillors mentioned the payment of multiple SRA's and whether it was fair that those taking up more than one role had to forego some of the payment they may have received otherwise;
- There was also some comments linked to the respective SRA rates and whether some of the smaller working groups should be remunerated when there wasn't as much work as some other roles such as Vice-Chair of Development Control

Q7 – hours involved in being a Councillor

[Councillors were asked to give an indication of how long they felt they spent on various aspects of their Councillor role per month. There was no requirement for Councillors to formally record their time]

The rates varied from 37 hours per month to 197 hours per month. The mean average hours spent was 108 and the median average 94 hours.

It may be worth noting that of the 13 Councillors that recorded their typical time spent, only one councillor was not in receipt of an SRA – therefore this was mostly compiled from Councillors who might be expected to devote more time to the role.