

Independent Panel on Members' Pay and Allowances

IRP – 03

Response from Elin Jones AM, Plaid Cymru Ceredigion
30th October 2008

Dear Chair

I would like to offer some comments on the current review into AMs' allowances.

1. It has been suggested that AMs' salaries should be increased and that the living away from home allowance should be scrapped. I am against this suggestion as it would be unfair to some members – like me – who live so far from Cardiff that they have no option but to stay overnight in the Cardiff area. The system of salary + reimbursing living costs is a better reflection of the true costs incurred by AMs from every part of Wales.
2. AMs should be compensated for their overnight living costs in Cardiff according to their duties. Since my election as an AM I have bought a flat in Cardiff. In spite of this I do not necessarily think that the present system should continue. If the decision is taken to cease funding for mortgage repayments I would ask that 2 matters be considered first.
 - a) A full comparison should be made between mortgage repayments, rent repayments and repayments of hotel costs in Cardiff Bay (therefore in walking distance of the Senedd). The future arrangements should be decided on the basis of this evidence.
 - b) If the present AMs are forced to sell property, then they should be given sufficient time to enable them to do so, e.g. two years.
3. Whatever the final decision, it must be ensured that any costs arising from living in Cardiff from Monday to Thursday are met. The fridge in my flat broke down last year and I had to decide whether to get it mended or buy a new one. On the basis of cost and reducing waste I decided to have it mended and to claim the cost back from my allowance. This was a reasonable and necessary cost arising out of living in Cardiff – and it reflects the reality of the cost of maintaining somewhere to live in Cardiff. On the whole, in my opinion, a system of repaying the essential costs of living in Cardiff, on the basis of expenditure, is reasonable and necessary. I would think that the majority of AMs, like me, do not have any additional income and are therefore not in a position to maintain a house in their constituency and a second home in Cardiff.

Am gysylltu ag Elin? Want to contact Elin?

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4. Lastly, I would like to draw attention to the comparison between AMs' and MPs' allowances. Since last year the House of Commons has authorised expenditure of £10,000 as a Communications Allowance. In Ceredigion, for example, this allowance is used to advertise the MP's surgeries in the Cambrian News. These advertisements cost about £100 a week. This Allowance also funds a report of the MP's work which is distributed through the post at a cost of several thousands of pounds to the taxpayer. Now, I don't necessarily support the idea that AMs should have this sort of Allowance or this amount of money. But certainly, at present, the MP's substantial resources for communication give him an advantage over the AM. It gives the impression that the MP is busier than the AM – by advertising at taxpayers' expense. From what I have seen across Wales, there is no evidence that any MPs state that they should only be contacted on Westminster issues, in these advertisements. This, in turn leads to MPs dealing with issues that have been devolved. In my opinion there are 3 options to correct this imbalance.

- i) ask Westminster to stop this allowance for Welsh MPs
- iii) introduce a similar allowance for AMs
- iii) ensure that, if Welsh MPs use this allowance, it must only be used for Westminster issues and that every advertisement and report makes this clear to constituents.

I favour the last option.

I hope that my opinion on different aspects of your work is of interest, if not of use, to you.

Yours sincerely

Elin Jones, AM