

SUBMISSION TO THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL
WEST LANCASHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL
FROM THE OUR WEST LANCASHIRE GROUP OF COUNCILLORS
NOVEMBER 2019

The panel requested the views of the Our West Lancashire Group on five matters relating to the Members' Allowance Scheme at West Lancashire Borough Council.

Our comments relating to these five areas are detailed below.

1. **Basic Allowance** – The long-standing view of the Our West Lancashire group is that the basic allowance at West Lancashire Borough Council remains significantly out of line with other Lancashire councils. The allowance of £4842 per year is the highest of any Lancashire borough council and has been so for almost 20 years.

In February 2019 the basic allowances for Lancashire Boroughs were:

West Lancashire	4842
Hyndburn	4634
Chorley	4422.61
Wyre	4137
Preston	3831
Fylde	3750
Rosendale	3342
Lancaster	3383.5
Pendle	3000
Ribble Valley	3643
Burnley	3500
South Ribble	4605.25
Average	3924.2

The Lancashire average of £3924.20 is more than 23% lower than the West Lancashire figure of £4842.

In the absence of regionally or nationally set figures for councillor allowances, Our West Lancashire believe that tracking the average allowance level for Lancashire councils is an appropriate mechanism to determine the basic allowance and would ask you to consider introducing this mechanism. It would make an annual saving of almost £50,000 a year at a time when approximately 38 council employees face voluntary or compulsory redundancy.

This proposal also has the support of 86.5% of local residents in our most recent survey (October 2019) on this matter.

2. **Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA)**

The use of percentages of the basic allowance to calculate the respective special responsibility allowances has the advantages of ease of administration and understanding.

The Our West Lancashire Group states our opposition to any increase in the total special responsibility allowances paid.

The recent Sustainable Organisation Review Project (SORP) final report indicated that cabinet members were to take on a great strategic role under the new management structure. However, senior councillors have always set the strategic direction of the council under previous structures. Councillors decide and officers implement. There is no evidence that this will be significantly different under the new structure.

Given that the SORP is resulting in approximately 38 council employees leaving the council through voluntary or compulsory redundancy in the period between November 2019 and March 2021, it would rightly be viewed by external observers as verging on the “obscene” to increase special responsibility allowances while this process was underway. Any such increases in SRA would reduce public confidence in local government in West Lancashire and impact negatively on staff morale which is already fragile as evidenced by the staff feedback to the SORP report provided to councillors in July 2019.

The Our West Lancashire Group reiterates our opposition to any increase in the total special responsibility allowances paid.

3. Childcare and Dependent Carer’s Allowance

It is time the rate at which this allowance is paid was reviewed as it has remained unchanged for a number of years. While it is very rarely claimed, the Our West Lancashire group believes that local residents should not be deterred from standing for election to council by the costs of caring for children or dependent family members while attending official meetings in their role as a councillor.

We would support this allowance being paid at the living wage hourly rate which is currently £9.30 per hour. As the living wage is reviewed and indexed annually, setting the allowance in line with the Living Wage would also future proof this element of the scheme.

4. Travelling and Subsistence Allowances – no comments

5. General – no additional comments