

Review of Role & Responsibilities of Councillors in Northern Ireland (NI)

16 August 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview:

There are 11 councils in Northern Ireland (NI) and a total of 462 councillors. Councillors are in the main based in the communities in which they serve and are therefore both accessible and available to constituents/ratepayers. Within the council area and District Electoral Area (DEA), the councillor is increasingly viewed as an advocate for change and their roles have become more complex and multi-faceted. They provide leadership within the unique context of NI's political landscape, contributing to social and economic prosperity and addressing the diverse needs of constituents. This document reports on a review of the roles and responsibilities of councillors as commissioned by the Department for Communities (DfC) and has been prepared by a Working Group (WG) appointed by the DfC.

Purpose

The Report is designed to inform on the approach taken to undertake the review; the means of communication used to engage; findings and evidence gathered, together with analytical deliberations leading to recommendations. The WG were further informed by previous reviews carried out and by the recent reviews in both Scotland and the Republic of Ireland (RoI). The Report contains several recommendations and observations and is being submitted to the Minister for Communities for consideration.

Key Facts

The WG through its on-line survey engaged with 62% of councillors. In addition, many meetings were conducted with councillors in geographical districts and with councillors in individual meetings. In addition to the survey the WG members met with 24 individuals and 8 NI Organisations. Most councillor respondents (57%) indicated that they were in full time employment with a further 23% reporting that they were in part time employment. Again, most

councillors spoke about being available 24/7 and being the first line of political contact even regarding issues for which responsibility lies with Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs).

Recommendations

This Report makes recommendations against the Terms of Reference (ToR) prepared by the DfC. While the Basic Allowance (BA) goes to the very heart of this review, all the recommendations must be considered to provide completeness and a picture as to how, based on the evidence, councillors should be remunerated. The BA set at a maximum of £17,030 from 1st April 2023 was considered by 84% of those who responded to the survey to be inadequate because it does not reflect the more challenging roles undertaken by councillors. It was also noted as being a barrier to entry for those considering entering politics as a councillor.

The WG recommends that the baseline BA, effective from 1 April 2025, should be £21,935 (this will be subject to two further increases to ensure full account is taken of the latest evidence base). Furthermore, it is recommended in line with the wishes of most councillors that the decision to pay this allowance should be removed from individual councils to deliver equity across all councils in NI. Recommendations which impact on remuneration are also made regarding Dependants' Carers' Allowance (DCA), travel expenses and Member Services and Support.

Conclusions

We should value the demonstrable work carried out by NI councillors. The WG is convinced, based on the evidence, that the recommendations more accurately reflect the changing roles and responsibilities of councillors and furthermore provide the basis for attracting new blood into the local political scene. However, change is a constant and it is important to revisit/review the roles and responsibilities of councillors again by the end of the decade.

Finally, the WG wishes to place on record its thanks to all who participated in the review, without their help it could not have been undertaken so comprehensively. The WG also wishes to thank the secretariat for their disciplined and focussed commitment to delivery.

1. INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 1.1 Local government councillors play a vital role in representing the interests of residents within their electoral districts. It is vitally important that this is constantly revisited and that the roles are reflected in allowances provided. In December 2021 the former Minister for Communities, Deirdre Hargey MLA, agreed to an independently led review of the roles and responsibilities of councillors. This was against the background of issues raised about the changing and more challenging roles faced by councillors because of suspension of the NI Assembly in February 2022 and the impact of COVID-19 on councils. Previously the role and remuneration of councillors had been reviewed by the Councillors' Remuneration Working Group, under the chair of Dr Declan Hall in 2006 and the NI Councillor's Remuneration Panel, under the chair of Deep Sagar in 2013.
- 1.2 In 2022, meetings took place between representatives of the National Association of Councillors (NAC) and the DfC officials and as a result a Terms of Reference (ToR) for an independently led review of the roles and responsibilities of councillors was developed and then approved by the former Minister Hargey MLA in August 2022. In the absence of a Minister for Communities, the Permanent Secretary of the DfC approved the documentation for a competition to appoint an independent chair for a review of the roles and responsibilities of councillors in June 2023. Following this competition, Maynard Mawhinney was appointed as independent chair with effect from 1 December 2023.
- 1.3 A WG was set up in December 2023 and the first meeting took place in January 2024 with the review period continuing until August 2024. During the review period the NI Assembly was restored in February 2024.
- 1.4 The DfC determined that the WG would be made up from those clearly independent of local government and therefore 3 members, including the

Chair were appointed with this attribute. The WG was further composed of senior representatives from the NI Local Government Association (NILGA); National Association of Councillors NI (NAC); Irish Congress of Trade Unions/Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (ICTU/NIPSA) & the DfC.

- 1.5 The WG was charged with making recommendations on the system and level of allowances which would be available to councillors taking into consideration the role and responsibility of councillors since the Review of Public Administration (RPA). The WG considered the changes in local government from April 2015 and also remuneration schemes for councillors in other jurisdictions in Britain and Ireland. See **Annex A** for the full ToR.
- 1.6 **Annex B** contains a glossary of terms used in this report.
- 1.7 **Annex C** contains a table of the WG meetings.

2. WORKING GROUP MEMBERS AND BIOGRAPHIES



*Back row (L-R): Joe Boyle (NAC), Kevin Kelly (ICTU/NIPSA), Maynard Mawhinney (Chair), Jeff Glass (DfC)
Front row (L-R): Alison Allen (NILGA), Martina Campbell (Independent), Grace Nesbitt OBE (Independent)*

The Working Group (WG) membership is as follows and represents a wide range of experience in the public sector, commerce, local government, business, human resources and analytical skills:

- Maynard Mawhinney, chair (independent)
- Grace Nesbitt, independent member
- Martina Campbell, independent member
- Joe Boyle, NAC
- Alison Allen, NILGA
- Kevin Kelly, ICTU/NIPSA
- Jeff Glass, DfC

Maynard Mawhinney - Independent Chair

Maynard Mawhinney was formerly Director of Food & Commercial Tourism in InvestNI and is currently a non- executive Director with the Business Services

Organisation (BSO) and the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority (NIFHA) where he chairs the Audit & Risk Committee. He is the Chair of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprises' (CAFRE) Advisory Group, Maynard served as a Board member with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) and the Health & Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI). In the private sector he served as a Non-Executive Director with Newry based Around Noon Ltd and was also agri-food consultant with BDO in addition to working in a consultancy capacity on several business projects.

Grace Nesbitt - Independent Member

Grace Nesbitt, OBE, brings a wealth of experience gained through her professional career in human resources, formerly in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS), attaining Fellowship status with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Grace was an independent member of various Audit and Risk Committees over many years, both in central and local government in Northern Ireland. She has also held numerous Director Roles in the 3rd sector. Grace is currently the Chair of the Board of Governance of the Jersey Audit Office and is also Chair of the Agricultural Wages Board in NI.

Martina Campbell - Independent Member

Martina is a civil servant with over 40 years' service across a range of departments, including Department of Health (DoH), The Executive Office (TEO), the former Department for Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL) and latterly DfC. Martina has a wide breadth of experience in the policy, governance and legislation areas. She has been involved in bringing legislation through the assembly on a range of matters including Age and Gender Equality, Welfare Reform and gambling.

Joe Boyle - NAC

Joe Boyle has been a Councillor since 2005 and Secretary of the National Association of Councillors (NAC NI - Region) for 10 years. Joe was elected to Ards Borough Council in 2005 and subsequently to Ards and North Down Borough Council under the Review of Public Administration (RPA) in 2014, representing the Ards Peninsula DEA. He is a Past Chairman of the Planning

Committee, and former Chair of the Council's Environment Committee during this period. He also sits on the East Border Region members' forum, and the Audit and Governance Committee. Councillor Boyle is also the current Chairperson of the Northern Ireland Local Government Partnership on Travellers Issues (NILGPTI) of which all 11 Councils are members as well as a delegate representing the Council on NILGA. He is a former member of Portaferry Regeneration Ltd and currently chairs the Council's ongoing Public Realm Scheme in Portaferry.

Alison Allen - NILGA representative

Alison Allen joined the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) on 1 February 2022 following 20 years of public service including wide-ranging roles in Belfast City Council (BCC), Antrim Borough Council, the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) and the NI Assembly. Her experience also includes working in partnership with a diverse range of political, voluntary, community, statutory and private sector stakeholders to deliver high quality services to the public. Alison has a particular passion for innovation, integration, sustainability and flexibility in public services as we continue to work together to ensure local people and places prosper given recent challenges.

Kevin Kelly – ICTU/NIPSA

Kevin Kelly has been a full time official for NIPSA for the past 17 years representing members throughout the Public Sector most notably in National Joint Council (NJC) employing authorities. The last five years he has been specialising in the Local Government Sector and is the lead Joint Trade Union Secretary for a number of councils including Newry Mourne and Down District Council (NMADD), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ACBCBC) among others. He is Staff side lead and Trainer on Job Evaluation (JE), in particular the Greater London Provincial Council (GLPC) that is used set the pay of staff in all 11 of the District Councils. He has been selected by ICTU to sit on the WG due to his background knowledge of the roles councillors play in industrial relations and how pay and grading is determined in the sector.

Jeff Glass - DfC Official

Jeff Glass is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) and is currently Head of Local Government Finance in the DfC. He has held various finance posts throughout the NICS over a 35-year period.

3. COUNCIL STATUTORY DUTIES WITHIN NI POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

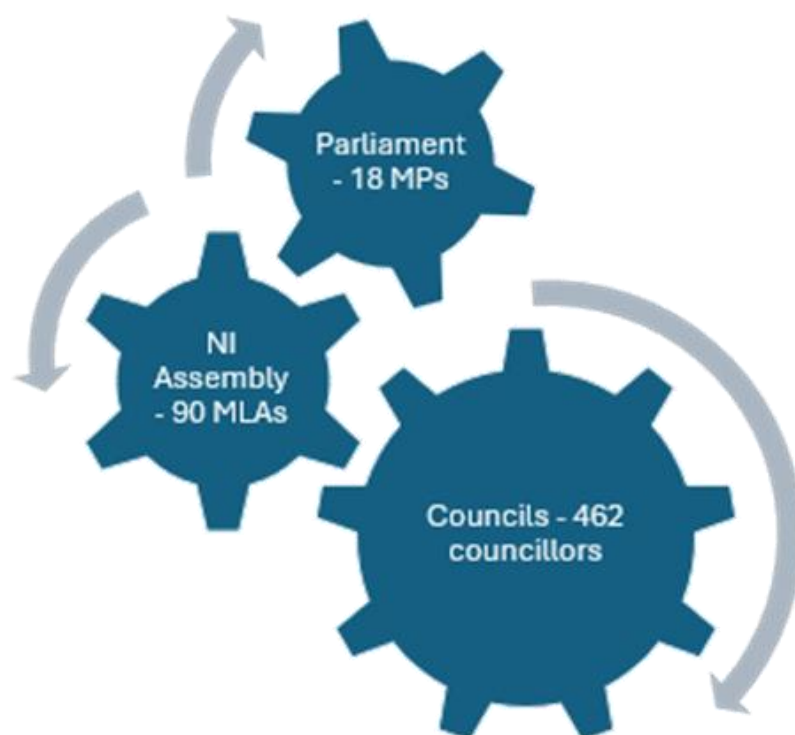
Introduction

- 3.1 This section of the report provides an overview of the various levels of political life in NI including their respective roles and responsibilities. The WG decided to include this detail in the report, as in the course of their engagement, the WG was told that considerable confusion existed in the public and amongst constituents as to the various remits within government here.

Levels of Government

- 3.2 There are 3 levels of government in NI. This includes local councils, the NI Assembly and the United Kingdom (UK) Parliament at Westminster. Politicians working at the different levels will have different roles and responsibilities. However, in practice and certainly operationally, there are overlaps with rate payers often approaching their local councillor even though the issue may be better dealt with by their local Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) or Member of Parliament (MP). Throughout this review exercise, note is continually being taken as to the respective roles of councillors, MLAs and MPs in painting a picture as to the role of the councillor in the 21st Century in NI.
- 3.3 Following a referendum in NI in 1998, the UK Parliament transferred a range of powers to the NI Assembly. This means that local politicians, instead of MPs in Westminster, make key decisions on how NI is governed. The UK government remains responsible for national policy on all matters that have not been devolved, including foreign affairs, defence, social security, macro-economic management and trade. There are 18 constituencies in NI each of which elects a MP to the House of Commons. Within the UK government, the Secretary of State for NI is responsible for the Northern Ireland Office (NIO). The NI Assembly is made up of 90 MLAs. MLAs pass laws and examine policy on transferred

matters like health, education, the environment and housing. They scrutinise the work of ministers and hold the government departments to account.



Review of Reform of Public Administration (RPA)

- 3.4 The RPA was formally launched by the Northern Ireland Executive (NIE) in June 2002. The remit of RPA was to: *“.... review the existing arrangements for the accountability, administration, and delivery of public services in NI, and to bring forward options for reform which are consistent with the arrangements and principles of the Belfast Agreement, within an appropriate framework of political and financial accountability”*.
- 3.5 On 11 April 2013 the Executive agreed that the reform of local government should be implemented with effect from 1 April 2015,

resulting in a reduction in the number of councils from 26 to 11 and the transfer of some powers and functions previously delivered by NI departments to these new councils. In addition, the number of councillors also reduced from 582 to 462. The following functions transferred on 1 April 2015:

- **Planning**
 - Local development plan functions
 - Development control and enforcement.
- **Roads**
 - Off street parking (except Park and Ride)
- **Local Economic Development** (transfer from Invest NI):
 - Start a Business Programme and Enterprise Shows
 - Youth Entrepreneurship (such as Prince's Trust and Shell Livewire)
 - Social Entrepreneurship
 - Investing for Women
 - Neighbourhood Renewal funding relating to enterprises initiatives.
- **Local Tourism**
 - Small scale tourism accommodation development
 - Providing business support including business start-up advice along with training and delivery of customer care schemes
 - Providing advice to developers on tourism policies and related issues.

3.6 The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 conferred a new duty of community planning on councils from 1 April 2015. Community planning is a process whereby councils, statutory bodies and the community and voluntary sectors work together to develop and implement a shared vision for

promoting the well-being of their area and pave the way for the most efficient use of scarce resources.

- 3.7 However, the transfer of urban regeneration responsibilities to the new 11 councils on 1 April 2015 did not take place. In addition, Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) did not transfer until 1 April 2019.
- 3.8 Councils have a range of roles and responsibilities, including services (waste collection and disposal, recycling and waste management, local planning functions, street cleaning, cemeteries), planning (local development plans), roads (off-street parking), local economic development, local tourism and heritage. Councillors are responsible for making decisions on behalf of the local community regarding all of these functions.
- 3.9 Councils are in every respect the local administration and councillors themselves live and often work in the council area they represent. They therefore by default become the first line of political contact because of their easy accessibility. Initial findings pointed to confusion in the minds of ratepayers as to the respective roles of councillors and MLAs. This was also borne out in the RoI where consideration was given to placing an advertisement in “the Press” setting out the role of the councillor. The role of the councillor has become more complex, multi-faceted and continues to change with councillors being now viewed as advocates for change. However, perceived confusion in where responsibility for various issues lies has now largely been replaced by the on the ground availability and accessibility of councillors and hence, they are often the first port of call.

4. APPROACH FRAMEWORK: UNDERSTANDING THE COUNCILLOR ROLE

Introduction

- 4.1 This section of the report summarises the approach taken by the WG to gather evidence and details the various organisations and individuals consulted. It also sets out the steps taken by the WG to comply with best practice regarding equality considerations.

Approach Taken

- 4.2 Local government councillors play a vital role in representing the interests of residents within their electoral district. They provide leadership within the unique context of NI's political landscape, contributing to social and economic prosperity and addressing the diverse needs of constituents. Their responsibilities include engaging with residents, participating or leading, in council proceedings, advocating for local initiatives, and collaborating with partners for the benefit of their constituents. The work of a councillor broadly covers advocacy/representation, participating in core council business and activity of a more party-political nature. For the purposes of developing a role description for this review, activity of a more party-political nature falling outside the scope of participating in core council business is not included.
- 4.3 In its consideration of the allowances & support services of which councillors' avail, the WG at the outset agreed on the need to thoroughly understand the role and activities of councillors today. These were assessed against the roles undertaken prior to RPA. The WG were further informed by the Review of Councillors' Remuneration in NI (2006) and the Report of the NI Councillors' Remuneration Panel (2013).

Engagement Strategy

4.4 A comprehensive approach using multiple methods of communication was agreed upon and this included:

- A questionnaire/survey posted on each council website and results analysed.
- Meeting councillors individually and in groups through the NAC, and NILGA.
- Meeting councillors in specific council areas to ensure geographical spread.
- Meeting councillors who serve/served as mayor.
- Meeting MLAs who served as councillors.
- Meeting Party spokespersons on local government.
- Publishing the appointment of the independent Chair of the WG on the Department for Communities' website¹.
- Promoting the work of the review on NILGA's social media and website.
- BBC Good Morning Ulster radio interview to encourage participation from councillors who had not engaged.

4.5 The WG did consider how to engage the public directly in the review and concluded that this would be challenging. This view was shared in the Republic of Ireland and Scotland who have recently conducted similar reviews. As a counterbalance however, the WG engaged extensively with a wide range of organisations that worked with councillors. The WG also met with representatives from all the major political parties in NI, council Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and the third sector. In total, WG members met with 24 individuals, 8 NI organisations, 1 Scottish organisation, 1 Rol organisation, 2 groups of party leaders; and 3 councils. A list of consultees can be found at **Annex D**.

¹ Appointment of Independent Chair of the review of the roles and responsibilities of councillors in Northern Ireland

- 4.6 These channels served to gather evidence from councillors themselves as to the duties they carry out, how this is done, and the time commitment involved. The key factor in successful communication and engagement is listening and this was emphasised and practiced from the first engagement. The WG however determined that balance in evidence gathered was critical and therefore a significant number of organisations were consulted that worked with councillors (see **Annex E**).
- 4.7 The WG's approach also extended to consulting with individuals and organisations at official level and with jurisdictions in Great Britain (GB) and the RoI. The framework to the Review was one of inclusivity and diversity. A WG member was charged with key responsibility in this regard including adherence to Section 75 legislation and Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016, discussed at paragraphs 4.10 - 4.13.
- 4.8 The WG, in looking at the role and responsibilities of councillors also considered how the role carried out might be enhanced: what, if any barriers to entry exist; use of social media; and the difference in approach across age profiles. Considerable time was committed to gathering evidence and key to this was listening to councillors directly and to a range of organisations that work in tandem with councils. Members of the WG engaged both in face-to-face meetings and remotely.
- 4.9 Due diligence has been undertaken to ensure that no individual or organisation can be identified unless prior consent has been given.

Equality, Diversity & Rural Needs

- 4.10 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998² places a statutory obligation on Public Authorities to carry out their functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations in respect of religious belief, political opinion, gender, race, disability, age, marital status, dependants, and sexual orientation. The aim of this statutory obligation is to encourage public authorities to address inequalities and

² [Northern Ireland Act 1998 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

demonstrate measurable positive impact on the lives of people experiencing inequalities and improve the quality of life for all of the people of Northern Ireland.

- 4.11 The statutory Section 75 duties apply to designated public authorities³ including government departments and agencies, local councils, health trusts, housing associations, and education and library bodies. The WG appointed to review the roles and responsibilities of local councillors is not a designated public authority, it is therefore not required to conduct any equality screening or rural proofing. However, in the interests of best practice, the WG adopted the principles of equality and diversity by consulting with as wide a reach of people across a diverse geographical area.

Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

- 4.12 The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016⁴ aims to improve outcomes for rural dwellers by ensuring that the social and economic needs of people in rural areas are properly considered by public authorities in their decision-making processes and to increase transparency on how public authorities consider rural needs when undertaking their functions. As the WG is not a designated public authority it is not compelled to consider rural needs in its deliberations. However, in the interests of best practice, the WG consulted with councillors in a wide geographical area, and the availability, in particular, of registered childcare, especially in rural areas out of office hours was often cited as a barrier to people putting themselves forward for election to the role of councillor. The issue of barriers and enablers for the role of councillors is discussed in further detail in section 6.

³ A designated public authority is any body or organisation listed in Schedule 2 to Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/13/contents>

⁴ [Rural Needs Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/1/contents)

Diversity Ambassadors' Network

- 4.13 Members of the WG also met with representatives of the Diversity Ambassadors' Network, an initiative set up by the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC) to actively promote the equality and diversity agenda in all councils. The network of Diversity Ambassadors is made up of elected members and officers from councils.

5. BASIC ALLOWANCE

Introduction

- 5.1 This section of the report sets out the current provisions for the Basic Allowance (BA) in NI and provides a comparison with other jurisdictions. It also details the approaches adopted by the WG to determine the future quantum of the BA and recommends how it should be applied and updated in future.

Previous Review in NI

- 5.2 The last time that local councillors' allowances were reviewed in NI was in 2013. The previous Report of the NI Councillors' Remuneration Panel⁵ to the former Minister for Environment, concluded that, at that time, 50% of the median NI full-time wage for all employees (both public and private sector) for the year 2012 would be a fair basic allowance for councillors. This represented a recommended allowance of £12,000 p.a. which was an increase of 23.23% on the previous allowance of £9,738. The year 2012 was chosen as this was the latest available published data for the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)⁶. The median gross annual wage for all full-time employees in Northern Ireland (both private and public sector) in 2012, was £24,011.
- 5.3 The report also recommended that those councillors with District Electoral Areas (DEAs) with a mean electorate larger than 3,000 should receive an additional £1,200 p.a. representing an increase of 10% more to recognise the higher constituency workload. The report further

⁵Report of the NI Councillors' Remuneration Panel to the Minister for the Environment 2013 – copies available on request from LGFinanceBranch@communities-ni.gov.uk.

⁶[Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

recommended that all councillors should receive £1,000 p.a. for office consumables such as phone, paper, ink, etc. This figure was chosen as this was the amount payable to MLAs at that time. In a written statement⁷, the then Minister, Mark Durkan MLA, decided that, on balance, the similarities across larger DEAs outweighed the differences and that all councillors should be paid £14,200 from 2015/16. This amount included the proposed DEA allowance of £1,200 plus the £1,000 for consumables.

Current Position

- 5.4 The BA, which is funded by councils is currently set at a maximum of £17,030 from 1 April 2023. This is the gross amount and subject to Income Tax, National Insurance and pension contribution deductions.
- 5.5 At present a circular is issued each year from DfC specifying the maximum of the BA which councils can adopt. In recent times the WG noted that 2 out of the 11 councils here voted not to apply the maximum BA. The amount of the BA is uprated each year by DfC in line with local government pay settlements here.
- 5.6 Many councillors stated that whilst being in public office was akin to a vocation, it was important that being a councillor was remunerated fairly. Most respondents to the survey (84%) considered that the BA and Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) should be increased for the more challenging roles faced by councillors. Over 100 comments received referred to the number of hours worked and the increasing demands and responsibilities upon councillors and the remuneration didn't accurately reflect the current role. Many councillors who had either

⁷ <https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/official-report/written-ministerial-statements-2011-2016/>

full or part time employment alongside their role as a councillor cited the struggle to strike a balance and reported that they couldn't reduce their hours in their paid employment owing to the financial impact. Others noted that it would be important for the remuneration to increase to reflect the hours worked and to attract capable, experienced professionals to the role.

- 5.7 Changes since RPA and the role of the councillor are set out in sections 3 and 4 respectively of this report. The evidence is that given the work of a councillor, that the current regime of allowances does not reflect, both the volume and complexity of the work.
- 5.8 Councillors and councils support the whole community regardless of age, gender, race, socio-economic status or educational attainment. Citizens' expectations, as well as advances in technology and social media, means that councillors are even more accessible within their local communities. The overwhelming message from those with whom the WG met and from those who responded to the survey, was the need to invest in democracy. Now, more than ever, we need to ensure we attract and retain skilled and talented people into the role. The remuneration payable should not be seen as a barrier and should better reflect the key role councillors play in determining how ratepayers' money is spent and how services are provided in local areas.
- 5.9 The WG noted that councils wanted flexibility regarding the payment of allowances and therefore the practice has been for the DfC to set maximum limits for the BA. There was a strong view expressed by most stakeholders (81%) that the award of the BA should be taken out of councillors' hands – that is that the decision on amount payable should be set by the DfC and automatically applied to councillors with a future proofing mechanism to ensure they remain appropriate.

Other Jurisdictions

- 5.10 The ToR require the WG to give consideration to other jurisdictions in GB and also Rol.

England

- 5.11 In England independent Remuneration Panels are required to make recommendations to individual councils on the level of allowances paid to councillors. The WG researched councillor remuneration, terms and conditions in local government in England and details of this research is referred to throughout this report. However, it is broadly recognised that successive reorganisations of local government have created a complex array of arrangements which vary from area to area. Much of England has two tiers of local government - county councils and district councils - with responsibility for services split between the two. Other areas have a single unitary authority or combined authority responsible for all local services. Due to this complexity, the WG agreed that arrangements in England do not provide the most useful information for comparison purposes.

Best Comparators

- 5.12 The WG concluded that the arrangements in Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland provide the most useful basis for comparison. It should be noted that local government in NI are not responsible for education, personal social services, roads (other than off street parking) and public housing which are responsibilities of local government in Scotland and Wales. The Rol are also responsible for roads and public housing but not education and personal social services as these are managed by central government. However, councils in NI have responsibilities for all planning decisions and waste management

services which councils in the RoI do not have. A comparison of the main responsibilities of councils within the four jurisdictions noted above are included in a table in **Annex F**.

Scotland

5.13 The SLARC published their latest report⁸ in February 2024, and recommended setting the allowance at 80% of the median salary (£30,726) for all public sector employees (both full and part-time) in Scotland with effect from 1 April 2024. The ASHE survey in Scotland is based on 35 hours. SLARC's survey of councillors reported that councillors spent between 21 and 35 hours per week on formal business. The median hours equated to 28.75 hours which is 82.14% of the now standard working week of 35 hours in Scotland. This is how they arrived at 80% figure. The SLARC further recommended that this proportionate link to the median public sector salaries is accepted as the methodology on which councillor salaries are established. On the issue of future salary increases, the SLARC further recommended that the salaries of all councillors should continue to be uplifted on an annual basis as per the current arrangements introduced in 2017, which means that councillors' salaries are increased in line with the median increase in earnings of public sector employees in Scotland, as published by the latest ASHE survey⁹.

5.14 The SLARC used the data published in the 2022 ASHE survey as this was the latest published data available. Eighty per cent of the median public sector salary (for all employees) in Scotland equates to £24,581, and this represents an increase of almost 22.30% from the 2023/24 allowance of £20,099. The SLARC recommended that the salaries of council leaders in current Band D (Edinburgh & Glasgow) are

⁸ Councillors' remuneration and expenses: recommendations - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

⁹ ASHE 2022 Survey Scotland - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/annual-survey-of-hours-and-earnings-2022/>

benchmarked at the salary of an MSP (Member of the Scottish Parliament) as at 1 April 2023 (£67,662) and that the salaries of council leaders in the current Band C be set at 85% of those in current Band D and those in combined Bands A and B be set at 70% of the salary of those in current Band D. The SLARC also recommended that the salaries of civic heads and senior councillors continue to be set at a maximum of 75% of their council leader.

- 5.15 On the 5 July 2024, the Scottish Government published their response¹⁰ to the SLARC report. The Government accepted the recommended increased allowance and announced plans to introduce regulations to give effect to the proposed increase from 1 April 2025. However, the Government did not accept that the proportionate link (of 80% of median salary of public sector employees) should be maintained. Instead, the Government stated that it would accept the recommendation made by the SLARC to use the existing methodology of uplifting allowances by the median increase of earnings of public sector employees, as published by ASHE. The Scottish Government accepted the SLARC's recommendations on the salaries of Council Leaders, Senior Councillors and Civic Heads.

Wales

- 5.16 In Wales, councillor allowances are determined annually by an Independent Remuneration Panel¹¹ (the Panel). The Panel published their latest report on 28 February 2024, and recommended the continuance of the link between the remuneration of elected members of principal councils, and the average earnings of their constituents (ASHE¹²). The Panel restated their view that a fair and reasonable remuneration package will continue to support elected members and not

¹⁰ [Councillors' remuneration and expenses recommendations: SG response - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/councillors-remuneration-and-expenses-recommendations/sg-response/pages/12.aspx)

¹¹ [Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales: annual report 2024 to 2025 \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/independent-remuneration-panel-for-wales-annual-report-2024-to-2025)

¹² [Annual survey of hours and earnings: 2022 | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/annual-survey-of-hours-and-earnings-2022)

act as a barrier to participation. The Panel also confirmed that, in their view, the time commitment for councillors was the equivalent of three full days. As a result, the proposed allowance from 1 April 2024 is £18,666, which is three fifths (60%) of the annual earnings for all employees in Wales in 2022 (the latest published data available to the Panel).

Rol

- 5.17 An Independent Review of the Role and Remuneration of Local Authority Elected Members, led by Sara Moorhead SC, was published in 2020 (the Moorhead Report¹³). The report recommended that the Representational Payment and the Municipal District Members allowance should be replaced with an appropriate single salary payment based on, and appropriate to, the important work being done by councillors. It was proposed that the introduction of the salary coincide with the streamlining and rationalisation of the range of expense allowances that were currently payable to councillors in line with public sector norms.
- 5.18 The report recommended that councillors' salary should be aligned with a specific staff grade within Local Authorities, namely, point 3 of a Grade 6 Senior Staff Officer, which is €50,122 (£42,940¹⁴) per annum based on a 37-hour week. The report further recommended that this should be proportionately reduced to reflect the part-time nature of the councillor role and based on 2.5 days per week or 18.5 hours per week (€25,066 ~ £21,474¹⁵). Any additional time allocated by councillors to their representational role will be on a voluntary basis. The point was also made that councillors enter local government to serve the community, not for financial gain, and as such the calculation of an appropriate salary

¹³ [gov - Independent Review of the Role and Remuneration of Local Authority Elected Members – Final Report \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie)

¹⁴ Sterling rate converted as at the Bank of England rate on 2 April 2024. No available exchange rate at 1 April 2024 as it was Easter Monday.

¹⁵ Sterling rate converted as at the Bank of England rate on 2 April 2024. No available exchange rate at 1 April 2024 as it was Easter Monday.

amount should include a reduction of 10% to take account of the ‘public and civic element’ of their role.

- 5.19 In May 2021, the Irish Government agreed proposals to reform the remuneration payable to local councillors. The proposals took account of the recommendations made within the Moorhead report. The proposed salary was set at €25,066 (£21,474¹⁶). At time of writing (August 2024) the current salary of a local councillor is €28,724 (£24,608¹⁷).

Summary of approaches used

- 5.20 As can be seen from the preceding paragraphs, Scotland and Wales linked councillors’ BA to the latest published ASHE survey, as did the previous NI report. Both Wales and NI linked councillor BA to a percentage of the median salary for all employees (both public and private sector) whilst Scotland used the slightly higher median annual salary for all public sector employees. The RoI linked theirs to a specific grade within the Local Authority (LA), reflecting a direct link to public sector salaries.

The NI Approach – 2024

- 5.21 Having considered the different approaches used in other jurisdictions, the WG concurred that, whichever approach was used, a robust justification was essential for any allowance awarded. Various methods were agreed by the WG as objectively appropriate, including:

- Public sector pay analysis (ASHE Survey and equivalent).
- Job Evaluation.

¹⁶ Sterling rate converted as at the Bank of England rate on 2 April 2024. No available exchange rate at 1 April 2024 as it was Easter Monday.

¹⁷ Sterling rate converted as at the Bank of England rate on 2 April 2024. No available exchange rate at 1 April 2024 as it was Easter Monday.

- Comparison with other jurisdictions.

5.22 The WG did consider the usefulness of benchmarking against other similar political roles i.e. MLA/MP. However, the WG noted that no other jurisdiction considered the salary for other political roles to be relevant for the purposes of councillor remuneration, although SLARC did compare the role of council leaders in current Band D (Edinburgh & Glasgow) to that of an MSP. In view of this, the WG decided against benchmarking with either MPs' or MLAs' salaries.

Public Sector Pay Analysis

5.23 Independent Panels in Scotland and Wales (and indeed, the previous NI report) set as comparators for councillor salaries, either a percentage of the median salary for all employees in the public sector (Scotland); or a percentage of the median salary for all employees both public and private sector (Wales and the previous NI report). The RoI aligned their councillor remuneration to a specific point on the local authority staff scale, reflecting a direct link to public sector salaries.

5.24 The WG considered it very relevant to consider the proportionate link between councillor BA and the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) in Scotland, Wales and RoI (ASHE equivalent) i.e. the average earnings of constituents. The WG findings are summarised in table overleaf:

Table: Link between Councillors' Salaries and Public Sector Earnings

	2024/25 Councillor Salary	2022 Public Sector All Employees (Full and Part Time) Median Earnings (ASHE)	Current Councillor Wage as % of 2022 Public Sector All Employees Median Earnings
Scotland	£24,581	£30,726	80.00%
Wales	£18,666	£28,297	65.96%
Rol	€29,980	€52,288	57.34%
Average of 3 comparable jurisdictions			67.77%
NI		£29,042	

5.25 A number of explanatory notes relevant to the data above are set out below:

- Rol does not use ASHE, but for the purposes of this review the equivalent information has been sourced from Rol. Rol have agreed a number of increases in recent years, including in year, so for the purposes of this exercise, the Rol salary for 2024/25 is an average of the monthly representational salary payment throughout 2024/25.
- Both Scotland and Wales in their recent report on councillor remuneration determined their recommendations for 2024 councillor remuneration based on the 2022 ASHE survey. The 2022 ASHE survey is the most recent ASHE survey with confirmed figures as the 2023 survey figures remain provisional.
- The Scottish Remuneration Panel and the Scottish Government Response agree that the remuneration for councillors should be

£24,581 based on the 2022 ASHE survey. To give sufficient time for budgets and associated legislation it will not be implemented until 1 April 2025, but on that date, it will include the agreed annual uplift so will be higher than £24,581. The actual basic allowance for the 2024/25 year is £21,345.

- For the purposes of this exercise, although Wales links their determination to 60% of average earnings for all employees in Wales in 2022, for consistency, we have used the median earnings for all public sector employees.

Findings – Public Sector Pay Analysis:

- 5.26 Applying the 67.77% average of the councillor salaries as a proportion of all employees' public sector median earnings as taken across Scotland, Wales and RoI to the NI 2022 Public Sector All Employees Median Earnings results in £19,682.

Job Evaluation

- 5.27 The WG next considered that job evaluation would also provide some useful insights as it is a process widely used across the public sector to independently assess job grading and loading.
- 5.28 The WG agreed that the Greater London Provincial Council (GLPC) job evaluation scheme was the most appropriate for several reasons:
- It is an equality-proofed scheme;
 - it is widely used in all councils in NI;
 - it has the agreement of all trade unions; and
 - its factors, descriptors, and conventions are highly relevant to the role of a councillor.

- 5.29 The process adopted mirrored that of any other job evaluation for a staff member in a council and the WG worked with Clare Carson, a Human Resources (HR) specialist from Queen's University Belfast (QUB) to review existing councillor role information from the NAC, NILGA and the 2013 review to draft an initial role description.
- 5.30 This initial draft role description was then reviewed by the five main local government NILGA party leaders¹⁸ and by the NAC¹⁹ to obtain their agreement or to allow for amendments. All suggested changes were accepted, including using the term "Role Description" to better reflect the position of the councillor. A copy of the Role Description is provided at **Annex G**.
- 5.31 Following agreement on the Role Description, an evaluation panel convened to evaluate the post. The panel comprised:
- Two fully trained evaluators, Kevin Kelly and Peter Boyle²⁰.
 - Alison Allen, CEO of NILGA, serving as an observer and providing clarification on the councillor job role where needed.
- 5.32 The resulting job evaluation exercised objectively evaluated the role of councillor as equating to the following National Joint Council (NJC) salary scale range of £37,336 - £40,221. Please note, this salary scale is as applies to 2023/24 as the pay deal which would apply has not yet been agreed for 2024/25.
- 5.33 In terms of hours to be applied to this base salary, the WG agreed to use 25 hours. This proxy is based on the mean of 46% of respondents to the

¹⁸ Alliance, DUP, SDLP, Sinn Féin, UUP

¹⁹ National Association of Councillors

²⁰ Biographies are available at Annex H

survey who stated they spent, on average, 20-30 hours per week on their role as councillor.

- 5.34 The WG agreed that as the vast majority of all councillors have been doing the role for a number of years, then the base salary should be regarded as that at the top of the scale i.e. £40,221 (full time equivalent of 37 hours per week).

Findings: Job Evaluation

- 5.35 Applying 25 hours pro rata to £40,221, results in £27,176.

Comparison of councillor pay increases in other jurisdictions

- 5.36 The WG was aware of recent significant reviews of councillor remuneration in Scotland and RoI and that Wales publish a councillor remuneration report annually. The WG agreed that analysing the extent to which councillor salaries increased in these jurisdictions between 2023/24 and 2024/25 would provide useful insight. The WG findings are summarised in the table overleaf.

- 5.37 RoI are phasing in a series of increases throughout 2023/24 and 2024/25, including a number of in year increases. For the purposes of this exercise, the WG used an average of the monthly representational salary payment for both 2023/24 and 2024/25.

- 5.38 The actual basic councillor allowance in Scotland for 2023/24 is £20,099²¹ and for 2024/25 is £21,345²². However, to reflect the impact of the accepted recommendations of the SLARC report, the WG considered it necessary to compare the increase between the actual 2023/24 basic allowance and the recommended increased basic

²¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2023/21/made>

²² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2024/24/made>

allowance by SLARC which was accepted by the Scottish Government for the 2024/25 year of £24,581. It should be noted that the Scottish Government in their response stated £24,581 could not be implemented in this financial year due to timing issues. The Scottish Government has agreed to apply it as in effect a new baseline and further stated that this amount of £24,581 will be subject to the uprating for the 2025/26 year.

Findings: Comparisons with other Jurisdictions

- 5.39 Applying the average 11.26% increase in councillor remuneration from 2023/24 to 2024/25 to existing NI councillor remuneration of £17,030 for the 2023/24 year, results in £18,948.

Table: Increases in Councillors' Salaries

	2023/24 Councillor Salary	2024/25 Councillor Salary	% increase
Scotland	£20,099	£24,581	22.30%
Wales	£17,600	£18,666	6.06%
Rol	€28,435	€29,980	5.43%
Average % increase			11.26%

Conclusion

- 5.40 In reviewing all of this evidence together, the WG considered that all approaches were equally relevant and useful. The WG determined that the most objective method to make a final recommendation on the basic allowance for councillors would be to take a simple average of the findings from all three approaches. This is summarised overleaf:

Table: Basic Allowance Summary

Approaches and amounts	
Public Sector Pay Analysis	£19,682
Job Evaluation	£27,176
Comparison of % increases in other jurisdictions	£18,948
	£65,806
Average	£21,935

5.41 **The WG recommends a new baseline Basic Allowance for councillors of £21,935.**

5.42 As part of the rate setting process for 2024/25, councils budgeted for an increase to the 2023/24 BA which was £17,030. The actual percentage increase has not yet been agreed between councils and Trade Unions (TU). The BA for 2024/25 will be based on the 2023/24 BA of £17,030 plus the percentage increase agreed between councils and TU.

5.43 Councils will need time to assess how the increase in the BA will impact on the 2025/26 rate setting process. Therefore, subject to Ministerial approval the earliest that the increase in the BA can be applied will be April 2025.

5.44 The WG is also aware of the lag time in the statistical evidence base used to determine the BA to be paid April 2025. For example, the latest available for ASHE is 2022, the pay scale used for the Job Evaluation is based on 2023/24 and the figure of 2023/24 has been used for the basic councillor allowance here.

5.45 In recognition of this lag impact, the WG agrees that appropriate indexation must be applied to the actual amount paid in April 2025. The WG recognises that the calculations detailed in this report to determine

the BA should be recalculated with the up-to-date public sector earnings information, 2024/25 and 2025/26 NJC pay scales, 2025/26 councillor salaries in other jurisdictions and also the BA for councillors here for 2024/25 when available.

5.46 The WG recommends that the new baseline BA of £21,935, which will be subject to 2 further increases to ensure full account is taken of the latest evidence base, should be applied from 1 April 2025.

5.47 The WG further recommends that annual increases in the BA from 2026/27 are in line with local government pay settlements.

5.48 The WG is content with the current uplifting arrangements as used by DfC which reflect the quantum of pay settlements in local government here.

Maximum Basic Allowance

5.49 The DfC formally determines the maximum rates for BA under Section 31 of the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011. Section 31 (2) states “Payments by a council under the regulations shall be of such amounts or at such rates as may be determined by the council but shall not exceed such amounts or rates as may be determined by the Department.”

5.50 During the period of this review, it was highlighted to the WG by most stakeholders that any decisions on a “maximum” BA should be removed from individual councils.

5.51 The WG recommends that all councillors should receive the same BA and that reference to “maximum” is removed from the legislation.

- 5.52 In order to remove reference to a “maximum” BA, the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 will need to be amended and as this is primary legislation this may take some time to progress through the NI Assembly.
- 5.53 **The WG recommends that all councils pay the BA as set out in the consolidated guidance on councillors’ allowances circular issued by DfC, until the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 is amended.**

6. **ACCOMPANYING RECOMMENDATIONS**

Introduction

6.1 This section of the report sets out the key themes emerging from the WG's engagement with stakeholders which have, where appropriate, been mapped against specific areas as set out in the ToR, copy available at **Annex A**. It also includes the WG's recommendations on several areas, except for the Basic Allowance which is dealt with in Section 5.

Survey

6.2 The WG also conducted a survey²³, as referenced in Chapter 4 under Approach and Methodology. The survey was published on each council's website and promoted through groups such as NAC & NILGA. Members of the WG met with a broad range of councillors to ensure a wide geographical spread as well as in the interests of diversity and inclusion; a list of those the WG met is available at **Annex D**. A total of 305 responses to the survey were received, this included responses from 285 councillors out of a possible 462 councillors. This represents a 62% response rate which compares with the response rate for Scotland of 64% of councillors.

Key Findings of the Survey

- 6.3 The key findings of the survey²⁴ include: -
- 46% of respondents reported spending, on average 20-30 hours per week in their role as councillor, whilst a quarter (26%) of respondents said they spent around 30-40 hours per week.

²³ The survey template has been published along with the final report on the Department's website

²⁴ The survey findings has been published along with the final report on the Department's website

- The majority of respondents (57%) stated that they were in full time employment in addition to their role as councillor. A further 64 respondents (23%) were in part time employment.
- In terms of length of time served as councillors, 118 respondents (42%) were currently in their first term whilst 109 (39%) had served between two to five terms. Almost 20% of councillors had served between 6-15 terms.
- The majority of respondents (70%) reported having faced abuse and/or harassment because of their role. In conversations with councillors, most reported having received abuse on social media.
- The majority (84%) of respondents consider that the BA and the SRA should be increased for more challenging roles faced by councillors.
- The majority of respondents (81%) think that all councils should pay councillors the same amount across all the allowances.
- The majority of respondents (86%) agreed that the BA and SRAs should continue to be increased in line with council officers' pay increases (NJC pay scales).

Terms of Reference (ToR)

6.4 The ToR, provided by the DfC proposed the following:

“that the 2023 independently led review of the roles and responsibilities of councillors should make recommendations on:

- *The system and level of allowances which would be available to councillors taking into consideration the role and responsibilities of councillors since April 2015 and schemes of remuneration for councillors in other jurisdictions in Britain and Ireland.”*

6.5 The WG in their consideration of the roles and responsibilities of councillors since 2015, identified two further specific areas which merited analysis and these have been added to the eight areas specified in the ToR:

- *Allowances (basic, attendance and special responsibility).*
- *Chair & vice chair allowances.*
- *DCA.*
- *Pension scheme.*
- *Severance scheme.*
- *Travel & subsistence (T&S)*
- *Maternity/paternity and long-term sickness.*
- *Range of members' services and support.*
- *Learning and development (L&D)*
- *Enabling participation in public life*

Attendance Allowance

6.6 There is no Attendance Allowance in place for councillors as the 2006 Review of Councillors' Remuneration in NI Report²⁵ concluded that the Attendance Allowance should be abolished and replaced by an enhanced basic allowance. Some of those consulted however felt that there would be merit in having such an allowance, like what is paid by the Department of Justice (DoJ) for attendance at Police and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs). The 2006 Review set out a clear rationale for abolishing this allowance and the supporting case has been endorsed by the WG. It is also important to see this within the context of the BA which is addressed in Section 5.

²⁵ Written Ministerial Statement - DoE - Local Government Reform Programme: Councillors' Remuneration and final scheme of allowances. Copies of the 2006 Review of Councillors Remuneration in NI Report available from LGFinanceBranch@communities-ni.gov.uk.

6.7 The WG does not see reason to change recommendations of previous reviews i.e. that this remains an integral part of BA.

6.8 **The WG recommend that the current position remains, and no Attendance Allowance be re-introduced.**

Chair & Vice Chair Allowances

6.9 The WG found that the amount paid to the chairs, vice chairs (and also the mayors) vary considerably across the 11 councils. Indeed, some councils do not remunerate these positions at all. Some stakeholders welcomed this degree of flexibility; other considered it inequitable, given the work to be delivered by councils is prescribed by statute. Other jurisdictions had similar flexibility.

6.10 Thirty-nine per cent of respondents agreed that the best approach was to continue to allow councils flexibility on whether to take chairperson/vice chairperson allowances into account when considering SRA limits. A similar number (39%) agreed to allow councils to have flexibility but with a maximum or upper limit in place.

6.11 The WG recognises that councils wish to have discretion over the allocation of the SRA, however, the WG concluded that in the interests of equality the vice-chairs should be paid as well as committee chairs.

6.12 **The WG recommends that councils pay all vice-chairs as well as chairs of committees from the Special Responsibility Allowance.**

Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA)

- 6.13 Each council may also pay a SRA. This is an allowance for taking on additional responsibility such as the chair or vice chair of a council committee. The maximum rate is based on the size of the council population. Each council's population figures are updated each year by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and it is the duty of each council to operate within the total maximum rate appropriate to its population band. The DfC issues a circular each year advising councils of the allowances payable²⁶.
- 6.14 A SRA is not payable to any councillor who represents their council on an outside agency or body and is only payable within the formal council committee governance structure. The limit on 50% of councillors receiving an SRA was introduced in the 2006 Review of Councillors' Remuneration in NI. It has been for each council to decide which roles or duties attract SRA but the allowance should only be paid to those councillors who have significant additional responsibilities over and above the generally accepted duties of a councillor. The actual amount available for the 2023/24 financial year based on council population is set out below:

Table: Maximum SRA Allowances By Population Size

Population of council	Maximum SRA	Maximum (1/5th) for individual councillor	Councils in each band
Less than 120,000	£59,960	£11,992	1
120,000 - 199,000	£83,994	£16,789	8
200,000 +	£129,513	£25,903	2

²⁶ [Circular LG 10/2022 - Consolidated Councillor Allowances](#) | Department for Communities ([communities-ni.gov.uk](#))

- 6.15 There was concern expressed about the differing practices in councils regarding the SRA, such as some giving an allowance to all members on the planning committees, whilst in other councils only the chair and/or vice chair are in receipt of SRA. There was consensus that the structures set by the DfC on applying SRAs do not provide the necessary flexibility for councils and party groups to organise themselves in a way that best meets their local needs, particularly the 50% limit on the number of councillors who can be in receipt of it.
- 6.16 A view was also expressed that councillors should be able to be in receipt of more than one SRA – rather than the current practice of being awarded only one SRA, regardless of what additional duties they have.
- 6.17 On the issue of using SRA to pay an allowance to party group leads within a council, there appeared to be regional variation and a view was expressed that the practice of councillors only being able to be in receipt of one SRA, also limits that flexibility.
- 6.18 In Wales, principal councils are grouped into population bands and elected members with senior roles, such as chairs of committees or leaders are entitled to a higher level of fixed payment depending on their local authority's population band. There is a limit on the number of senior salaries payable ("the cap"), a statutory maximum of 50% of the council's membership.
- 6.19 In Scotland, each local authority is placed into one of four bands based on various factors, including the size of the council budget. The band determines the level of pay for senior posts within the council and the maximum number of senior councillors which can be appointed by each council. Regulations specify the maximum amount of money which can be spent on senior councillor salaries by each council. It is then up to

individual councils to decide how much to pay its senior councillors, who may be paid different amounts.

- 6.20 In the RoI, councillors who are mayors/council chairs of local authorities, chairs of the municipal districts and chairs of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) receive additional remuneration.
- 6.21 The WG considers that to reflect what happens in practice, with councillors holding more than one additional responsibility that councillors should be able to claim up to 2 SRAs. The WG considers that serious consideration should be given to ensuring such roles are spread out and rotated in the interests of developing the skills and experience of all councillors. The WG agreed that the role of party group leads within a council is important to the effective discharge of council business in what is a political organisation.
- 6.22 The WG recognises the importance of party group leader positions to the corporate and political functioning of councils and concluded that this should also attract an allowance, but that it should be considered outside the SRA arrangements.
- 6.23 **The WG recommends the following regarding SRAs:**
- **The cap of 50% being in receipt of it should be abolished.**
 - **Councillors can be in receipt of a maximum of 2 SRAs.**
 - **Councils should give serious consideration of appropriate remuneration of party leads (if not in place already), outside the SRA arrangements.**

Dependants' Carers' Allowance (DCA)

6.24 In Northern Ireland, a council may make a payment of a DCA to a councillor incurring an expense for the care of their dependants while performing any approved duty. The regulations set out that the amount of DCA payable by the council is the lesser of the actual expenses of arranging care of children or dependants or such amount as is determined by the council. The DfC sets a maximum hourly rate and monthly amount for DCA depending on whether standard or specialist care is required. The actual amount available for the 2023/24 year is set out below (Circular LG 23/2023 – Consolidated Councillor Allowances). In 2022/23, claims were received from councillors in only two councils totalling £1,174.

6.25 Within the survey, respondents cited a lack of awareness about the availability of the allowance and reported difficulties with the process of claiming. Over half of respondents (52%) reported having dependents or caring responsibilities.

Table: DCA Rates

Dependants' Carers' Allowance	Hourly Rate	Maximum Monthly Amount
	£	£
Standard	10.42 [^]	542
Specialist	20.84	1,084

[^](Based on national living wage)

- 6.26 In Wales, councils can make contributions towards councillors for the costs of care and personal assistance. Formal (registered with Care Inspectorate Wales) care costs to be paid as evidenced (no maximum). Unformal (unregistered) care costs to be paid up to a maximum rate equivalent to the Real Living Wage hourly rates as defined by the Living Wage Foundation at the time the costs are incurred. Each authority must ensure that any payments made are appropriately linked to official business or approved duty.
- 6.27 There are no similar provisions in Scotland and the RoI. In Scotland such provisions were not available to local government workers and therefore the view was it should not be made available to elected members.
- 6.28 Just over half (52%) of respondents to the survey reported having dependent and/or caring responsibilities. The majority of respondents (81%) think that councils should all pay the same amount, and 93% agreed that the DCA should continue to be based on the increase in the National Living Wage. In almost all the discussions with councillors, the issue of availability of care outside normal working hours and in rural areas was raised as an issue. Almost all those consulted cited availability of care, as a barrier to entry for some individuals such as single parents or those with caring responsibility for older relations. Many respondents cited the fact that the current allowance takes no account of the increased costs of caring during unsocial hours. Some respondents suggested the allowance should be linked to the Real Living Wage as opposed to the National Living Wage.
- 6.29 The WG agreed that this allowance does not meet the need as the level of this allowance is insufficient to attract registered childminders. Costs of childcare varies considerably throughout NI depending on whether or not a facility such as a nursery is used, or whether a registered

childminder is used. Regardless of which provider used, neither are available to suit the working hours of councillors, for whom most meetings are in evenings.

6.30 The WG noted that this issue is a barrier to entry from women in particular who typically have more caring responsibilities for children and also elder care and concluded that changes needed to be made.

6.31 **The WG recommends that the Welsh protocols be adopted for DCA:**

- **Each council must have a process in place to ensure that any payments claimed are for official approved duty;**
- **Unregistered care costs to be paid up to a maximum of the National Living Wage, for both standard and specialist with a monthly cap applying in accordance with the rates published each year by the DfC; and**
- **The cap for registered care costs to be abolished.**

Pension Scheme

6.32 The Pension Scheme for councillors (the Scheme) is a tax approved defined benefit scheme. New councillors will be automatically brought into the Scheme but can opt out. The benefits built up and paid under the Scheme are based on the length of their membership and their career average pensionable pay. The pensionable pay for a councillor consists of BA and SRA payments only. Pension is normally only payable at State Pension Age, however, exceptions exist for example – ill health or early retirement. In such cases where a councillor retires before they reach the State Pension Age their pension will be reduced.

6.33 The benefits of the Scheme are summarised overleaf:

- At retirement a councillor will receive a pension based on their average pay while a member of the Scheme.
- The pension will be revalued each year to keep pace with the cost of living.
- The council makes contributions towards the pension benefits.
- A councillor can boost their pension benefits by:
 - purchasing “added years”; and
 - paying additional voluntary contributions (AVCs) to build up an additional pension fund with the in-house AVC provider, Prudential.
- Survivors’ pensions are payable to a councillor’s spouse, civil partner, eligible cohabiting partner and children.
- Life cover is automatically provided of three times’ pensionable pay and a councillor can say who they would like to receive the death grant.
- A councillor gets tax relief on their pension contributions.
- Normal retirement is at a councillors’ normal pension age (state pension age), but they can retire early from age 55 onwards (early retirement reductions will apply).
- A councillor can remain in the Scheme until the day before age 75.
- Prior to reaching their normal pension age, a councillor can retire on ill-health grounds at any age providing they qualify.
- A councillor can transfer their benefits out to another scheme once they have left active membership.

6.34 Councillors welcomed that fact that they could join a pension scheme. Full details of the pension benefit available to councillors are available on the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) web site. Councillors should avail of this helpful

resource²⁷ to better understand the provisions of the pension scheme. The survey asked for any comments or suggestions around the current arrangements for councillor pensions. 130 respondents answered this question. 88 of these had no comments or suggestions and around 15 individuals noted that they were satisfied with the current arrangements. Several respondents commented that they did not know what the arrangements were or that they would like more information about the scheme. Some respondents suggested that the pension scheme should allow for additional contributions to be made – this facility is available to councillors through the option to purchase Additional Voluntary Contributions or Added Years, both of which can boost the pension payable.

6.35 The WG compared the pension schemes in the RoI, Wales and Scotland. In the Republic of Ireland, councillors do not receive a pension but are entitled to receive a once off lump sum gratuity payment on retirement based on number of years of service²⁸. Councillors in Wales continue to have access to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) if they are offered membership under the council's scheme of allowances. The LGPS is available to councillors in Scotland.

6.36 The WG has no recommendations to make regarding the Pensions Scheme and note that nearly all councillors are members of the Pension Scheme.

Severance Scheme

6.37 This was an issue which was raised in almost every discussion the WG held with stakeholders. The purpose of a severance scheme is to

²⁷ [Understanding the Scheme - NILGOSC](#)

²⁸ [councillor-review-report-final-moorhead-report.pdf \(ailg.ie\)](#)

6.38 At present there is no severance scheme for councillors in Northern Ireland who either wish to leave their role for any reason, such as ill-health, or who are not re-elected. Forty- four per cent of respondents to the survey thought there should be a severance scheme and a further 34% thought there should be a scheme aligned with local councils' staff scheme. During our discussions with stakeholders, there was overwhelming support for the introduction of a scheme. Some people cited the availability of a scheme as being an enabler to encourage new candidates. The majority of those consulted considered that if there were to be a scheme, then the amounts payable should be capped.

6.39 Some stakeholders drew comparisons to the severance scheme available to others holding political office here such as MLAs and MPs who were entitled to severance upon leaving office. Former MPs will be eligible to receive a loss-of-office payment²⁹ if they lose their seat at a general election. Winding-up costs may be claimed by former MPs from the budgets outlined in the Scheme of MPs Staffing and Business Costs 2023/24 to support them in completing their outstanding parliamentary

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functions, including the costs of closing down constituency offices. Winding-up costs may be claimed following a general election by former MPs from the budgets outlined in the Scheme to support them in completing their outstanding parliamentary functions, including the costs of closing down constituency offices. All former Assembly members, including ministers, will be entitled to receive a resettlement allowance³⁰.

Other Jurisdictions

- 6.40 In the RoI from June 2024, there is a gratuity for councillors leaving office, based on 300% (3 times) the remuneration payment at date of retirement and capped at a maximum of 20 years' service. There are no provisions for any type of severance in GB at this point in time.
- 6.41 In Scotland, the SLARC recommended that a resettlement (severance) scheme should be introduced for councillors losing office, and that it should be modelled on the system applied to MSPs. The Scottish Government, in their response published in July 2024, firmly stated that this was an issue for local government to decide. It did, however, commit to working with Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), to give the issue further consideration in advance of the next planned local government elections and agreed to make any necessary legislative provisions required to introduce such a scheme should local government agree.
- 6.42 In Wales, regulations are to be introduced for a one-off severance scheme for long-serving councillors.
- 6.43 The Minister and the Department should keep the introduction of the one-off severance in Wales under review as this is an emerging situation.

³⁰ [Ministerial Pay Scales \(niassembly.gov.uk\)](https://niassembly.gov.uk/ministerial-pay-scales)

6.44 The WG noted that their survey, which was completed by 285 councillors, indicated that 57% of respondents are also in full time employment and a further 23% are in part time employment. The WG also noted that no other UK jurisdiction provided any kind of severance to their councillors, although Scotland have indicated they may wish to consider it in the future. Given that the purpose of severance schemes is to provide a transitional funding cushion until other employment is obtained. the WG does not consider that severance is appropriate, given that 80% of councillors in total are in either full or part time employment.

6.45 **The WG recommends that no severance scheme is put in place.**

Travel & Subsistence (T&S)

6.46 The WG noted that T&S is only available for official council meetings/business. Any meetings with constituents are not covered. This was particularly challenging in terms of cost to those councillors working in rural areas. Others did express a view that it would be difficult to monitor and potentially open to abuse if extended. It was also noted that the actual mileage rate varied across councils – ranging from 45p per mile to 65p.

6.47 Most respondents to the survey (73%) believed that full repayment of public transport costs should be an allowance option. Around a third of those who added additional comments, thought that repayment of public transport costs would encourage the use of public transport. In contrary, around the same number of comments noted the limitations with public transport, particularly in rural areas and outside normal working hours.

6.48 In Wales, Scotland and NI, members may claim reimbursement for travel and subsistence when undertaking official business or approved duties.

Mileages rates in NI, Scotland and Wales are the same for a pedal cycle, motorcycle and for taking passengers. However, motor car rates are much more generous in NI than in Scotland and Wales for the first 8,500 miles but considerably less after 8,500 miles. Welsh councils provide the lowest accommodation rates for outside of London at £95 compared to £100.70 for councils in NI and £110 for Scottish councils. Welsh and Scottish councils provide an allowance for staying with a friend or family member of £30 and £25 respectively. Councils in NI and Scotland provide separate allowances for each meal whereas Welsh councils have a maximum meal allowance per day. The total meal allowance per day is most generous for councillors in NI at £50.65 a day and least generous for Welsh councillors at £28 a day.

6.49 The recent report published in February 2024 by the SLARC recommends that the current regulations (2010) in Scotland on councillors' expenses for travel, subsistence and accommodation should be replaced by the provisions applying to officers in their respective councils. The Scottish Government accepted this recommendation in principle but considers it requires further consideration as the SLARC did not provide detailed evidence on this area. It recognised the need to review the expenses paid to councillors but considers that such a review would sit better with local government given the range of specific local circumstances that may apply, but with input from other bodies as appropriate.

6.50 In the RoI T&S regulations were recently extended to cover not just council business but councillors' representative role. T&S payments for attendance at meetings and within the electoral area - average €4,061

(£3,479³¹) and range from €2,052 (£1,758³²) to €11,517 (£9,867³³). Annual fixed expenses allowance was abolished.

6.51 The WG, mindful of the need to ensure equality, considers that there should be consistency across councils as to what is determined official council business for the purposes of claiming travel and subsistence. In particular, to ensure inclusion of councillors representing the council on outside bodies. In addition, there should also be consistency with the amounts paid.

6.52 **The WG recommends regarding T&S:**

- **the definition of “official business” for the purposes of T&S should be agreed with councils by the DfC and issued in the form of an official departmental circular.**
- **mileage for official approved duties is paid in line with the rates set out in the consolidated councillor allowances circular issued by the DfC.**

Maternity/Paternity and Long-Term Sickness

6.53 In Northern Ireland there are no provisions for maternity/paternity or indeed sickness benefits for councillors. However, the legislation does state that a councillor ceases to be a councillor if they have not attended any meeting throughout the period of 6 months unless the failure to attend was due to a reason approved by the council. Legislation also provides that a vacancy due to non-attendance may be filled by co-option.

³¹ Sterling rate converted as at the Bank of England rate on 2 April 2024. No available exchange rate at 1 April 2024 as it was Easter Monday.

³² Sterling rate converted as at the Bank of England rate on 2 April 2024. No available exchange rate at 1 April 2024 as it was Easter Monday.

³³ Sterling rate converted as at the Bank of England rate on 2 April 2024. No available exchange rate at 1 April 2024 as it was Easter Monday.

6.54 The consensus was that there is a need for such provisions. Most respondents (83%) to the survey agreed that there should be maternity/paternity provision for councillors and that it should be aligned with the policies in local councils for staff. Many of those consulted suggested that the availability of such a provision would encourage more people, especially younger candidates, and women into politics. Some councillors also suggested there should be the option for councillors to take maternity/paternity leave and co-opt someone to carry out their role whilst they are on leave. Several respondents referred to the need for reasonable adjustments to be made in this area and perhaps discretionary leave available around the time of the birth. The need for remote/hybrid working, particularly around the time of the birth was noted to enable new parents to fulfil their role. Most respondents (75%) thought there should be long-term sickness leave available to councillors aligned with the policies for staff in local councils. 40 respondents added comments to their answer on sickness leave with 25% of these suggesting that if a councillor was unable to fulfil their role for a longer period, they should be able to temporarily co-opt someone else into the role to ensure their constituents are represented.

6.55 In Scotland, there is no legal right to family leave of any kind for people in elected public office. However, Family Leave Guidance was circulated in recent years to Scottish councils for adoption on a voluntary basis. The Guidance sets out some key principles which local authorities may wish to adopt to support elected members during periods of maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave. This support includes councillors continuing to receive their Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowance (where entitled) in full whilst on maternity, paternity or adoption leave³⁴. Councillors in Scotland who have long term

³⁴ [Family Leave Guidance \(cosla.gov.uk\)](https://www.cosla.gov.uk/family-leave-guidance) & [Fairer family leave for councillors - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-family-leave-for-councillors/pages/1-2-introduction.aspx)

sickness are just entitled to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) and Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) on the same basis as other workers who pay Class 1 contributors for as long as they remain councillors³⁵.

6.56 In Wales³⁶, councils must put in place arrangements in their constitution (the council rule book) for the temporary absence of councillors for personal reasons (“family absence”). It is set out in the law that county councillors are able to take periods of absence for a range of family milestones including the birth of a baby, the adoption of a child or other parental matters. The period of absence will depend on the purpose for the leave³⁷. In terms of sickness³⁸, councillors must still get paid if they are off work because they are sick. They must be paid for up to 6 months if they are off work sick. This is not the case for co-opted members. Councillors who have a senior salary can be paid their senior salary if they are off work sick for a long time. Each authority will decide if they want to do this. They can be paid this for up to 6 months.³⁹

6.57 In the RoI⁴⁰, an act was passed into law in December 2022 to give legislative effect to an entitlement of maternity leave to local authority elected members for the first time. To ensure an equality of approach, possibility of the appointment of a temporary substitute would also be available in the case of an elected member who is absent for an extended period due to illness or in good faith for another reason.

³⁵ [Councillors' remuneration, allowances and expenses: guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/councillors-remuneration-allowances-and-expenses-guidance/pages/1-1-introduction.aspx)

³⁶ [Local democracy in Wales: introduction to the role of councillors \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

³⁷ [Local democracy in Wales: introduction to the role of councillors \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

³⁸ [Paying councillors and other elected members in Wales \(gov.wales\)](#)

³⁹ [Paying councillors and other elected members in Wales \(gov.wales\)](#)

⁴⁰ [gov - Minister of State Burke welcomes passing of Bill providing maternity leave for Councillors \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

- 6.58 The WG concluded that the provision of appropriate maternity/paternity and long-term sickness are key to addressing barriers to being a councillor.
- 6.59 **The WG recommends that the DfC oversees further work with relevant stakeholders with a view to implementing appropriate maternity/paternity and long-term sickness schemes.**

Range of Members' Services and Support

- 6.60 In NI, the BA includes an element for incidental and consumable costs incurred by councillors in their official capacity. This element within the basic allowance is **£1,199 from 1 April 2023**. Most respondents (55%) reported being content with this rate. 47 respondents provided additional comment within the survey on this question and reported either not being aware of this allowance or requiring more clarity around it. Several respondents noted that this amount was taxable, so it did not reflect the actual amount received. Around 25% of respondents highlighted that the amount does not cover office support costs actually incurred. A further 20% thought that an office support allowance should be separate to the basic allowance.
- 6.61 Councillors in general considered that they received good quality support from member services officials within their council. The support provided by IT staff was very much appreciated albeit the provision of phones and iPads varied across the councils. Comment was made that a standardised approach would be helpful to ensure councillors were properly equipped to fulfil their role effectively. Some commented that unlike MLAs, councillors do not have the capacity to employ office/secretarial support and so will rely on family members to take phone calls.

6.62 In 2021, a survey was completed by councillors in NI. Councillors were asked to confirm if their council funded and provided certain support and incidental costs. The responses are noted in the table below. One council stated that the basic allowance includes an element for incidental and consumable costs incurred by councillors in their official capacity – therefore details of this council could not be included.

Table: Summary of Support Provided by Councils

Support and incidental costs	Yes	No
Broadband	9	1
Mobile Telephone	4	6
Smartphones	6	4
Tablets - iPad	7	3
Laptops	8	2
PCs	0	10
Printers	8	2
Photocopiers	1	9
Memory Sticks	1	9
Ink Cartridges	8	2
Notepads - stationery is on an ad hoc basis and infrequent	4	6
Copy Paper	5	5
Envelopes	4	6
Postage Stamps	0	10
Other Costs (If yes please provide detail)		

6.63 Regarding Scotland, the SLARC note in their 2024 report⁴¹ that their evidence gathering exercises found that: *“councils generally offer a range of administrative and clerical support to councillors to aid them in undertaking their responsibilities. This support commonly includes personal assistants (PAs) for key figures such as the council leader,*

⁴¹ Review of Governance - Councillors' remuneration and expenses: recommendations - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

conveners, and provost. Additionally, there are members' services or democratic services teams that provide administrative assistance to all elected members, including diary management, expenses handling, and general clerical support. The level of support can vary in terms of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff, with some councils having more extensive support teams than others....given the different types of support offered to elected members, and the differing levels of detail councils provided in their survey responses, it is not possible to calculate the exact level of admin/clerical support for elected members across all councils."

6.64 In Wales, councils must pay their members £156 a year (equivalent to £3 a week) towards the extra household expenses (including heating, lighting, power and broadband) of working from home. Councils must either pay their members £52 a year for the cost of office consumables required to carry out their role, or alternatively councils must enable members to claim full reimbursement for the cost of their office consumables. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) note that councillors in Wales are *"provided with a range of support and information. There are dedicated officers providing support to members, covering advisory, administrative, committee, casework and research services"*⁴².

6.65 In the RoI councillors are provided with a LRA (fully vouched) for office and other related expenses for members to discharge their duties of €4,200 (£3,598⁴³) per annum. There is also a Petty Cash Allowance (non-vouched) for incidental expenses of €960 (£822⁴⁴) per annum.

⁴² [Support for Councillors | WLGA Councillors Website Guide \(wlgacouncillorsguide.wales\)](https://www.wlgacouncillorsguide.wales)

⁴³ Sterling rate converted as at the Bank of England rate on 2 April 2024. No available exchange rate at 1 April 2024 as it was Easter Monday.

⁴⁴ Sterling rate converted as at the Bank of England rate on 2 April 2024. No available exchange rate at 1 April 2024 as it was Easter Monday.

6.66 The WG considers that it is important that councillors are provided with the means and equipment necessary to carry out the full remit of the role. This should be done without any financial detriment to the councillor.

6.67 The WG also noted the increased threats from cyber-attacks and the need to safeguard critical information on devices. Cyber security's core function is to protect the **devices** we all use (smartphones, laptops, tablets and computers), and the **services** we access, both online and at work, from theft or damage. It is vital that protective measures are taken to minimise the probability of an attack being successful.

6.68 **The WG recommends that each councillor be provided with the following as standard:**

- **Broadband - provider and package to be selected by the council with installation and monthly cost paid for by the council.**
- **Technology – note all these items remain the property of the councils and should be regularly renewed and as appropriate come pre-loaded with a reputable virus protection programme:**
 - **Smartphones**
 - **IT – Tablet/iPad and/or Laptop**
 - **Access to, or provided with, printers and photocopiers**
- **Consumables**
 - **Ink cartridges (if printer provided at home)**
 - **Notepads**
 - **Copy paper**
 - **Envelopes**

6.69 The next two areas were not included in the DfC ToR but emerged as significant discussion points at most meetings. Such was the strength of feeling amongst those we met, the WG as stated deemed them sufficiently important to include in the review.

Learning and Development (L&D)

6.70 The importance of the knowledge and skills to be an effective councillor was frequently raised through the stakeholder engagement. The WG therefore considered that it was essential to include reference to this in this report.

6.71 At present there is no mandatory L&D in place for councillors in NI, aside from the legal requirement for those councillors on Planning Committees to have relevant training. The content and nature of this training is not specified in the act. The WG noted that no other jurisdiction in the UK or ROI have mandatory training for councillors.

6.72 The WG did find however, that although practices differed, there was consensus that in order to fulfil the core councillor role confidently, a core level of learning and development support was needed for all councillors and that this should be in the areas of corporate governance, irrespective of the committees that councillors serve on. This includes areas such as strategic planning, performance management, legal compliance, financial management, cybersecurity, audit and risk.

6.73 Additionally, L&D should then focus on the individual needs of the councillor, informed by an individual training needs analysis. The issue of whether such training should or could be mandatory was explored and views were mixed.

6.74 10 of the 11 councils in NI hold the Councillor Development Charter accreditation, managed by NILGA. This kite mark standard provides a robust quality framework covering the following areas:

- There is a clear commitment to councillor development and support.
- The council has a strategic approach to councillor development.
- L&D is effective in building councillors' skills and knowledge.

6.75 Even for those who have held the role for a number of terms, this systematic approach to supporting learning and development for councillors is essential and should continue with support given to the remaining council to achieve the standard. A WG within NILGA of Elected Members and Council Officers provides regional support and co-ordination in the areas of councillor learning and development. The majority of respondents (97%) to the survey agreed that councillors should be provided training in corporate governance best practice. Some respondents highlighted the important role of councillors making decisions on large sums of public money, and the need for such training to be mandatory.

6.76 **The WG recommends that L&D in the area of corporate governance (as detailed at point 6.73) should be mandatory, with content and learning material consistent across all 11 councils as appropriate.**

6.77 However, to make training on governance issues mandatory would require primary legislation and this will be subject to the views of the Minister and the NI Assembly.

6.78 **The WG recommends that all councils adopt a mandatory approach to corporate governance L&D until a decision is made to amend the legislation.**

6.79 **Enabling Participation in Public Life**

6.80 Concerns were expressed to the WG by stakeholders about the growing need for councillors to be more reflective of the society which they serve. Central statistics are not available on the composition of councillors here. It would be beneficial if such a data base was established. The WG did helpfully obtain some information on the composition of councillors from NILGOSC and are relying on this evidence base, as most councillors here – 425 out of 462 are members of the LGPS in NI. **Annex I** sets out the age and gender profile of the current 425 councillors who are members of the LGPS. This evidence indicates that the most common age bracket for councillors is 45 to 49 and that 293 councillors are male and 132 are female. The view was expressed that there is a pressing need to attract and retain younger (i.e. from 18 to 29 age) and more female councillors.

6.81 Comments were made that anyone, regardless of their personal circumstances should be able to become a councillor.

6.82 The WG recognises and acknowledges that for the majority of councillors it is a free-standing role which is carried out with commitment and passion. The WG also noted that for some here, serving as a councillor has been a stepping stone to becoming an MLA or MP. In NI, currently the following also served as councillors:

- 13 of 18 MPs – 72%; and
- 69 of 90 MLAs – 77 %

6.83 While engaging with stakeholders it was agreed that councillors who had any type of caring responsibilities, including elder care, young children or those with disabilities found the role particularly challenging to

manage. The lack of maternity/paternity leave and allowances, coupled with the current regime of DCA are considered as significant barriers.

- 6.84 Comment was also made that remote working was a significant enabler for those councillors facing such difficult personal circumstances, particularly for those in rural areas with a long travel time (sometimes in excess of 3 hours round trip) to a council meeting. Others did see benefit in face-to-face meetings yet recognised the savings in time and mileage claims to the public purse, had hybrid working be permitted to continue after Covid-19. On 24 June 2024, the Local Government (Remote Meetings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 were approved by the NI Assembly and became operational from 25 June 2024. To allow remote meetings to take place, a council must put in place standing orders governing remote attendance at meetings of that council.
- 6.85 The WG considers that in general the recommendations made in this report will help to remove the barriers to entry with the new regime regarding all allowances and also specific recommendations on the DCA and maternity/paternity leave.
- 6.86 **The WG recommends that a data base of composition of the councillor cadre in terms of age and gender is established under the direction of the Minister and that the Minister may wish to liaise with other ministers and relevant organisations on how the wider barriers to holding elected office could be addressed in partnership. This should be kept under review and an action plan to counter any imbalances developed and monitored.**

Next review

6.87 The WG noted that it was over 10 years, (2013) since the last review of councillors' allowances. The WG agrees that is best practice to have a systematic review process in place for any package of remuneration, particularly paid for from the public purse, albeit via the district rate. It is important that the regime to recognise the work of councillors in Northern Ireland is therefore subjected to scrutiny on a regular basis to ensure currency and also best use of public resources. It would be timely to have the next review completed in time for the local council elections in May 2031. This will allow for the recommendations in this report, subject to ministerial approval, to have bedded in and their efficacy to be properly assessed.

6.88 The WG recommends that a further comprehensive review be undertaken no later than 2030.

7. OBSERVATIONS

- 7.1 In the course of its deliberations, as set out in section 6 of the report, the WG considered that both Learning & Development and Enabling participation in Public Life to be so fundamentally important that both were elevated to be part of the review recommendations.
- 7.2 The WG also wished to make the following observations which emerged from their evidence gathering.

Personal Security

- 7.3 In September 2023, it was announced that there will now be a one-off Security Allowance Scheme for councillors in RoI of up to €2,500 (£2,142⁴⁵). In July 2024, it was confirmed that Members of the NI Assembly are to be offered extra money to step up their security. A special fund is being set up by the Stormont's Assembly Commission to pay for increased security measures at politicians' homes and offices. It would be appropriate to keep this area for councillors under review.

Social Media

- 7.4 The WG also noted that the majority of respondents (70%) reported having faced abuse and/or harassment because of their role. In conversations with councillors most reported having received abuse on social media. It would be helpful for training in the use of social media and how to respond to such abuse to be provided.

⁴⁵ Sterling rate converted as at the Bank of England rate on 2 April 2024. No available exchange rate at 1 April 2024 as it was Easter Monday.

Younger Councillors

7.5 Based on the profile of councillors in the Pension Scheme as a means of identifying age bands, just over 80% of councillors are aged 35 and above. It is noteworthy that while the younger grouping of councillors represent the minority of councillors, they embrace common threads in their approach to the role:

- They tend to hold several positions. These range through working for their political party, running a business, study, working in an organisation. This calls for a systematic approach to how they exercise their role as councillor and the time available to do this. They will confidently claim to be delivering for constituents but will involve others with knowledge/responsibility at an earlier stage rather than running with an issue themselves.
- They are focused on the effective use of IT and see the need for remote working as critical for effective time management. They also see the need for a balance to be struck in face-to-face deliberations and those conducted on-line. Social media is key to conveying activity; and
- They welcome the idea of mandatory training especially in the field of governance.

7.6 This potentially reflects the approach of an increasing number of councillors, making up the next and subsequent mandates.

Conclusion

7.7 The WG believes that addressing the challenges associated with personal security, use of social media and attracting younger councillors are as integral to the future of healthy local democracy as remuneration

and terms and conditions. The WG noted the importance of collaboration in taking forward work around these observations, both across councils as well as across jurisdictions and with partner organisations and recognises the role of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) in facilitating this collaboration. The WG notes that NILGA provides essential regional political leadership across local government and as such would benefit from having this position recognised in legislation as an association of councils.

8. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

TIMELINE

- 8.1 This section of the report provides a summary table of the recommendations and proposes an implementation timeline. The WG sought advice on any legislative changes necessary and have included them for ease of reference.
- 8.2 The WG is aware that the last systematic review was conducted in 2013 to inform transition allowances and also set the allowances payable from April 2015 when the new 11 councils came into being.
- 8.3 The WG also notes that the need of the review was first mooted by the NAC in May 2021. The chair of the WG and four of the WG members were appointed in December 2023. In February 2024, one of the original working group members (Carmel McKinney⁴⁶) stood down due to illness. The WG were very saddened to hear of her passing on 10 June 2024 and would like to express their condolences to her family and friends. A new independent member (Martina Campbell) was appointed in February 2024. It was determined that the WG would benefit from another independent member and Grace Nesbitt, who has HR experience was appointed in March 2024.
- 8.4 It is therefore nearly a decade from this issue had been independently reviewed. Over this time the complexity of the role and the volume of work which councillors undertake has increased; whilst the BA has increased from £14,200 in April 2015 to £17,030 in April 2023. The increase in the quantum of the BA therefore needs to be set in this context and it is for this reason that WG concluded that a new level of the BA be applied from April 2025.

⁴⁶ A tribute was published by the website of the Department of Health ([Tribute to former NIFRS chair | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/tribute-to-former-nifrs-chair/))

- 8.5 The recommended increase in the BA is the recommendation with the highest cost - detail is provided in Section 5.
- 8.6 The proposed initial increase in the BA from £17,030 at 1 April 2023 to a new baseline BA of £21,935 represents a £4,905 uplift per councillor. The additional cost for all 462 councillors is £2,266,110. However, the actual amount due to be paid from April 2025 will increase due to future indexing for 2024/25 and 2025/26 to ensure the latest statistical evidence base is applied as detailed in section 5.
- 8.7 This increase of £2,266,110 represents 0.26% of the total amount to be raised by councils in 2024/25 (as per district council rate statistics 2024/25).
- 8.8 Detail on the legislative processes if any, have been included for completeness and to enable smooth implementation of key recommendations, ideally by April 2025.

Table: Summary of Recommendations and Implementation Timeline

Recommendation	Legislation required if any	Proposed date for implementation	Paragraph of recommendation	Comments
<u>Basic Allowance</u>				
The WG recommends a new baseline Basic Allowance for councillors of £21,935.	Determination by the Department.	Consolidated guidance on councillors' allowances circular issued by DfC for 2025/26.	5.41	Subject to the views of the Minister.
The WG recommends that the new baseline BA of £21,935 which will be subject to 2 further increases to ensure full account is taken of the latest evidence base, should be applied from 1 April 2025.	Determination by the Department.	Consolidated guidance on councillors' allowances circular issued by DfC for 2025/26.	5.46	Subject to the views of the Minister.
The WG further recommends that annual increases in the BA from 2026/27 are in line with council officers pay awards.	Determination by the Department.	Consolidated guidance on councillors' allowances. circular issued by DfC for 2026/27.	5.47	Subject to the views of the Minister.

Table: Summary of Recommendations and Implementation Timeline

Recommendation	Legislation required if any	Proposed date for implementation	Paragraph of recommendation	Comments
The WG recommends that all councillors should receive the same BA and that reference to “maximum” is removed from the legislation.	Requires an amendment to the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011.	As soon as practicable.	5.51	Subject to the views of the Minister and the NI Assembly.
WG recommends that all councils pay the BA as set out in the consolidated guidance on councillors’ allowances circular issued by DfC, until the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 is amended.	Requires an amendment to the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011.	As soon as practicable.	5.53	Subject to the views of the Minister and the NI Assembly.

Table: Summary of Recommendations and Implementation Timeline

Recommendation	Legislation required if any	Proposed date for implementation	Paragraph of recommendation	Comments
<u>Attendance Allowance</u> The WG recommend that the current position remains, and no Attendance Allowance be re-introduced.	None.	N/A.	6.8	Subject to the views of the Minister.
<u>Chair & Vice Chair Allowances</u> The WG recommends that councils pay all vice-chairs as well as chairs of committees from the Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA).	Requires an amendment to the Local Government (Payments to Councillors) Regulations (NI) 2019.	As soon as practicable.	6.12	Subject to the views of the Minister.

Table: Summary of Recommendations and Implementation Timeline

Recommendation	Legislation required if any	Proposed date for implementation	Paragraph of recommendation	Comments
<p><u>Special Responsibility Allowance</u></p> <p>The WG recommends the following regarding SRAs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cap of 50% being in receipt of it should be abolished. • Councillors can be in receipt of a maximum of 2 SRAs. • Councils should give serious consideration of appropriate remuneration of party leads (if not in place already), outside the SRA arrangements. 	<p>Requires an amendment to the Local Government (Payments to Councillors) Regulations (NI) 2019.</p> <p>Requires an amendment to the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011.</p>	<p>As soon as practicable.</p> <p>As soon as practicable.</p>	<p>6.23</p> <p>6.23</p>	<p>Subject to the views of the Minister.</p> <p>Subject to the views of the Minister and the NI Assembly.</p>

Table: Summary of Recommendations and Implementation Timeline

Recommendation	Legislation required if any	Proposed date for implementation	Paragraph of recommendation	Comments
<p><u>Dependants' Carers' Allowance</u></p> <p>The WG recommends that the Welsh protocols be adopted for DCA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each council must have a process in place to ensure that any payments claimed are for official approved duty; Unregistered care costs to be paid up to a maximum of the National Living Wage, for both standard and specialist with a monthly cap applying in accordance with the rates published each year by the DfC; and 	Determination by the Department.	Consolidated guidance on councillors' allowances circular issued by DfC for 2024/25.	6.31	Subject to the views of the Minister.
	Requires an amendment to the Local Government (Payments to Councillors) Regulations (NI) 2019.	As soon as practicable.	6.31	Subject to the views of the Minister.

Table: Summary of Recommendations and Implementation Timeline

Recommendation	Legislation required if any	Proposed date for implementation	Paragraph of recommendation	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cap for registered care costs to be abolished. 	Requires an amendment to the Local Government (Payments to Councillors) Regulations (NI) 2019.	As soon as practicable.	6.31	Subject to the views of the Minister.
<u>Pension Scheme</u> The WG has no recommendations to make regarding the Pensions Scheme and note that nearly all councillors are members of the Pension Scheme.	None.	None.	6.36	Subject to the views of the Minister.
<u>Severance Scheme</u> The WG recommends that no severance scheme is put in place.	None.	None.	6.45	Subject to the views of the Minister.

Table: Summary of Recommendations and Implementation Timeline

Recommendation	Legislation required if any	Proposed date for implementation	Paragraph of recommendation	Comments
<p><u>Travel & Subsistence</u></p> <p>The WG recommends regarding T&S:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the definition of “official business” for the purposes of T&S should be agreed with councils by the DfC and issued in the form of an official departmental circular. mileage for official approved duties is paid in line with the rates set out in the consolidated councillor allowances circular issued by the DfC. 	<p>Determination by the Department.</p> <p>Determination by the Department.</p>	<p>Consolidated guidance on councillors’ allowances circular issued by DfC for 2024/25.</p> <p>Consolidated guidance on councillors’ allowances circular issued by DfC for 2024/25.</p>	<p>6.52</p> <p>6.52</p>	<p>Subject to the views of the Minister.</p> <p>Subject to the views of the Minister.</p>

Table: Summary of Recommendations and Implementation Timeline

Recommendation	Legislation required if any	Proposed date for implementation	Paragraph of recommendation	Comments
<p><u>Maternity/Paternity and Long-Term Sickness</u></p> <p>The WG recommends that the DfC oversees further work with relevant stakeholders with a view to implementing appropriate maternity/paternity and long-term sickness scheme.</p>	None.	Current Mandate.	6.59	Subject to the views of the Minister.

Table: Summary of Recommendations and Implementation Timeline

Recommendation	Legislation required if any	Proposed date for implementation	Paragraph of recommendation	Comments
<p><u>Range of members' services and support</u></p> <p>The WG recommends that each councillor be provided with the following as standard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadband - provider and package to be selected by the council with installation and monthly cost paid for by the council. • Technology – note all these items remain the property of the councils and should be regularly renewed and as appropriate come pre-loaded with a reputable virus protection programme: 	<p>Requires an amendment to the Local Government (Payments to Councillors) Regulations (NI) 2019.</p>	<p>As soon as practicable.</p>	<p>6.68</p>	<p>Subject to the views of the Minister.</p>

Table: Summary of Recommendations and Implementation Timeline

Recommendation	Legislation required if any	Proposed date for implementation	Paragraph of recommendation	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smartphones • IT – Tablet/iPad and/or Laptop • Access to, or provided with printers and photocopiers • Consumables <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ink cartridges (if printer provided at home) • Notepads • Copy paper • Envelopes 	Requires an amendment to the Local Government (Payments to Councillors) Regulations (NI) 2019.	As soon as practicable.	6.68	Subject to the views of the Minister.

Table: Summary of Recommendations and Implementation Timeline

Recommendation	Legislation required if any	Proposed date for implementation	Paragraph of recommendation	Comments
<p><u>Learning and Development</u></p> <p>The WG recommends that L&D in the area of corporate governance (as detailed at point 6.73) should be mandatory, with content and learning material consistent across all 11 councils as appropriate.</p> <p>The WG recommends that all councils adopt a mandatory approach to corporate governance L&D until a decision is made to amend the legislation.</p>	Requires primary legislation to make training on governance issues mandatory.	As soon as practicable.	6.76	Subject to the views of the Minister and the NI Assembly.
	Requires primary legislation to make training on governance issues mandatory.	As soon as practicable.	6.78	Subject to the views of the Minister and the NI Assembly.

Table: Summary of Recommendations and Implementation Timeline

Recommendation	Legislation required if any	Proposed date for implementation	Paragraph of recommendation	Comments
<p><u>Enabling Participation in Public Life</u></p> <p>The WG recommends that a data base of composition of the councillor cadre in terms of age and gender is established under the direction of the Minister and that the Minister may wish to liaise with other ministers and relevant organisations on how the wider barriers to holding elected office could be addressed in partnership. This should be kept under review and action plan to counter any imbalances developed and monitored.</p>	None.	Current Mandate.	6.85	Subject to the views of the Minister.

Table: Summary of Recommendations and Implementation Timeline

Recommendation	Legislation required if any	Proposed date for implementation	Paragraph of recommendation	Comments
<u>Next Review</u> The WG recommends that a further comprehensive review be undertaken no later than 2030.	None.	2030.	6.87	Subject to the views of the Minister.

TO R FOR REVIEW OF THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF COUNCILLORS

In December 2021, Minister Hargey agreed that a further independently led review of the roles and responsibilities of councillors is now timely.

On the 1st May 2013, a Councillors' Remuneration Panel for NI, comprising a chairperson and four members, was set up to consider allowances for councillors, from June 2014 - March 2015 (Shadow Period) and from 1st April 2015 and beyond.

The Panel was asked to consider and make recommendations on:

- The system and level of allowances which would be available to councillors from 1 April 2015 taking into consideration the role and responsibilities of councillors post-reform, the proposed new governance arrangements (particularly in relation to SRA's) and schemes of remuneration for councillors in other jurisdictions in Britain and Ireland;
- The system of remuneration/allowances which would apply for a council chairperson and vice-chairperson; and
- The allowances which would be payable to councillors during the shadow period.

The Panel submitted its report to the Department of the Environment (DOE) Minister (Mark H Durkan) on the 1 November 2013, making ten recommendations. The DOE Minister considered the recommendations made by the Panel in conjunction with the views of the Political Reference Group for the Local Government Reform Programme and also representations made to him by the groups including the NAC.

Prior to the review in 2013, on 11 October 2004 the then Secretary of State agreed that there should be an independent review of councillors' remuneration in NI. On 1 March 2005, the then Minister with responsibility for local government announced that she was setting up a working group to conduct the review. The remit of the WG was to make recommendations to the Minister on the options for a system of remuneration for councillors in NI taking into consideration schemes of remuneration in other jurisdictions in the UK and Ireland. The final report was published in June 2006.

It is proposed that the 2023 independently led review of the roles and responsibilities of councillors should make recommendations on:

- The system and level of allowances which would be available to councillors taking into consideration the role and responsibilities of councillors since April 2015 and schemes of remuneration for councillors in other jurisdictions in Britain and Ireland. This should include:
 - Allowances (basic, attendance and special responsibility)
 - Chair & vice chair allowances
 - DCA
 - Pension scheme
 - Severance scheme
 - T&S
 - Maternity/Paternity and Long-Term Sickness
 - Range of members services and support

A working group will be appointed to take forward the review and membership will be as follows:

- Independent chair
- NAC representative
- NILGA representative
- ICTU representative
- 2 Independent members
- DfC Official

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS**ANNEX B**

AILG	Association of Irish Local Government
APNI	Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
APSE	Association of Public Service Excellence
ACBCBC	Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
ASHE	Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
AVC's	Added Voluntary Contributions
BA	Basic Allowance
BCC	Belfast City Council
BSO	Business Services Organisation
CAFRE	College of Agriculture, Food and Enterprise
CCAG	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIMA	Chartered Institute of Management Accountants
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
COSLA	Convention Of Scottish Local Authorities
CPA	Care and Personal Allowance
DCA	Dependants' Carers' Allowance
DCAL	Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure
DCSDC	Derry City and Strabane District Council
DEA	District Electoral Area
DFC	Department for Communities
DOE	Department of the Environment
DOH	Department of Health
DOJ	Department of Justice
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EONI	Electoral Office for Northern Ireland
FODC	Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
GB	Great Britain
GLPC	Greater London Provincial Council
HMO	Houses of Multiple Occupation
HSENI	Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland
HR	Human Resources
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
IFRP	Independent Financial Review Panel
JE	Job Evaluation
LA	Local Authority
LCCC	Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
LGA	Local Government Association
LGPS	Local Government Pension Scheme
LGSC	Local Government Staff Commission
LRA	Local Representation Allowance
L & D	Learning and Development
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
MSP	Member of the Scottish Parliament
NAC	National Association of Councillors
NI	Northern Ireland

NIAO	Northern Ireland Audit Office
NICS	Northern Ireland Civil Service
NICVA	Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
NIE	Northern Ireland Executive
NIFHA	Northern Ireland Fisheries and Harbour Authority
NILGA	Northern Ireland Local Government Association
NILGOSC	Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee
NILGPTI	Northern Ireland Local Government Partnership on Travellers' Issues
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
NIPSA	Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistic and Research Agency
NJC	National Joint Council
NMADDC	Newry Mourne and Down District Council
PBP	People Before Profit
PCSPs'	Policing and Community Safety Partnerships
PO	Principle Officer
QUB	Queens University Belfast
Rol	Republic of Ireland
RPA	Review of Public Administration
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
SEHSCT	South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
SF	Sinn Fein
SLARC	Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee
SMP	Statutory Maternity Pay
SMT	Senior Management Team
SOLACE	Society Of Local Authority Chief Executives
SPCs'	Strategic Policy Committees
SSP	Statutory Sick Pay
SRA	Special Responsibility Allowance
TEO	The Executive Office
ToR	Terms of Reference
TUV	Traditional Unionist Voice
T & S	Travel and Subsistence
UK	United Kingdom
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
WG	Working Group
WLGA	Welsh Local Government Association

TABLE OF WORKING GROUP MEETINGS**ANNEX C**

Date of meeting	In person at Causeway Exchange or remotely via Microsoft Teams	Duration (hours)
9 January 2024	Causeway Exchange	3
19 January 2024	Teams	1
1 February 2024	Causeway Exchange	3
12 February 2024	Teams	1
21 February 2024	Causeway Exchange	3
7 March 2024	Teams	1
14 March 2024	Causeway Exchange	3
10 April 2024	Causeway Exchange	3
23 April 2024	Teams	1
1 May 2024	Causeway Exchange	3
9 May 2024	Teams	1
14 May 2024	Causeway Exchange	3
28 May 2024	Causeway Exchange	3
10 June 2024	Causeway Exchange	3
24 June 2024	Teams	1
2 July 2024	Causeway Exchange	3
16 July 2024	Causeway Exchange	3
23 July 2024	Causeway Exchange	3
30 July 2024	Causeway Exchange	3
8 August 2024	Causeway Exchange	3

CONSULTEES

- Elected Development Network (NILGA)
- National Association of Councillors (NAC)
- Association of Irish Local Government (AILG)
- Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE)
- Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC)
- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
- Ex-council CEO Jacqui Dixon
- Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE)
- Roger Wilson, CEO of Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council
- Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)
- Professor Colin Copus, Professor of Local Politics in the Department of Public Policy, De Montfort University and Director of the Local Governance Research Unit.
- Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC) and Diana Stewart as LGSC's Director of Corporate Services
- Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC) Equality and Diversity Group
- Senior Officials of Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC)
- Mayors
 - Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council
 - Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council
- Councillors from specific councils from different regions of NI
 - Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council
 - Derry & Strabane District Council
 - Fermanagh & Omagh District Council (NILGA also in attendance)
- UUP group leaders meeting
 - Councillor Victor Warrington
 - Councillor Derek Hussey

- Councillor David Taylor
- Alderman Ian Burns
- Alderman Sonia Copeland
- Sinn Fein party meeting
 - Colm Gildernew MLA
 - Maolfosa McHugh MLA
 - Councillor Matt Garrett
- Current councillors/former councillors across various parties
 - Councillor Craig Blaney - Ulster Unionist Party
 - Councillor Trevor Wilson - Ulster Unionist Party
 - Former Councillor Jim Speers - Ulster Unionist Party
 - Alderman Paul Greenfield - Democratic Unionist Party
 - Councillor Ben Mallon - Democratic Unionist Party
 - Councillor Paul McLean - Democratic Unionist Party
 - Alderman Lewis Boyle – Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
 - Councillor Barry McKee - Green Party Northern Ireland
 - Councillor Terry Andrews - Social Democratic and Labour Party
 - Councillor Dan Kerr - Independent Republican Socialist
 - Councillor Bobby Hadden - Independent
 - Councillor Barry Montieth - Independent Republican Socialist
 - Councillor Kevin McElvogue – Independent Republican Socialist
- Former councillors/current MLAs across various parties
 - Eoin Tennyson MLA – Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
 - Kellie Armstong MLA – Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
 - Jonathan Buckey MLA - Democratic Unionist Party
 - Brian Kingston MLA - Democratic Unionist Party
 - Mark H Durkan MLA - Social Democratic and Labour Party
 - Robbie Butler MLA - Ulster Unionist Party
 - Andy Allen MLA - Ulster Unionist Party

DOCUMENTATION AND EVIDENCE REVIEWED

- 2013 report by Councillors' Remuneration Panel for Northern Ireland - [Department of the Environment- Local Government Reform: Councillors' Remuneration and Final Scheme of Allowances \(niassembly.gov.uk\)](#)
- Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC)'s Independent Review of Councillor Remuneration 2024 report - [Foreword - Councillors' remuneration and expenses: recommendations - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- Professor Colin Copus' paper 'A manifesto for councillors' which was prepared on behalf of the LGIU (Local Government Information Unit) to stimulate debate about the future role of councillors. - <https://lgiu.org/publication/a-manifesto-for-councillors/>.
- Independent Financial Review Panel (IFRP) report into MLA salaries - <https://ifrp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/The-Report-on-Northern-Ireland-Assembly-Members-Salaries-Allowances-Expenses-and-Pensions-March-2016.pdf>
- Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE)
 - [Under Pressure: The Future of Councillor-Officer Relationships](#) (2022)
 - [APSE Local Government Commission 2030](#) (2021)
 - [Spending on parks and neighbourhood services in Scotland](#) (2020)
 - [Neighbourhood services and sustainable local government](#) (2019)
 - [Ensuring the leadership of the new municipalism](#) (2019)
 - [Accountability and scrutiny: The issues for local government in a changing political environment](#) (2017)
 - [Doing local politics in Scotland: Councillors, officers and communities](#) (2017)
- Association of Irish Local Government (AILG)'s research paper, 'The 21st Century Councillor in Irish Local Government' - <https://ailg.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/AILG-Maynooth-University-Councillor-Research-Report-Final-compressed.pdf>
- National Association of Councillors (NAC) Councillor Equality Proposal 2024

- Analysis to compare councillor allowances across Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.
- Analysis of information provided by the 11 councils on how the role of a councillor has changed pre and post reform in terms of attendance at council meetings, committee meeting and outside body meetings⁴⁷.
- Online survey issued to councillors over a period of 6 weeks via NILGA – 275 councillors responded (over 60% return).

⁴⁷ The WG determined that while this information was useful, it was of limited value because we did not ask councils to capture the length of the time of the meetings.

- Elected Development Network (NILGA)
- National Association of Councillors (NAC)
- Association of Irish Local Government (AILG)
- Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE)
- Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC)
- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
- Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE)
- Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)
- Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC) and Diana Stewart as LGSC's Director of Corporate Services
- Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC) Equality and Diversity Group
- Members of Senior Management Team (SMT) of Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC)

RESPONSIBILITIES OF COUNCILLORS ACROSS JURISDICTIONS ANNEX F

The responsibilities of councillors across jurisdictions can be broken down into the broad categories noted in the table below:

	Wales⁴⁸	Northern Ireland⁴⁹	Scotland⁵⁰	Republic of Ireland⁵¹
Education	Y	N	Y	N
Housing	Y	N	Y	Y
Social Services	Y	N	Y	N
Highways and Transport	Y	N*	Y	Y
Waste Management	Y	Y	Y	Y**
Leisure and Cultural Services	Y	Y	Y	Y
Environmental Health and Services	Y	Y	Y	Y
Planning	Y	Y	Y	Y***
Economic Development	Y	Y	Y	Y
Emergency Planning	Y	Y	Y	Y

* Off-street parking only

** Almost all waste collection and disposal is managed by the private sector in the Republic of Ireland but councils are responsible for the associated licensing and enforcement.

*** Governance arrangements in the Republic of Ireland are different and planning responsibilities are reserved under the Chief Executives authority and elected members have no real role in planning decisions.

⁴⁸ [Local government in Wales - WLGA](#)

⁴⁹ Devolution within Northern Ireland, A report for the Northern Ireland Local Government Association [devolution-within-ni-report.pdf \(nilga.org\)](#)

⁵⁰ [Local government - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#), Scottish Local Authorities' Economic Development Group 3 Year Strategic Plan 2023-2026 [SLAED-Strategic-Plan-2023-26.pdf](#) and [\(improvementservice.org.uk\)](#) & [Guide to emergency planning for community groups | Ready Scotland](#) and [Where to go for help and advice | Ready Scotland](#)

⁵¹ Devolution within Northern Ireland, A report for the Northern Ireland Local Government Association [devolution-within-ni-report.pdf \(nilga.org\)](#), [Local government facts and figures: Ireland - LGiU](#) and [gov - A framework for major emergency management \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

Background and context:

The role of a councillor has changed significantly from the changes instigated by the Review of Public Administration in 2015 when the number of councils were reduced from 26 to 11. New powers were devolved from central to local government as follows in April 2015, with the exception of matters relating to Houses of Multiple Occupancy which transferred later, in April 2019.

- **Planning** - local development plan functions and development control and enforcement.
- **Roads** – Off street parking (except Park and Ride)
- **Local Economic Development** – including assisting new business and enterprise initiatives.
- **Local Tourism** – small scale tourism accommodation development and providing business support and advice.

Role Summary

As a local government councillor in Northern Ireland, you will play a vital role in representing the interests of residents within your electoral district. You will provide leadership within the unique context of Northern Ireland's political landscape, contributing to social and economic prosperity and addressing the diverse needs of constituents. Your responsibilities include engaging with residents, participating or leading, in council proceedings, advocating for local initiatives, and collaborating with partners for the benefit of your constituents.

The work of a councillor broadly covers advocacy/representation, participating in core council business and activity of a more party-political nature. For the purposes of this role description, activity of a more party political nature falling outside the scope of participating in core council business is not included.

Responsibilities:

Key responsibilities include the following areas:

- **Leadership** - providing strong and effective leadership at council meetings / proceedings and in the development and execution of corporate plans, services and initiatives in a complex multi-disciplinary organisation. Providing leadership in communities and in representing the interests of your council/community on relevant outside bodies.
- **Governance** - ensuring effective controls and a sound governance regime is followed through constructive challenge and scrutiny of the delivery of council Services.
- **Finance** – exercising due diligence in the management and control of budgets and expenditure.
- **Statutory requirements** - complying with statutory requirements and powers within the legal framework and remit, including quasi-judicial functions, laws and by-laws.
- **Corporate improvement** – improving council services through business transformation and innovation.
- **Sustainability and the Environment** – having due regard to the need to have sustainable services, taking account of relevant environmental issues.
- **Consultative body** - engage with key stakeholders and represent your council externally, advocating for improvements for your area.
- **Constituents** – representing constituents and dealing with their concerns.

Advocacy and Constituency Representation:

- Serve as a primary point of contact for constituents (normally within their District Electoral Area), addressing their concerns, inquiries, and requests.
- Foster open dialogue with all constituents, ensuring they get appropriate access to council services.
- To effectively represent the specific interests of the constituency/district electoral area in shaping council services and accessing wider public services.

- To advocate for the council's and Northern Ireland's interests at local, regional and national levels, highlighting local priorities and seeking support for council services.

Policy Development and Decision Making:

- Participate actively, or lead, in council meetings to enable effective collective decision making on issues, having regard to sustainability and environmental concerns and the need for corporate improvement in service delivery.
- Determining the District Rate, taking account of the need to provide relevant services to meet local needs and balancing the long-term fiscal sustainability of the council's resources.
- Make decisions in council of a quasi-judicial nature and in keeping with statutory and regulatory requirements e.g. planning, licensing, building control.
- Advocate for strategies, policies and initiatives that promote social and economic growth and prosperity in the council area and in keeping with the council's wider legal duties.
- Ensure that council decisions reflect the diverse perspectives and needs of the local population.

Collaboration and Communication:

- Work collaboratively with fellow councillors, other political representatives, council staff, trade unions, governmental bodies and community organisations to achieve common objectives, resolve challenges and build trust, including across the UK, Ireland and beyond as appropriate.
- Maintain transparent and accessible communication channels with constituents, keeping them informed about council activities and decisions.
- Represent the council in fostering initiatives at community level to promote dialogue and cooperation.
- Represent the council on outside bodies to which the council may appoint you. Taking care to only promote the council's resolved positions and agreed policies.

- Interact with a range of fora, such as local residents groups', government departments to ensure needs are met.
- Actively participate, if/when appointed independently as a councillor, to statutory bodies.

Media Engagement:

- When required serve as a spokesperson for the council, participating in media interviews, press conferences, and public statements.
- Articulate council decisions, policies, and initiatives to the media and the public in a clear, concise, and accurate manner.
- Proactively engage with local, social and national media outlets to raise awareness of key issues, initiatives, and achievements.

Scrutiny and Oversight:

- Participate in the annual budgeting and rate setting process, prioritising expenditures to address pressing community needs.
- Scrutinise and challenge the work of council and associated internal/external audits to ensure responsible fiscal management, corporate governance and accountability to ratepayers.
- Identify, manage and mitigate risks on a systematic basis through regular constructive challenge and within an effective governance regime.

General:

- To be accountable to the public by providing accurate information about council activities and explaining decisions and policies.
- To comply with legislation, abide by the adopted policies of the council, the Councillor Code of Conduct, standing orders and financial regulations.
- To set an example to the community, maintaining high ethical standards and proper standards of behaviour as an elected representative.

- To follow procedure and act only through proper channels. Promote transparency and access to information received such as agenda and meetings summons.

Attributes:

- A strong commitment to public service and community engagement, with an understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities in Northern Ireland.
- Excellent communication, interpersonal, and conflict-resolution skills.
- Familiarity with the political and cultural dynamics of Northern Ireland
- Ability to work effectively in a diverse and multi-cultural environment, respecting differing perspectives and identities.
- Previous experience in community leadership, advocacy, or public administration is advantageous.
- Flexibility to work outside regular office hours, including evenings and weekends, to accommodate council meetings and community engagements.
- A commitment to ongoing learning and development to enhance relevant knowledge and skills.
- Attend relevant set training courses, which de facto are mandatory - such as induction training and courses related to relevant committees – particularly Planning Committee work.
- Be willing to undertake any other work as role may require.

Peter Boyle

For the past three years, Peter has been a full-time union official of NIPSA, representing members in local government and NIFRS. He also has a vast knowledge of local government procedures having spent over 16 years working for Newry Council. During this time, Peter has gained experience of the GLPC job evaluation scheme and is one of the leading experts in the scheme for trade union side, having carried out evaluations, sat on appeal panels and carried out training on the scheme.

Kevin Kelly

Considered the lead expert in NIPSA on the GLPC job evaluation scheme after gaining over 20 years' experience in its implementation in the local government and education sectors. He delivers training to NIPSA representatives as well as those from other trade unions, he has carried out evaluations representing members at appeals as well as sitting on appeal panels for all union members.

PROFILE OF COUNCILLORS IN PENSION SCHEME**ANNEX I**

Agebands	Female	Male	Grand Total
<25	6	7	13
25-29	8	21	29
30-34	13	28	41
35-39	17	33	50
40-44	12	32	44
45-49	24	31	55
50-54	18	36	54
55-59	14	40	54
60-64	12	35	47
65-69	6	22	28
70-74	2	8	10
Grand Total	132	293	425

*Information received from NILGOSC. There are a total of 462 councillors in Northern Ireland. Note- a small number of councillors who are aged 75 or over cannot remain as members of the pension scheme and so are not accounted for in the above table.