

**MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES**  
**Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel**  
**to Oxfordshire County Council**

**December 2025**

**SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Summary**

- A. The Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) has now carried out a full review of the County Council's scheme of members' allowances, and this report sets out the Panel's recommendations.
- B. The Local Government Act 2000 provides that before any new scheme of allowances is agreed, the Council is required to take into account the advice of its duly appointed Independent Remuneration Panel on the levels and types of allowances to be paid under that scheme.
- C. In summary, it's our view that the current levels of councillors' allowances are, in the main, lower than for comparable authorities and do not sufficiently recognise the time and workload involved. It's important too that an allowances scheme acts as a means of encouraging a diverse range of people to consider becoming county councillors in Oxfordshire. Clearly, allowances cannot be the only means of overcoming obstacles to wider democratic representation; however, they are an important element. We consider our recommendations to be appropriate to the roles performed by county councillors in the service of the people of Oxfordshire.

**Principles Adopted**

- D. This was the first full review since December 2020. As such we considered this to be an opportunity to review the entire scheme of allowances by looking at each element afresh.
- E. We were also particularly mindful, and heard from many councillors, that part of the purpose of an allowances scheme is to encourage a diverse range of people to consider standing as councillors and undertaking responsible positions once elected.
- F. We decided to look objectively at the appropriate level for allowances, noting the relatively low level of the Council's allowances compared to other authorities in the region. As an Independent Remuneration Panel, we must be mindful of affordability, but our main task has been to assess the councillor and co-opted roles objectively.
- G. A Council's Independent Panel should therefore give an honest, benchmarked view of the level of allowances appropriate to the various roles and commitments of its County Councillors and Co-opted Members.

- H. The Panel's focus has been on reviewing the **roles** in question, within the Council's governance structure, and not on the persons occupying those roles. We have, however, taken the opportunity to consider the various approaches and levels of allowances set by comparable authorities across the South East and nationally.
- I. We noted that, following the IRP's review in 2020 the Council's Scheme introduced a cap of two Special Responsibility Allowances that any individual could claim. We also noted that most County authorities surveyed have a cap of only one SRA.
- J. As a starting point, we decided to review the Basic Allowance and use this as a base, with SRAs assessed in terms of multiples of the Basic Allowance. It was also important that we considered the fact that allowances are not a 'salary', are not payment for work done, but are intended to offset the cost of being a councillor so that no one is out of pocket as a result of representing their communities. That said, we were also mindful that becoming a councillor is a choice and has a voluntary element to it.
- K. We also wanted to hear directly from members of the Council themselves and so carried out a survey of all councillors and interviews with a selection of councillors and senior officers.

## Recommendations

- (a) that the Basic Allowance payable to all councillors be increased by approximately 8%, from £14,268 to £15,420 per annum;
- (b) that, in addition to the Basic Allowance that Special Responsibility Allowances should be increased by a similar percentage resulting in to the figures shown in Appendix 1;
- (c) retain a cap such that no individual member of the Council should be entitled to receive more than two Special Responsibility Allowances at any one time;
- (d) a Co-optees' Allowance continues to be payable to an independent co-opted member of the Audit & Governance Committee when the co-opted member serves as Chair of the Audit Working Group, equivalent to Committee/Scrutiny Committee Chair and increased to £9,252;
- (e) the Council's Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances and the Co-optees' Allowance to the Chair of the Audit Working Group be amended annually in line with the percentage rise in overall employee costs for Oxfordshire County Council arising from the annual Local Government Pay Award for staff and that this should take effect from the date on which the award for staff similarly takes effect; however, if the above increases are agreed, the pay award should not be applied to any increased allowances in 2026/27 but only from 2027/28. This will be limited to the four-year term of each council.
- (f) that Child and Dependant Carer's Allowances be increased: -
  - 1) Child Care: the hourly rate is equivalent to the Oxford Living Wage of £14.06 per hour capped at 120 hours per year, payable on production of receipts.

- 2) Dependant Carer: the hourly rate is twice the Oxford Living Wage i.e. £28.12 per hour capped at 120 hours per year, payable on production of receipts;
- (g) the Council retains, for members, the travel and subsistence scheme that is applicable to officers. Overnight accommodation is to be booked by officers where possible; when alternative accommodation arrangements are to be used, this should be approved by the relevant officer;
- (h) claims made under the Council's travel and subsistence scheme be accompanied by receipts and/or any other relevant evidence of the costs incurred and that claims under the scheme be made, in writing, within two months of the relevant duty in respect of which the entitlement to the allowance arises;
- (i) the list of Approved Duties for the purpose of travel, subsistence and dependant care allowances continue and be agreed as set out in the attached Annex 2;
- (j) the amounts for Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowances and Co-optees' Allowances be rounded to the nearest pound.

## **THE PANEL'S REPORT**

### **Introduction**

1. The Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 require local authorities to review their Allowances Schemes and to maintain an Independent Remuneration Panel to consider and make recommendations on new schemes. In brief, the Regulations say that the following issues are to be addressed by the Panel:
- a) Basic Allowance: each local authority must make provision for a basic, flat-rate allowance payable to all members. The allowance must be the same for each councillor; it can be paid either in a lump sum or in instalments.
- b) Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA): each local authority may make provision for the payment of SRAs for those councillors who have significant responsibilities. The Panel has to recommend the responsibilities that should be remunerated and the levels of the allowances.
- c) Co-optees' allowance: each local authority may make provision for the payment of an allowance to co-optees' for attending meetings, conferences and seminars.
- d) Childcare and dependant carers' allowance: local authorities may make provision for the payment of an allowance to those councillors who incur expenditure for the care of children or dependent relatives whilst undertaking particular duties.

- e) Travel and subsistence: each local authority may determine the levels of travel and subsistence allowances and the duties to which they should apply.
- f) Indexation: each local authority may determine that allowances should be increased in accordance with a specified index and can identify the index and set the number of years (not exceeding four) for which it should apply.
- g) Backdating: each local authority may determine that, where amendments are made to an allowances scheme, the allowances as amended may be backdated.

### **The Independent Remuneration Panel**

2. The Independent Remuneration Panel for Oxfordshire County Council is: -

- Ben Anim-Antwi
- Martyn Hocking
- Stephen Mckechnie
- David Shelmerdine

3. The Panel elected David Shelmerdine as its Chair for this review.

### **Terms of Reference**

- 4. To make recommendations to Oxfordshire County Council on the allowances:
  - a. that should be payable to County Councillors in Oxfordshire, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 and to do so in the following circumstances:
  - b) annual recommendations on the Council's yearly scheme of allowances where the Council is minded to amend the scheme of allowances otherwise than by reference to a duly adopted index;
  - c) when the Council proposes to revise or modify any aspect of an existing scheme or the Council requests a review;
  - d) where required to do so by virtue of Regulations.
- 5. The County Council wished the Panel to undertake a comprehensive review of the Council's Scheme of Members' Allowances. This last occurred in December 2020, with changes to some aspects of Schemes since that time. In September 2025 the IRP issued an interim report with recommendations on the special responsibility allowances (SRAs) payable to leaders and shadow cabinet members in circumstances where there was more than one recognised official opposition group and on allowances payable to councillors taking parental leave.

### **The Panel's Work**

6. We met four times as a Panel during 2025. On:

- 6 August
- 27 August
- 6 November
- 26 November.

7. In conducting our review, we had regard to a significant amount of information, which included the following:

- The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 and of the Government's "Guidance on Consolidated Regulations on Members' Allowances for Local Authorities in England";
- Details of the allowances of numerous other County Councils, especially those comparative authorities adjacent to Oxfordshire and in the South East generally;
- Responses to a questionnaire to Oxfordshire County Councillors seeking comments on the Council's allowances scheme
- The County Council's political management structure.

We also interviewed 11 members of the Council, seeking in our selection of interviewees to obtain a sample which was representative of the various roles performed by councillors. We also interviewed the Chief Executive Officer and the Monitoring Officer. The following councillors and officers were interviewed during September, October and November:-

Cllr Stefan Gawrysiak – Independent (non-aligned) Member

Cllr Liz Leffman – Leader of the Council

Cllr Ian Middleton – Leader of the Green Party Group

Cllr Liz Brighthouse OBE – Leader of the Labour and Co-operative Party Opposition Group

Cllr Ben Higgins – Cabinet Member for Future Economy and Innovation

Cllr Susanna Pressel – Labour and Co-operative Councillor for Jericho & Osney Division

Cllr Dan Levy – Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation

Cllr Gavin McLauchlan – Green Party Councillor for Benson & Crowmarsh Division

Cllr Liam Walker – Leader of the Oxfordshire Alliance Opposition Group

Cllr Mark Lygo – Chair of the Council

Cllr James Barlow – Green Party Councillor for Wallingford Division

Martin Reeves – Chief Executive Officer

Anita Bradley – Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer

8. An online survey was sent to the 69 councillors and received 23 responses (33%).

## **Political Structure**

9. We noted that the Council had operated a 'Leader and Executive Model' since 5 November 2001 and that the Council reinforced this commitment by adopting a Strong Leader model in August 2009. A Liberal Democrat administration is in place, operating a Cabinet system of decision-making, with a series of scrutiny committees providing challenge and policy focus. Since 2013, the Council has introduced informal locality meetings, all the County Councillors of that particular area meeting together. A number of more regulatory committees are also in operation to carry out statutory non-executive functions. All 69 councillors meet together as Council to agree the budget and policy framework. All councillors were also involved in the important task of community representation within their own electoral divisions.
10. We were therefore concerned in the current review to see if roles and responsibilities had changed over time, to gauge the time commitment involved and to assess the level of remuneration appropriate to the responsibilities and work done by councillors.

## **REVIEW OF ALLOWANCES**

### **Basic Allowance**

11. It is required under the relevant legislation that a Basic Allowance be provided to all members of the Council and that it must be of the same value for each. This allowance is intended to help compensate members for their time spent as a councillor, and covering incidental costs incurred by them as ordinary members of the Council, including the use of their homes.
12. In determining an appropriate level of Basic Allowance, we had regard to:
  - a) Oxfordshire County Councillors' own views as to the appropriate level of Basic Allowance (as expressed both in written submissions and in answer to interview questions);
  - b) The current level of Basic Allowance paid by the County Council and the value of the Council's Basic Allowance, relative to that paid by other County Councils, principally those immediately adjacent to Oxfordshire and in the South East;
  - c) The need to consider the voluntary service principle as required by statutory guidance.

### ***What the Basic Allowance should cover***

13. The Basic Allowance, in our view, is intended to recognise the many calls on a councillor's time including the costs associated with general constituency work. This includes the use of a councillor's home, home phone and utilities. In our view, it also covers time commitment integral to serving as an ordinary member (or substitute) of a formal meeting of the Council. We also noted that it is the Council's practice to deploy ICT devices to enable seamless working with the Council's systems. We felt that the Basic Allowance should be deemed to cover incidental user-consumables such as printer cartridges.

## ***Voluntary element***

14. We still hold the view that a proportion of a councillor's time should continue to be regarded as voluntary and as such should not be remunerated. It is our view that while the role of county councillor contains an element of voluntary activity – such as the aspiration to serve and represent constituents in the community – it is not appropriate or feasible to try to quantify this proportion. Furthermore, the pace of change and the immediacy of contemporary communication, including social media, mean that the demands of the role are ever more challenging. Consequently, no specific formula has been used to quantify these factors in the calculation of the allowances recommended in this report. Rather, we consider that they are bound up in the principle that an allowance is not a payment for work done but a recognition of the time, level of responsibility and personal exposure that such public duty requires.

## ***Determination of the level of Basic Allowance***

15. Our starting point was to consider the evidence received from councillors in relation to the Basic Allowance. There was broad consensus amongst councillors that the councillors' Basic Allowance is insufficient for the workload, especially for those without independent means, with families, or in full-time employment. Cabinet and leadership roles are also seen as under-remunerated given their demands. Allowances and the impact on means-tested benefits are seen as major barriers to attracting and retaining councillors from diverse backgrounds, younger people, and those with caring responsibilities. The panel noted, however, that the Government had commenced a consultation on restoring membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme for councillors in England
16. While the allowances scheme alone cannot facilitate a wider demography – the candidate selection of political parties, the governance structure of authorities play a significant part - realistic and benchmarked allowances are one way of contributing to a more level playing field.
17. We considered the various calls on County Councillors' time both in their constituency and formal roles (e.g. attending meetings, engaging with parish councils and community groups). We heard that County Councillors spend, on average, the equivalent of two full days per week on Council work. The Panel heard from councillors that the level of social media abuse had increased in recent years, in relation to national and local policies, which sometimes led to the involvement of police. The IRP took into account various calculation methods in reaching their conclusions including the Consumer Price Index (CPI), state pension increases and the UK national average salary.
18. We also looked at the levels of Basic Allowance paid by comparator County Councils, primarily in the South East but also other comparable County Councils across England. We found that Oxfordshire County Council had fallen behind, among South East counties, if not some others nationally, and that an increase was appropriate to rebalance the Basic Allowance to better support a more diverse range of people, reflective of Oxfordshire. The South East

Employers Survey on Members Allowances provided a useful benchmarking resource and a summary of the results is attached at Appendix 2. We deemed that an increase in the allowance to £15,420 (approximately 8%) was a modest but important step, sending a clear message about the importance of councillors' work in the community and helping facilitate a wider range of representation.

19. In achieving this, we wanted to continue to use the Basic Allowance as a base for assessing the various Special Responsibilities required within the Council.

**We RECOMMEND that the Basic Allowance payable to all councillors be increased to £15,420.**

### **Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA)**

20. We then reviewed the posts that should qualify for an SRA and the appropriate level at which each allowance should be set.
21. We had regard to:
  - a) The political management arrangements set out in the Council's Constitution, the responsibilities performed within that framework and the functions of the various roles.
  - b) The range and levels of SRA proposed in other County Councils and in the South East.
  - c) Evidence from Oxfordshire County Councillors (in person and through responses to the questionnaire) as to whether current SRAs are appropriate and as to suggestions for additional SRAs.

### **Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)**

22. We reviewed the roles for which SRAs are payable in the current allowances scheme, as listed in Appendix 1, and noted that a thorough review of these roles and responsibilities was undertaken during the previous full review in 2020. The IRP reached the conclusion that the roles and level of these allowances (as multiples of the basic allowance) continued to be appropriate, with the exceptions described below.

### **Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairs**

23. We noted that, although an SRA had been set for the Chair of the Horton Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the committee had not met for a considerable time and did not appear to be serving a role in the Council's governance structure. We believe that the SRA payable for this role should be subsumed into the allowance paid to the Chair of the Oxfordshire Joint Health and Overview Committee.

**We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance to the Chair of the Horton Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee be deleted.**

24. We also noted that, by rotation, the Council had taken the responsibility for the role of Chair of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Joint



Health and Overview Committee. Having reviewed the role and responsibilities attached to this position, and the practice of neighbouring authorities, we recommend that no allowance is payable for this position.

### **Minority/Third Party Group Leaders**

25. We addressed whether leaders of minority parties should receive SRAs, considering group size thresholds and workload. We concluded that while the points raised by the Green Party Group were relevant, the additional burden was not sufficient to warrant a new SRA at this time.

### **Pension Fund Committee Members**

26. During their interviews some councillors referred to the responsibilities in terms of the considerable ongoing training and detailed knowledge that was required of members appointed to the Pension Fund Committee. We concluded that while these additional responsibilities were demanding, the role was comparable to other committees such as the Planning and Regulation Committee and did not merit a distinct SRA for members, beyond its Chair.

### **Adoption and Fostering Panels**

27. The Council introduced an allowance for a councillor who takes part in Adoption and Fostering Panel Meetings and we recommend that this should be continued with an increase to £120 capped at £1,500 per year based on the current trajectory that the Councillor serving on the Adoption Panel attends one such hearing per month.

**We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance for member representatives on Adoption and Fostering Panels, be increased to £120 per Panel hearing capped at £1,500 per year.**

### **Capping of Special Responsibility Allowances**

28. We reviewed the cap on the number of Special Responsibility Allowances which any individual councillor could receive at any one time. A cap of 2 SRAs per member was recommended and introduced at the last review in 2020.
29. We noted that most other authorities in our survey limit the payment to one SRA per councillor, but have not recommended this further step this year so as to allow the Council best to consider its governance arrangements going forward, bearing this distinction in mind.

**We RECOMMEND that the Council's Scheme retains a cap whereby a councillor may hold no more than two SRAs at any one time.**

## **Child and Dependant Carers' Allowances**

30. We agreed that the continuation of these allowances as part of a package of measures (including the increase in the basic allowance), was of significant importance, to encourage those with young families or care responsibilities to stand for Council in the coming years.
31. We considered the rates for hourly allowances for comparator County Councils in the South East and noted that the existing Oxfordshire rates are relatively low. As such, we benchmarked that against other councils' experience.
32. We believe a more realistic rate in this particular area is essential in demonstrating a commitment to enabling those with caring responsibilities to consider performing the role of a councillor. The Approved Duties in the Council's Scheme of Allowances provides a tangible set of circumstances for which such an allowance can be claimed, suitably evidenced.
33. We do not consider a councillor should be able to claim such expenses for care provided by family members. We feel the Scheme should recognise caring responsibilities in respect of dependent children under 16 or dependent adults certified by a doctor or social worker as needing attendance.
34. We considered it appropriate that the hourly rate should also take into account the Oxford Living Wage as a base for the Child Care allowance; and as a multiple of that (twice) for the Dependant Carer allowance. These allowance should be indexed to the Oxford Living Wage moving forwards. This is reflected in our recommendation.

**We RECOMMEND that Child and Dependant Carers' Allowances continue to be paid on the basis that:-**

- a) **Child Care: up to a maximum of £14.06 per hour for a child (i.e. Oxford living wage pertaining from time to time), to a maximum level of 120 hours per annum, on the production of receipts;**
- b) **Adult Care: up to £28.12 per hour for an adult (i.e. twice the Oxford living wage pertaining from time to time), to a maximum level of 120 hours per annum, on the production of receipts;**
- c) **Both the Child Care and Adult Care allowances be indexed to the Oxford Living Wage.**

## Co-optees' Allowance

35. We continue in the view that there should not generally be a co-optees' allowance payable to all co-opted members on Council Committees, since they are not required to fulfil the wider responsibilities of a councillor. We are therefore not making a recommendation for such an allowance. We do however continue to endorse the principle that co-opted members should be able to claim travel and subsistence allowances, provided that these cannot be claimed legitimately from another body.
36. We remain of the view that the independent member of the Audit & Governance Committee should receive an allowance for carrying out the specific role of Chair of the Council's Audit Working Group, which reports to the Audit & Governance Committee. We concluded that the Chair of the Audit Working Group is a key role in the financial/business workings of the Council which should be remunerated.

**We RECOMMEND that the co-optees' allowance to the independent co-opted member of the Audit Committee when the co-opted member serves as Chair of the Audit Working Group be set at 0.6 times the Basic Allowance i.e. increased to £9,252.**

## Indexation

37. A council can apply an index to their allowances and in such a circumstance, if the only change each year is the application of the index, then the Council does not formally need to adopt a scheme of allowances each year. We have for some years recommended linking members' allowances to the local government pay award for Oxfordshire County Council staff, by way of a percentage payment. We believe this is still appropriate particularly in the current economic climate. However, we are mindful that in this report we are already recommending increases to allowances for 2026/27 and so believe that the index should not be applied to that year.
- (k) **We RECOMMEND that the Council's Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances and the Co-optees' Allowance to the Chair of the Audit Working Group be amended annually in line with the percentage rise in overall employee costs for Oxfordshire County Council arising from by the annual Local Government Pay Award for staff and that this should take effect from the date on which the award for staff similarly takes effect; with the proviso that no such index should be applied during 2026/27 to any allowances that are increased either as recommended in this report or otherwise.**

## Travelling and Subsistence Allowances

38. The Panel did not receive any strong views that the current basis of travel and subsistence allowances should change. However, whilst outside the specific remit of the Panel, we heard that the system for making claims was widely regarded as complex and difficult. The Panel discussed whether councillors should be able to claim the Oxford Congestion Charge as an expense,

ultimately agreeing to recommend consistency with the staff travel expenses policy which does not allow staff to reclaim the Oxford Congestion Charge . We noted the existing list of 'Approved Duties' (duties for which claims can be made) and suggest that the Council periodically reminds members of their right to make claims and how to do so.

**We RECOMMEND that claims made under the Council's travel and subsistence scheme be accompanied by receipts and/or any other relevant evidence of the costs incurred and that claims under the scheme be made, in writing, within two months of the relevant duty in respect of which the entitlement to the allowance arises;**

**We RECOMMEND the Council retains, for members, the travel and subsistence scheme that is applicable to officers.**

### **Amounts**

39. We recommend that the monthly payment of the Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowance and Co-optees' Allowances should continue to be rounded so the nearest pound at the time they are set each year, to make it easier and clearer to identify the allowances for each role.

**We RECOMMEND that the amounts for Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowances and Co-optees' Allowances be rounded to the nearest pound at the time of their setting and after any indexation is applied.**

### **Panel Monitoring Role**

40. It was agreed that the panel would rely on the Council to notify them of any significant structural changes affecting the scheme, but would also hold an annual update meeting in October each year to stay informed and responsive.

### **Conclusion**

41. In conclusion, the Panel considers the current levels of allowances to be, in the main, is low having regard both to the time and workload involved and, crucially, as a means of encouraging a diverse range of people to consider becoming county councillors in Oxfordshire. Clearly, allowances cannot be the only means of overcoming obstacles to wider democratic representation however they are an element.
42. We did hear from some members that they thought it would be beneficial if allowances were once again pensionable: it is not however open to us to suggest something not currently permissible in law. We noted that the Government had commenced a consultation on restoring membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme for councillors in England.
43. We consider our recommendations to be appropriate to the roles performed by county councillors in the service of the people of Oxfordshire. We understand it is for the Council to decide whether to accept these recommendations having

regard to the budgetary and political implications of so doing. Our role has been to present a Scheme we feel is reflective of the responsibilities of elected and co-opted members of Oxfordshire County Council.

44. We note that, following the establishment of new unitary authorities created as a result of the current review of Local Government structures in England, a further review of members' allowances will be required for the new council(s) in Oxfordshire.

**David Shelmerdine**

**Chair  
Independent Remuneration Panel**

**December 2025**

**On behalf of IRP members: -**

**Ben Anim-Antwi  
Martyn Hocking  
Stephen Mckechnie**