

Minority Political Group Leaders' Allowances

Submission for consideration by the Independent Remuneration Panel

Last September, when Members' Allowances were being considered, I wrote to the Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) pointing out that the Labour and Independents Groups were acting as groups as far as Council arrangements were concerned (proportionality, briefings, seating, etc.) but were not being recognised as such for Group Leaders' Allowances because each has only 3 members.

I suggested that it was an anomaly that the IRP might wish to consider. However, the IRP did not consider that they had evidence to justify recommending a change.

I was therefore a little taken aback when I saw the IRP recommendation in the Agenda of the Council Meeting on 17 February 2022 - **that the present formula for calculation of an SRA (Special Responsibility Allowance) to the Leader of a Minority Political Group on the County Council when a Minority Political Group comprises four or more Members should remain.**

However, seeing it reported at the Council Meeting, I noted that the Opposition Leader formula used to determine whether a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) be paid was adopted some time ago, and I requested that this be reviewed. The then Cabinet Member responsible, Cllr Stephen Reid, invited me to write to him about it.

When writing, I told him that I did not have evidence other than to say I had been acting as an Opposition Leader (albeit of a Minority Political Group) for the previous 9 months (now 16 months), so it was a matter of applying the fairness that the County Council applies in all other aspects of representation (to have Minority Group Leaders' Allowances).

Cllr Reid then wrote to Head of Law and Governance Barbara Beardwell:

"At the heart of Cllr Crawford's submission is the premise that four may not be the right threshold for invoking a Special Responsibility Allowance for minority group leaders. This is highlighted by the happenstance of us having two groups of three this year.

"Do we have a history of how four became the threshold and why, and whose recommendation it was? Also, do we know whether the IRP spent time on this subject or just included the status quo recommendation for completeness?"

"I don't think the politicians should overrule the IRP, but if you could identify the history of this, we could ask them to review the arguments that Cllr Crawford has outlined."

Barbara Beardwell responded:

“So far as the history of the Opposition Group Leader goes, the present criteria for eligibility and payment of a Minority Group Leaders allowance (that is it should attach where a political group comprised four or more Members) was agreed by the County Council at its meeting on 23 February 2012.

“By way of background the reason for consideration of this matter arose in 2011 following formulation of the then Community and Green Group which comprised two Members.

“The IRP in 2011 was asked to consider whether a Minority Group Leaders allowance should attach to the Leader of the newly formed Community and Green Group. The IRP’s recommendation was that a Minority Group Leaders allowance should only attach when a political group on the County Council comprised six or more Members, and that it should be calculated according the existing formula for calculation of the allowance for the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, which at the time was the only other minority political group on the County Council.

“Attached is a copy of the Minutes of the IRP meeting on 14 October 2011, where the matter was considered, including at Appendix 1(c) a copy of the submission from the then leader of the Community and Green Group. I have highlighted for ease of relevance the relevant sections.

“The County Council supported the 2011 recommendation of the IRP, save that it considered that a Group Leaders allowance should attach when a political group on the County Council comprised four Members (as opposed to six Members, as recommended by the IRP). Since this date the criteria for eligibility and payment of an Opposition Group Leaders allowance has been applied to in the case of all Opposition Groups on the County Council.”

Conclusion

In essence, I am making the same case as the then Leader of the Community and Green Group (Alan Weeks) in 2011 – Minority Opposition Group Leaders undertake the duties required of their role and, in line with the fairness that the County Council applies in all other aspects of representation, they should have Minority Group Leaders’ Allowances.

Councillor Alex Crawford
Leader – Labour Group
23 September 2022