

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee
Tuesday 28 May 2024
17th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

Scottish Local Authority Remuneration Committee (SLARC): Recommendations for Councillors' Remuneration and Expenses

Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide information to inform the Committee's evidence sessions on the following report—

[Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee's \(SLARC\) Recommendations for Councillors' Remuneration and Expenses](#)

2. The Committee will take evidence on the report in two separate evidence sessions as follows—
 - Session 1: SLARC
 - Session 2: COSLA

Background

3. During its ongoing inquiry, [Understanding Barriers to participation in local politics](#), the Committee has heard that one of the key barriers to participation in local elected politics is the relatively low rate of pay for councillors.
4. In November 2022 the Scottish Government announced that it would reconvene SLARC to undertake a one-off independent review of Councillor remuneration before making recommendations to the Scottish Government. SLARC was reconvened in April 2023, having last reported in 2011, and was asked to consider the following four questions—
 - Q1. Has the workload and responsibilities of councillors increased and become more complex?
 - Q2. Has the use of email, social media and other digital platforms increased pressure on councillors and increased demands from their constituents, including expecting speedier responses?
 - Q3. Has there been an increase in formal committee meetings (and the duration of these meetings) and informal meetings, such as working groups within a council?

- Q4. What is the breakdown of the average time spent by a councillor carrying out their day-to-day duties e.g., committee meetings, constituent queries etc?
5. As such, it was agreed that SLARC's recommendations should—
- Establish whether the role of a modern-day ordinary councillor is full time or part-time and what the commensurate pay for that work should be.
 - seek to ensure that remuneration does not act as a barrier to encouraging people to stand for elected office.
 - encourage a wider and more diverse range of people with varied lived experience from across our communities to stand for elected office; and
 - be affordable on an ongoing basis.

Final Report

6. SLARC's final report was published in February 2024.
7. COSLA has provided a written response to the report which is attached as an annexe.
8. The Committee also expects to take evidence from the Scottish Government on its response to the report's recommendations at a later date although timings for this are currently unconfirmed.
9. The report makes several recommendations which are reproduced below—

Workloads, responsibilities, and banding of councils

- R1 On the basis of the evidence gathered, the Committee recommends that the role of councillor continues to be fulfilled on a part-time basis, while the role of Senior Councillors is likely to require to be fulfilled on a full-time basis.
- R2 Notwithstanding R1 above, the Committee recommends that the definitions "full-time" and "part-time" should no longer be applied when describing the role of councillors, and that the role should be treated as a public office within Scotland's democratic processes, as is the case for MPs and MSPs.
- R3 The Committee recommends that all 10 councils currently within Band A¹ should be funded to enable the appointment of up to a maximum of 10 Senior Councillors, and that no other changes to the maximum numbers of Senior Councillors in Bands B, C and D are required.

¹ See Table 1, P.23 of Final SLARC Report

- R4 The Committee recommends that all councils currently within Band A should move into Band B, and that there should be no change to the councils currently within Bands C and D.
- R5 The Committee recommends that all bandings are reviewed by SLARC in advance of each Council election.

Councillor Remuneration and expenses

- R6 The Committee recommends that the salaries of councillors be set at 80% of the median salary for all employees in the public sector in Scotland as published in the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) resulting in an annual salary of £24,581 with effect from 1 April 2024.
- R7 The Committee recommends that this proportionate link to median public sector salaries in Scotland is accepted as the methodology on which councillor salaries are established.
- R8 The Committee recommends that the salaries of Council Leaders in the current Band D (Glasgow and Edinburgh) are benchmarked at the salary of a Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP).
- R9 The Committee recommends that the salaries of Council Leaders in the current Band C be set at 85% of the salary of those in current Band D; and those in the combined Bands A and B be set at 70% of the salary of those in the current Band D (Table 5, Page 36).
- R10 The Committee recommends that the salaries of Civic Heads and Senior Councillors continue to be set at up to a maximum of 75% of the salary of their Council Leader (Table 5, Page 36).
- R11 The Committee recommends that the salaries of all councillors continue to be uplifted on an annual basis as per the current arrangements introduced in 2017, which are in line with the median increase in earnings of public sector employees in Scotland, as published by the ASHE.
- R12 The Committee recommends that the current regulations (2010) on councillors' expenses for travel, subsistence and accommodation should be replaced by the provisions applying to officers in their respective Councils.

Councillors' safety, severance arrangements, fulfilment of duties, and induction

- R13 The Committee recognises the joint work underway by COSLA and Police Scotland aimed at tackling the issue of councillors' safety, including online safety, and recommends that training and resources for councillors should continue to be developed and kept under review by both organisations.
- R14 The Committee recommends that resettlement (severance) payments are introduced for councillors losing office. This should be

modelled on the system applied to MSPs and should be in place for the next election cycle.

- R15 The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government considers whether existing legislation needs to be reviewed to strengthen requirements on councillors to perform their duties. Given the Committee's recommended link of councillor pay to 80% of median public sector pay, councils should monitor and report upon councillor activity levels and attendance at formal council meetings.
- R16 The Committee recommends that all councils should review their internal and partnership governance arrangements, to assure themselves that councillors are able to fulfil their statutory duties.
- R17 The Committee recommends that all councils continue to provide induction for new councillors as well as ongoing topic-based training using a variety of delivery methods to ensure maximum take-up. It is important when these opportunities are provided, that councillors take advantage of them, and participation levels should be reported publicly.

Increasing awareness of councillors' roles

- R18 The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government and COSLA make a joint public statement endorsing the important role played by councils and councillors in delivering a wide range of critical local services. This statement should spearhead a wider multi-media public awareness campaign between now and the next Council Election, designed to raise public awareness and encourage potential candidates to stand for office.
- R19 The Committee recommends that COSLA develops a Pre-Election Induction Programme for potential council candidates. This should provide potential candidates with an accurate understanding of the role of the councillor and the demands they are likely to face. This should also contain details of how political parties will support candidates before, during and after their election campaign, including unsuccessful candidates.

Demographic representativeness of councillors and Members Support Services

- R20 The Committee recommends the establishment of a national dataset showing the demographic composition of the country's councillors, and how this is changing. Overtime, such data will identify key population groups who continue to be under-represented within councils to enable action to be taken to remove barriers and enable wider participation.
- R21 The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government and COSLA, working alongside representatives drawn from all under-represented groups, should consider how best to enhance supports for councillors in these groups, and develop proposals to support, encourage and enable more people from under-

represented groups to stand for office, particularly women, young people and people with a disability.

- R22 The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government and COSLA work together to ensure adequate provision is made to provide a minimum level of Members Support Services.

Conclusion

10. The Committee is invited to consider the information set out in this paper in its evidence sessions with SLARC and COSLA.

**Committee Clerks,
May 2024**

COSLA submission – Local Government Remuneration Committee Report 2024

Key points

1. The **Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)**, as the national and international voice of Scottish Local Government, welcomes the publication of the SLARC report and accepts the report's recommendations in principle.

Background

2. The independent Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC) was re-established in April 2023, in response to a joint commitment from SG and COSLA that *“terms and conditions truly reflect the responsibilities of a modern-day Councillor²”*. Officers from both organisations have supported SLARC providing both policy and secretarial support. The committee has also had regular engagement with COSLA leaders, the Leadership Sounding Board and the Barriers to Elected Office Special Interest Group.
3. The Barriers to Elected Office Special Interest Group co-chaired by the COSLA presidential team will oversee COSLA's implementation of the recommendations. The group meets bimonthly and will act as a sounding board for guidance, lobbying, and partnership development to meet the recommendations. The group also notes the wealth of additional evidence and expertise gathered by the committee and will use this to inform various workstreams going forward.
4. COSLA notes that many of the recommendations from the 2011 report were not adopted at the time due to budget constraints. COSLA understands the recent change in government ministers has delayed the publication of a Scottish Government response to SLARC. COSLA, however, stresses the importance of ensuring no additional delays and restates that COSLA leaders expect to see the uplift in councillor remuneration backdated to April 2024.

² [Public appointment: Convenor and Members appointed to the Scottish Local Authority Remunerations Committee. 5th of April 2023.](#)

Recommendations for COSLA consideration

5. COSLA considers the following recommendations to be areas of joint implementation or for COSLA to lead on. While these recommendations are considered COSLA led areas it is noted that meeting the recommendations will have a significant capacity and financial impact. The incorporation of these capacity and financial implications into local authority's budgets have not been accepted by COSLA leaders. Therefore, resource implications of 'COSLA recommendations' will contribute to ongoing conversations with Scottish Government around resourcing 'Scottish Government recommendations' as part of a complete funding package.
 - a. R12 – Expenses
 - b. R13 – Councillor Safety
 - c. R15 – Accountability structures
 - d. R16 – Review of governance arrangements
 - e. R17/ R19 - Induction and ongoing training for Councillors
 - f. R18 - Joint public statement on the role of Councillors
 - g. R20 – Development of a national database showing the demographic composition of the country's Councillors
 - h. R21 – Support for underrepresented groups
 - i. R22 – Provision of adequate Member Support Services

Recommendations for Scottish Government consideration

6. COSLA does not consider any of the recommendations of the SLARC report to be outside of local government remit and as such has accepted the committee's recommendations in full. COSLA do however suggest that the following recommendations require either financial or legislative input from the Scottish Government that make implementation impractical for local government to undertake without SG support.
 - a. R1/R2 – Public Office and time commitment to the role
 - b. R3/R4/R5 – Bandings of councils
 - c. R6/ R7/R11 – Remuneration uplift
 - d. R8/R9 – Remuneration of Council Leader
 - e. R10 – Remuneration of Civic Head
 - f. R14 – Resettlement (severance) payments

Funding

7. In line with the Verity House Agreement and the principles laid out in the European Charter for Local Self Governance, funding of local

government needs to be sustainable. The SLARC report highlights the cost of democracy a sentiment echoed by COSLA leaders. To attract and retain a diverse and representative group of elected members, councillor's terms and conditions need to be addressed. Leaving the cost of recommendations to local government budgets would result in limited implementation of recommendations and an unacceptable pitting of front-line services against the cost of democracy.

Next steps

8. COSLA commits to continuing to work with Scottish Government to implement the recommendations in the SLARC report jointly in the spirit of the Verity House Agreement.

9. The Barriers to Elected Office Special Interest Group has already begun work to implement the recommendations for COSLA consideration. The group note the varying legislative, financial and capacity challenges involved in implementation, resulting in different timelines for each recommendation. The group also welcomes the endorsement by the report of existing workstreams such as councillor safety (R13) and will continue to develop these areas using the evidence base gathered by the committee.