

Public Questions Council 20th September 2018

Mr Martin Costello has asked the Leader of the Council:

I believe that the £7600 Councillors 'annual allowance' is an extreme waste of money that cannot be justified. I propose that the system should be changed so that councillors may only claim for expenses by providing receipts etc.

Will the cabinet investigate implementing my proposed money saving system? I suggest the money saved could be directed towards combating the rising levels of homeless in the town.

The Leader of the Council has replied:

Thank you for your question. Firstly, your proposal falls outside the scope of current Statutory Regulations, The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England)

Regulations 2003/1021, which state:

"4.—(1) An authority shall—

(a) make a scheme in accordance with these Regulations which shall provide for the payment of an allowance in respect of each year to each member of an authority, and the amount of such an allowance shall be the same for each such member ("basic allowance");"

Secondly, the purpose of the allowance is to ensure that the widest possible range of residents can serve as councillors, not just to those with independent means.

If you look at the evidence collected by the Independent Remuneration Panel, as submitted to Council in July 2016, you will see that the level of allowances is based on the Panel's thorough and unbiased examination of the work councillors actually undertake. The information the Panel obtained showed that, on average, councillors are devoting more than 20 hours a week to Council business, which is the equivalent of studying for a part-time degree.

Therefore, for taking responsibility for serving over 220,000 people some of whom have the most complex or harrowing needs, for being corporate parents responsible for the welfare of all children in the borough, for setting a revenue budget of over £135m, of overseeing an organisation that quite literally provides services from birth to death, most councillors receive little more than the national minimum wage. That is good value for money.