

Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel to Wealden District Council for 2026/27

Introduction

1. This is the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel, established by Wealden District Council to make recommendations to the Council as to the amount of allowances which should be payable to its elected and co-opted members and independent members of the public sitting on committees (Allowances Scheme). The Panel wishes to emphasise it sits within an advisory capacity and has no power to change the scheme.

Recommendations

2. The Panel recommends the following in relation to the Allowances Scheme for 2026/27:
 - a) The Basic Allowance be increased by 3.8%, in line with the Consumer Prices Index inflation rate as defined by the Office of National Statistics in September 2025, rounded up to the nearest whole pound divisible by 12 to £5,496.
 - b) Special Responsibility Allowances be increased by 3.8%, using the same criteria as defined in 2(a) above, rounded up to the nearest whole pound divisible by 12 and paid to the following office holders:

<i>Chair of the Council</i>	<i>£5,700</i>
<i>Vice-Chair of Council</i>	<i>£1,416</i>
<i>Leader of the Council</i>	<i>£16,068</i>
<i>Deputy Leader of the Council</i>	<i>£8,316</i>
<i>Leader of the largest Minority Group</i>	<i>£1,284 plus £216 per member</i>
<i>Minority Group Leader(s) where group is five or more members</i>	<i>£216 per member</i>
<i>Minority Group Leader(s) where group is less than five members</i>	<i>£456</i>
<i>Cabinet Member</i>	<i>£6,648</i>
<i>Chair of Scrutiny and Performance Committee</i>	<i>£4,500</i>
<i>Chair of a Planning Committee</i>	<i>£5,064</i>
<i>Deputy Chair of a Planning Committee</i>	<i>£1,680</i>
<i>Chair of Audit and Governance Committee</i>	<i>£4,500</i>
<i>Chair of a Licensing Committee</i>	<i>£1,632</i>
<i>Chair of Standards Committee</i>	<i>£1,632</i>
<i>Co-optees</i>	<i>£996</i>

- c) That no councillor shall be entitled to more than one SRA payment. Where a councillor holds more than one office then the higher of the SRA shall apply.
- d) That Travelling Allowances continue to be paid in line with HM Revenue & Customs 'Approved Mileage Allowance Payment' rates as follows:

Car or Van	45p per mile for the first 10,000 miles and 25p per mile thereafter
Motor cycle	24p per mile (all miles)
Cycle	20p per mile (all miles)
Passenger supplement	5p per mile for up to four passengers
Public transport	Actual cost subject to the Council's approval

- e) Carers' Allowances to be paid in line with, but not less than, the National Living Wage as applicable at the time of claim.
- f) That Subsistence Allowances remain unchanged for 2026/27:

Breakfast	£8.00	When away from home on approved Council business before 8 a.m.
Lunch	£11.00	When away from home on approved Council business between 12 noon and 2 p.m.
Evening Meal	£20	When away from home on approved Council business after 7 p.m.
Overnight absence	£98.30	When outside London
London and specified Conferences	£110	

- g) That all Travelling and Subsistence claims must be accompanied by a valid receipt and payment is subject to Councillors signing to say they have actually and necessarily incurred the amount being claimed.

Background

- 3. Under Section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003 a local authority can only amend its Allowances Scheme following a review by an independent panel. The Wealden Independent Remuneration Panel established for this purpose comprises three members: Edward Stone (Chairman), Stephen Hallam and Clive Mills.

Consideration

- 4. The Panel initially met on 10 October 2025, again on 31 October 2025 and communicated by telephone and email at other times.
- 5. The Panel in its considerations had regard to:
 - a) The Panel Report to the Council for 2025/26;
 - b) The Cabinet and Council decisions in relation to the Allowances Scheme for 2025/26
 - c) Members' Allowances Scheme adopted from 1 April 2025;
 - d) The South East Employers' 2025 Survey of South East local authorities' members' allowances was not available at the time of the meeting but was subsequently reviewed;
 - e) The rate of inflation as at September 2025 and the position in relation to the current economic situation.

- f) The proposed Wealden Staff Pay Award report for 2026 was not available for consideration at the time of the meeting;
 - g) The current HMRC regulations relating to travel and subsistence.
 - h) Members responses to the current scheme
6. 15 Members responded to an invitation sent to all District Councillors to submit their views of the current scheme, prior to the Panel's meeting on 31 October 2025, and these were considered during the discussions. The Panel was grateful for the responses received from Members.
 7. In response to the feedback, the Panel felt that it was important to remind all Members that this was an **Allowance Scheme**, not a salary, and therefore not intended to compensate the number of hours worked, which the Panel acknowledged could be substantial, nor to reimburse Members for the effort they put in.
 8. The Panel also wish to remind Members that it is not permissible to pay allowances based on attendance, excluding travel and subsistence claims, which remain payable.
 9. In response to the feedback from Members regarding their workload, the Panel had every sympathy with some of the issues raised but wished to draw attention to the perceived public service element of their role, which has been identified as somewhere between 30% and 50% by many local authorities. The Panel also wished to remind Members that Political or Ward work was not covered by the Allowance Scheme.

Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)

10. The Panel was advised that there have been changes to the roles of Planning Committee and Licensing Committee but this has had no significant impact on the workload of individual Committees.
11. The Panel noted the current schedule of SRAs and discussed the level of allowances for 2026/27. It was felt that the balance between the different SRAs remained broadly correct.
12. The Panel considered that it was appropriate that SRAs were also increased by 3.8%, in line with the Consumer Prices Index inflation rate as defined by the Office of National Statistics in September 2025, rounded up to the nearest whole pound divisible by 12.

Co-Optees / Independent Person(s)

13. The Panel understands that the Council has provision for a number of co-optees on Committees in the form of 2x Independent Persons sitting as ex-officio members of the Standards Committee, 3x non-voting Parish Council representatives on the Standards Committee and 2x Independent Members of the Audit and Governance Committee and 2x Independent Members of the Scrutiny and Performance Committee..
14. The Panel therefore recommends that co-optees should be eligible for allowance in accordance with payments made to independent persons serving on the Standards Committee.

Travelling Allowance

15. The Panel recommends the Travelling Allowance for all means of transport be in accordance with the official rates published by HM Revenue and Customs as used by the majority of other councils. It was noted that anything paid above this amount

would be subject to taxation and would require tax forms to be completed. As of November 2025 these rates were.

- a) Car or Van – 45p per mile for the first 10,000 miles and 25p per mile thereafter;
 - b) Motor Cycle – 24p per mile (all miles);
 - c) Cycle – 20p per mile (all miles); and
 - d) A 5 pence per mile per passenger supplement for up to four passengers.
 - e) Reimbursement for the actual cost for the use of public transport, with the relevant Portfolio Holder's approval and proof of purchase, to include: Buses, Taxis and Rail Travel.
16. Payment should be subject to councillors certifying that they had actually and necessarily incurred the amount being claimed.

Carers' Allowances

17. The Panel considered that it was important to continue to make provision for carers' allowances to enable individuals with caring responsibilities to become Councillors and to support those members whose circumstances change and become carers.
18. The Panel recommends that all Carers' Allowances be in line with, and not less than, the National Living Wage as applicable at the time of claim.

Approved Duty Status

19. The Panel satisfied themselves that the list of approved duties for which expenses could be paid, was readily available to all Councillors.

Subsistence Allowance

20. The Panel notes these allowances are intended to meet the additional cost of providing meals above that which would be provided at home. The Panel recommends the payment of Subsistence Allowances for 2026/27 as set out in the table above.
21. Payment should be subject to councillors certifying that they had actually and necessarily incurred the amount being claimed.

Other Business

22. The Panel wish to recommend the extension of the support offered to staff for mental and emotional wellbeing should be offered to all Members.
23. The Panel would like to express its thanks to the Members and especially Mark O'Callaghan, Democratic Services Manager, who have assisted it in its work and the preparation of this report.

Edward Stone

Chairman

Dated: 25 November 2025