

Divisions: N/A

COUNTY COUNCIL – 9 DECEMBER 2025

SCHEME OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES 2026/27

Report by the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council is RECOMMENDED to adopt a Scheme of Members' Allowances for the financial year 2026/27, and in so doing to consider the following options, either:

- 1) To adopt the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel made in November 2025 and as set out in Annex 1 to this report; OR**
- 2) To adopt any particular recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel as the Council may determine; OR**
- 3) To agree alternative values for any of the allowances, as the Council may determine; OR**
- 4) If the Council does not wish to accept the Panel's recommendations at this time, in whole or in part, or to substitute alternative amounts, to agree a status quo Scheme of Allowances for 2026/27 for any unchanged aspect; AND**
- 5) That in any event, the Council adopts an annual index for a four year period (whereby if no other changes occur to a Scheme, then the Members' Allowances may increase in relation to that index for a period of no more than four years), and that this should relate (as in previous years) to the annual pay award for local government staff. If adopted, the increase will be 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.**

Introduction

- 1. Each year, Full Council is required to adopt a Scheme of Members' Allowances to apply from 1 April of the following year. In particular, it must set the amount of a Basic Allowance payable to all members and may make payments for Special Responsibility and Co-opted Members' Allowances. Accordingly, this report asks members to adopt a Scheme of Allowances to apply from 1 April 2026.**
- 2. Principally, Council's attention is drawn to the recommendations made by the Independent Remuneration Panel in November 2025 which are attached at Annex 1. In adopting a Scheme, the Council must have regard to the**

recommendations. However, it is the Council's choice whether to accept the Panel's recommendations in whole or in part, or not at all, or to determine other amounts. As such, options are set out in this report.

3. The Council may, for example, agree other amounts; or adopt a status quo Scheme which makes no substantive changes. In addition, Council may also choose to adopt an index, as in previous years, whereby the Basic, Special Responsibility Allowances and Co-opted Members' Allowances would rise each year by reference to an index. Formerly the Council has adopted as an index the pay award for local government employees.
4. Council may also wish to note that whatever Scheme is adopted, each individual member may choose to forgo any allowance to which they are entitled, in whole or in part, on a voluntary basis.
5. The Council must make a Scheme by no later than 31 March 2026.

Making a Scheme of Members' Allowances

Option A) The Independent Remuneration Panel

Approach

6. In framing its recommendations, the Independent Remuneration Panel had regard to a range of evidence, comparative information, survey responses from councillors and interviews a cross-section of members of the council. The Panel was mindful of its role of assessing what allowances are appropriate to the roles of elected and co-opted members, having regard to their workload formally and within constituencies and with an understanding of additional responsibilities where these are performed within the Council's governance arrangements.
7. The Panel was also mindful of the political and budgetary implications surrounding the adoption of a Members' Allowances Scheme but recognised that such considerations are for the Council to determine.
8. The Panel also recognised that an individual member can choose whether or not to accept an allowance in full or in part. Rather, the Panel concentrated on providing the Council with an objective, benchmarked view on what allowances it thinks are appropriate to the roles of elected and co-opted members for Oxfordshire County Council.
9. It has also been mindful that a Members Allowances Scheme is intended to present allowances that minimise the potential for any person to be out of pocket as a result of serving their community; recognising of course that some aspect of councillor's service is necessarily voluntary. Therefore, while a Scheme cannot alone influence wider democratic representation, it should at least not be a barrier to it. The Panel has presented its recommendations with these principles in mind. However, full Council may choose to accept these recommendations in whole or in part, or not at all.

The Panel's recommendations

10. The Panel's full Report is included as Annex 1. It sets out their recommendations in full, with rationale given at each stage. The main changes are:
- That the Basic Allowance payable to all councillors increase from £14,268 to £15,420 per annum; and
 - That, in addition to the Basic Allowance, a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) be paid as follows:-

PROPOSED ALLOWANCES FROM IRP 2026/27

SRA Position	Multiplier (of basic allowance of £15,420)	New Allowance	Comments
Leader of the Council	x 3	£46,260	
Deputy Leader of the Council	x 2	£30,840	
Cabinet Member	x 1.6	£24,672	
Leader of the Opposition	x 1	£15,420	
Shadow Cabinet Member	x 0.25	£3,852	
Chair of the Council	x 0.85	£13,104	
Vice-Chair of the Council	x 0.25	£3,276	This is 0.25 of the Chair's SRA not the BA
Scrutiny Chairs	x 0.6	£9,252	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education & Young People • Health • Performance & Corporate Services • Place
Chair of Oxfordshire Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee	x 0.6	£9,252	
Chair of Horton Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee	x 0	£0	IRP suggest this is deleted
Chair of Planning & Regulation Committee	x 0.6	£9,252	
Chair of Audit & Governance Committee	x 0.6	£9,252	
Chair of the Audit Working Group when a Co-opted Member	X 0.6	£9,252	
Chair of Pension Fund Committee	x 0.6	£9,252	
Locality Meeting Chair	x 0.1	£1,548	

Adoption & Fostering Panel Members			£120 for each attendance; capped at £1,500 per annum
Police & Crime Panel Chair	x 0.6	£9,252	

- c. That a cap be retained, such that no individual member of the Council should be entitled to receive more than two Special Responsibility Allowances at any one time.
- d. That the 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. 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 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 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:-
 - i. 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
 - ii. 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. That the Council retains, for members, the travel and subsistence scheme that is applicable to officers. Overnight accommodation to be booked by officers where possible; when alternative accommodation arrangements are to be used, this should be approved by the relevant officer.
- h. 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
- i. the list of Approved Duties for the purpose of travel, subsistence and dependant care allowances continue
- j. That the amounts for Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowances and Co-optees' Allowances be rounded to the nearest pound when first set.

Option B) Alternative amounts

11. The Council may choose alternative amounts for the Basic, Special Responsibility and Co-opted Member Allowances as it may determine, other than those recommended by the Panel. For information, the current values are shown below, in paragraph 12.

Option C) Status quo scheme

12. If the Council does not wish to make any substantive changes at this time, it may adopt a status quo Scheme based on the currently adopted Scheme. For information, the current values are shown below:

CURRENT ALLOWANCES 2025/26

Basic Allowance	£14,268
Leader of the Council	£42,804
Deputy Leader of the Council	£28,536
Cabinet Member	£22,824
Leader of the Opposition	£13,824
Shadow Cabinet Member	£3,456
Chair of the Council	£11,748
Vice-Chair of the Council	£2,928
Scrutiny Chairs	£8,568
Chair of Oxfordshire Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee	£8,568
Chair of Horton Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee	£6,435
Chair of Planning & Regulation Committee	£8,568
Chair of Audit & Governance Committee	£8,568
Chair of the Audit Working Group when a Co-opted Member	£8,568
Chair of Pension Fund Committee	£8,568
Locality Meeting Chair	£1,428
Adoption & Fostering Panel Members	£113 per Panel hearing
Police & Crime Panel Chair	£8,124

Option D) Indexation

13. The Council should also be aware that it has the opportunity, when adopting a Scheme of Allowances, to apply an index to Members' Allowances. In recent years, the Council has chosen to do this with regard to the pay award for local government staff. The effect of doing this is that, if in any given year there is no other change required to be made to a Scheme, the Scheme can remain unchanged except for an annual adjustment by virtue of the agreed index. While Council must still approve the Scheme each year, it need not undertake a fuller review each year in doing so while the index lasts.
14. It is recommended that Council may wish to do this whether the Panel's recommendations are accepted or not, applying such an index to any Scheme adopted.

Legal Implications

15. The Independent Remuneration Panel was convened under the Members' Allowances (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2003. These regulations, arising out of the relevant provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, require all local authorities to establish and maintain an Independent Remuneration Panel to make recommendations to Council on the level of basic and special responsibility allowances and associated matters that are paid to councillors.
16. The Independent Remuneration Panel has reviewed Oxfordshire County Council's Scheme of Members' Allowances, and their recommendations are contained within this report.
17. It should be noted that officers will be undertaking an Equalities Impact Assessment on the Childcare and Dependant Care allowances, the findings of which will be reported to Council.
18. Therefore, Council can:
 - (a) Follow the Panel's recommendations in whole or in part.
 - (b) Agree a revised scheme of allowances, either in whole or in part, including a 'status quo' arrangement.
 - (c) Adopt an index to apply for a maximum period of 4 years.

Financial Implications

19. An additional budget of £130,837 would be required to meet the recommended Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances increases for current members in the financial year 2026-27.

There is an existing total budget of £30,000 that is expected to be sufficient for travel and other allowances

	Current Allowances	IRP Recommendation	Additional Budget Required	Increases

Basic Allowances	1,088,555	1,176,579	88,025	8.1%
Special Responsibility Allowances	493,469	536,281	42,812	8.7%
TOTAL	1,582,024	1,712,861	130,837	8.3%
Bucks, Oxfordshire, West Berks Health Overview & Scrutiny Chair - TBD	0			
TOTAL	1,582,024	1,712,861	130,837	8.3%

Comments checked by Bick Nguyen-McBride, Assistant Finance Business Partner

Equality & Inclusion Implications

20. Before making a decision, Section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:
- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
 - ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:
 - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
 - iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, the need to:

- tackle prejudice; and
- promote understanding.

21. Public sector equalities duties have been considered by the IRP as part of their deliberations. Council's attention is drawn to paragraph 18 of the Legal Implications, contained within this report.

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Annex – Independent Remuneration Panel Report – December 2025

December 2025.