



Members' allowances survey 2008

Summary findings

A survey of 386 local authorities¹ in England was conducted in winter 2008. A total of 324 authorities responded (83.9%).

The survey requested details of the basic allowance, special responsibility allowances, dependent carers allowance, childcare allowance, travel allowance, bicycle allowance, subsistence allowance and access to pension schemes.

All local authorities in England have independent remuneration panels that review their allowances and provide advice on authorities' schemes. Allowances are intended to recompense properly the time necessary and the level of responsibility of the roles of councillors, whilst incorporating a strong public service discount.

All data are ungrossed and relate to the figures reported by authorities. Response rates for individual questions vary.

All councillors are entitled to receive a basic allowance and, where they hold offices of special responsibility as set by their council, they are also entitled to a special responsibility allowance. Authorities also have the discretion to pay additional allowances such as dependent / carers allowances, travel allowance and subsistence allowance, and to allow councillors access to pension schemes.

Allowances are highest where the cost of living is highest and allowances are also higher where the responsibilities and time required to fulfil the role are greatest. Strong public service elements are incorporated into the rates and, again, variations take into account distinctions between different types of authority and geographical region.

¹ Excluding Corporation of London and Isles of Scilly

(Note: as well as cost-of-living increases, allowance-levels change over time due to a number of factors. Councils often review the allowances paid and increase or decrease them in order to align them with other councils or to reflect a change in the nature of the role undertaken.)

Basic allowance

- Councillors' basic allowance in 2008 averaged £6,099 per annum and ranged from an average of £4,194 in shire districts to £9,978 in shire counties. It also varied regionally from £5,040 in the East of England to £9,739 in London.

Special responsibility allowances

- The average leader's allowance was £17,753 and ranged from £11,490 in shire districts to £37,486 in London boroughs. Across the regions, the average leaders' allowance varied from £13,481 in the East of England to £37,486 in London.
- Among cabinet / executive members, the average allowance was £9,710 and ranged from £6,083 in shire districts to £22,028 in London boroughs. This allowance also differed across the regions ranging from £7,684 in the North East to £22,028 in London.
- The average of cabinet / executive members per authority was 6.8. It was highest in counties (8.0), and lowest (6.4) in shire districts.
- Chairs of overview and scrutiny received an average allowance of £6,136 ranging from £3,946 in shire districts to £14,358 in London boroughs. Across the regions, this allowance ranged from £4,641 in the South East to £14,358 in London.
- The average number of chairs of overview and scrutiny in each authority was 2.6. The number was highest in counties and metropolitan districts (4.2) and lowest in shire districts (1.9).
- Chairs of planning committees received an average allowance of £5,623 which ranged from £4,077 in shire districts to £12,137 in London boroughs.
- Chairs of licensing committees received an average allowance of £4,334, ranging from £2,972 in shire districts to £9,484 in London boroughs.

Other allowances

- 89.5% of authorities offered a dependent carers' allowance at an average hourly rate of £7.83. 72.2% offered a childcare allowance and the average hourly rate offered was £7.03.
- Almost all authorities offered a travel allowance (95.1%) and a subsistence allowance (92.3%) while fewer (60.5%) offered a bicycle allowance.
- Around half of authorities (52.2%) offered councillors access to a pension scheme.

Councillors' Census 2008

In order to provide some general context to the above, some of the main findings from the 2008 National Census of Local Authority Councillors in England 2008 are shown below:

- 56.4% of councillors held a position of leading responsibility within the council and 53.2% of all councillors received a special responsibility allowance in addition to their basic allowance
- 88.0% considered themselves to be effective or very effective in their role as councillors
- 88.4% of councillors cited a desire to serve the community as their reason for wanting to become a councillor
- 94.1% thought that listening to local views was the most important thing for councillors to do while 91.4% said that supporting the local community was the most important thing for them to do
- councillors spent, on average, 22.2 hours per week on council/political business; those with one or more senior positions averaged 25.4 hours while those without senior positions averaged 18.2 hours.
- most councillors (62.5%) indicated that they thought it was very important that there was a greater role for councils in the accountability of key local services like health and police. 40.4% felt that it was very important that councils had a devolved, discretionary budget for individual councillors to spend on local amenities or initiatives.
- Around half (51.2%) said that their council was fully committed to allowing people to have a say on services provided locally through consultation and feedback. Nearly two-fifths felt that their council was fully committed to enabling people and communities to have an influence locally through active programmes of engagement, to providing better support for elected members and to having mechanisms to organise inquiries about contentious issues.

- 54.5% of councillors intend to stand for re-election at the end of their term in office and 81.8% would recommend taking on the role to others.

Notes:

1. The survey was conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) on behalf of the Local Government Association (LGA) and Improvement and development Agency (IDeA).
2. More details of the Councillors' Census 2008 are available at:
<http://www.lga.gov.uk/councillorscensus>
3. For further details, please contact Stephen Richards: stephen.richards@lga.gov.uk