

Wokingham's Independent Remuneration Panel

This statement is from Wokingham's Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP). The Panel is made up of local residents chosen, via an interview process, for their skills, independence, and objectivity. Panel members give up a considerable amount of their time to consider and make recommendations regarding the allowances that your local Councillors receive for the time they give to Council related duties. The contents of this statement are based on the work carried out by the IRP in 2020 and 2021.

How well do we know our local Wokingham Councillors? How much do we know about the work they carry out on behalf of the community?

We tend to learn a little more about our councillors around the time of local elections, but in the interim period how much do we know about what they are doing on our behalf, and how they are shaping the way that our local community is served?

The role of Councillor is a demanding one, requiring a good deal of commitment and a sense of community spirit. Councillors are expected to attend a wide range of meetings whilst also dealing with a variety of issues raised by residents.

Councillors are expected to either live or work in their community and while most are affiliated to a political party this is not a necessity, and some are independent of any political party.

The role of a Councillor centres on community leadership and engagement with a variety of responsibilities, including:

- representing the ward for which they are elected;
- decision-making such as developing and reviewing Council policy;
- assuming responsibility for legal functions of the Council, for example health and wellbeing;
- scrutinising decisions taken by the Executive – for example key strategies and policies such as the local plan;
- regulatory, quasi-judicial and statutory duties – for example determining major and sometimes controversial planning applications at Planning Committee.

All elected members of the Council, irrespective of their politics, are expected to work together to provide us with the community and facilities that we expect and make use of on a daily basis.

Councillors are rarely 'off duty' in that many are contactable by phone or email day or night. This could include responding to a sudden or even an ongoing problem that residents do not think is being dealt with satisfactorily.

So what are some of the issues and tasks they accomplish on our behalf, and just how much of their time is given to serving us?

A Councillor's role and remit depends on their position at the Council. Some Councillors have no additional responsibilities and instead focus almost solely on dealing with issues and complaints from residents within their ward.

Other Councillors sit on a variety of boards and Committees, whilst some take on the legal responsibility for certain areas of the Council such as Finance, Leisure, or Highways.

Councillors have talked to us about a range of issues that they deal with, including highways matters for example roadworks, environmental concerns such as fly tipping and bonfires, and those issues relating to planning applications and housing developments.

The latest national census of local councillors revealed that on average the number of hours given to Council business by those elected was equivalent to 22 hours per week, with 8 hours of that spent in Council meetings.

Are Councillors reimbursed financially for their time and effort?

Councillors receive Members' allowances to recompense for 50% their time spent on council matters, with the remaining time being provided on an unpaid basis. Many will say the real reward is the job satisfaction that comes from contributing to the local community.

A number of Councillors have told us that were not aware of any allowances when they chose to stand for election.

Every two years the IRP reviews the Members' allowances scheme, and makes recommendations about the level of allowances to be paid in future. These recommendations are presented to the Council for approval, or rejection.

Historically, Wokingham Councillors have taken a cautious approach to accepting recommendations to increase allowances, which remain at the same level as they were in 2017.

The IRP are due to make their next set of recommendations in relation to Wokingham's Councillors remuneration between May 2022 and May 2023, which will be presented at a meeting of the Council. The report will be available on the Wokingham Council website: www.wokingham.gov.uk