

## **IRP SUBMISSION – INDEPENDENT GROUP**

### **SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY ALLOWANCES**

#### **SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS:**

- 1) All Opposition Spokespeople undertake identical roles regardless of group size but are not remunerated equally. Essentially a Spokesperson is discriminated against for belonging to a smaller group and their time is devalued.
- 2) Smaller groups with four or less members are more disadvantaged as group members have to take on multiple Spokesperson roles with no additional remuneration.
- 3) That SRA's for Opposition Groups are (currently) based on size, but for the controlling group is a set figure regardless of changes in membership.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1) That the Opposition Group Spokesperson SRA budget be equally split between all current Opposition Group Spokespeople, due to all undertaking the exact same commitments. This would mean no additional budget would be required, rather simply a re-distribution of allowances in an equal and fair manner.
- 2) That the SRA policy be reviewed to establish a consistent approach and to ensure equality and fairness of treatment of Spokesperson & Opposition Spokesperson SRA's at Hampshire County Council, including how to reduce the disadvantage members face who have to fulfil multiple Spokesperson roles.

The Independent Group is disappointed with the current arrangements for Opposition Spokesperson Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) and unanimously feel it discriminates against Spokespeople from smaller Opposition Groups.

An Opposition Spokesperson's responsibilities and duties are identical regardless of political grouping or group size. When acting as a Spokesperson the workload which must be undertaken (such as: attendance at the Opposition Spokesperson briefings, attendance and contribution at Decision Days, being up to date with relevant information relating to committee/panel topics, exposure to the media for comment etc) is identical regardless of group size. All three Opposition Group Spokespeople for any given committee, have identical roles and time commitments. Essentially, the current policy infers that someone's time from a larger group is more valuable than the same time commitment from a smaller group.

Indeed, this disparity is further compounded as a member of a smaller Opposition Group. For example, in groups of four or less multiple Spokesperson roles will have to be taken on by an individual. We appreciate only one SRA can be allocated per Member, however there is something fundamentally unjust when an Opposition

Spokesperson from a larger group receives an allowance circa five times the amount a Spokesperson from our group receives. In monetary terms this values a Spokesperson from our group at 1/5<sup>th</sup> to that of the Opposition Group Spokesperson from the largest Opposition Group, and in one of our group's case, it currently values their contribution at 1/10<sup>th</sup>. Currently the inequality of the Opposition Group Spokesperson SRA's especially disadvantages smaller groups, in no other walk of life would it be deemed acceptable for someone to carry out the exact same role in the same organisation and be treated this differently financially. To be clear, we are not supportive of any increase in the overall budget for the Opposition Spokesperson roles, just advocating for fairness and equality within the existing financial model.

How can it be just that Opposition Spokesperson SRA's are based on group size, when firstly group size has no relevance to the work and duties carried out. And secondly, this is the opposite to how the largest group on the Council is treated. The roles and SRA's held by Cabinet Members, is not based on group size. The largest group at HCC has lost three Members since 2021, but the Spokesperson SRA's haven't reduced, as they would have done for any Opposition Group Spokesperson, in fact allowances have increased. How can it be right that the largest group receive their SRA's without any relevance to the size of their Group, but this rule is then reversed for Opposition Group Spokespeople? We cannot have Opposition Spokesperson SRA's being given based on numbers in a respective group, and at the same time giving a Spokesperson role as a Cabinet member for a respective area, that is not based on numbers within their group. There needs to be an equal and fair policy established that either does or doesn't base SRA's on the size of a group regardless of political affiliation, and a policy that puts the actual roles and responsibilities at the heart of any allocated SRA.