

Independent Review Panel - Financial Support for Members

IRP - 49

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Sir Roger Jones

Chair

The Independent Review Panel on AMs' Pay and Allowances

The Office of the Independent Review Panel

c/o Chris Reading

Cardiff Bay

CARDIFF

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Dear Sir Roger Jones

Financial Support for Assembly Members

These are some comments on the above subject. I believe that the process should be transparent and that our claims for any costs should be released regularly and openly.

For those of us who live some distance away from Cardiff, I believe that it is absolutely necessary that we are given some remuneration towards accommodation costs and that those basic costs would be valid. They include council tax, water, electricity and rent. However, it would be absolutely impossible for one to carry enough clothes and so on back and forth every week. That is, I hope that no one is expected to live in the same suit for four days or in the same shirt, apart from anything else and, of course, there are a number of events in one's diary in Cardiff. This means that a variety of suitable clothes are required for those events. It is, of course, a matter for the panel, in consultation with the Assembly Members, to decide what other costs are relevant and fair to claim. Considering the flat that I've bought in Cardiff, I noticed recently that a similar flat in the same block and of the same size sold for £20,000 less than the price that I paid for my flat and the market, of course, is still falling. Is it reasonable for me to ask the Assembly to reimburse some of that loss? Probably not, of course, but the situation proves that buying a flat or a house in Cardiff does not necessarily mean that one is better off in the long term.

The final and most important point that I would like to make is regarding support staff. It is probably unreasonable and even unfair to differentiate between various Members but the fact that one spends up to 8 hours a week travelling back and forth to Cardiff - especially since I, like other members in the North West, am not available to meet constituents during the week - puts further pressure on our staff and it is absolutely necessary that we have sufficient staff in our constituencies to deal with complaints and constituency issues. I also believe, as an ordinary Member, that it is also important to have some help in Cardiff with regard to research and policy. However, I would like to make one further point since my promotion to the Cabinet. The demands on a Cabinet member's time are immense and I now spend four full days either in Cardiff or in other areas of Wales which means I only spend Fridays

here in the constituency. I often spend time doing Ministerial work even on Fridays.

I am writing these notes, for instance, on a Saturday afternoon. I believe, therefore, that there is a case for giving more staffing support to Cabinet members in their constituencies than to other Members. This sounds odd as a Minister has a number of personal staff who look after issues as a Cabinet member but they, of course, do not deal with constituency work. This means that there is more constituency pressure on staff; therefore if it were necessary to differentiate or even to reduce the number of support staff for ordinary Members, then I definitely do not believe that should be the case for members of the Cabinet.

Yours sincerely

Alun Ffred Jones AM, Arfon