

## **Independent Panel on Members' Pay and Allowances**

IRP – 06

### **Response from Welsh Conservatives Support Staff Group**

3 November 2008

Dear Mr Reading,

#### **Re: Submission to the Independent Review Panel by the Welsh Conservative Assembly Member Support Staff Group**

Welsh Conservative AMSS are grateful for the opportunity, provided by the Independent Review Panel, to make a submission for consideration. The following points and recommendations have the support of all members of Welsh Conservative AMSS.

#### **Terms of Service**

##### **Pay Bands**

Many Assembly Members experience a high turnover of staff. For Welsh Conservative Members this is detrimental to their role in scrutinising the Welsh Assembly Government and holding it to account.

In particular, many Assembly Members have at times struggled to retain their senior staff, who have frequently been recruited by political lobbyists and special interest groups.

Under the current arrangements those senior members of AMSS have very limited prospects in terms of career development. As there are only five pay points to a single band, there are few incentives Assembly Members can offer to retain their most experienced staff.

The additional workload and responsibilities of Assembly Members have been recognised in their own pay. AMSS, who have experienced an increase in workload commensurate with that of their employers, have received no comparable recognition.

**Recommendation 1: The existing pay bands for AMSS should be changed to reflect two full Assembly terms. This can be achieved by the inclusion of three additional pay points at the top of each band.**

**Recommendation 2: A review of the existing pay rates for AMSS should be considered to determine whether it adequately reflects the additional workload now being carried out by staff.**

### **Redundancy Arrangements**

The role of AMSS is unique in that staff routinely face the threat of redundancy every four years. The existing redundancy arrangements inadequately reflect a member of staff's service. For example, under the current arrangements, a member of AMSS with four years experience would be entitled to a statutory redundancy package of just four weeks pay. While there are mechanisms through which a more adequate package could be put together by an Assembly Member through the winding up allowance, this is at the Member's discretion, and depending on the individual circumstances between different offices, funding may not be available due to the need to meet outstanding debts.

**Recommendation 3: Redundancy arrangements should be changed to adequately reflect a staff member's length of service. Guidance on redundancy packages should be clearly defined to reduce disparities between offices.**

### **Overtime**

There are significant disparities between how the current informal arrangements concerning overtime operate between different offices.

**Recommendation 4: Clear guidance should be given on the payment of overtime or time being given back in lieu, to prevent unreasonable demands being made on individual members of AMSS.**

### **Health Cover**

The provision of health cover was considered during the previous Independent Review, but to date no such scheme has been introduced.

**Recommendation 5: Both critical illness cover and death in service cover should be included within the AMSS pay and pensions package. In addition, a contributory healthcare plan for AMSS, comparable to that already offered to members of the Civil Service should be made available.**

### **Maternity Leave**

The permanent employment contract currently states an allowance for 26 weeks maternity leave at full pay, rather than 26 weeks at full pay and an additional 13 weeks of Statutory Maternity Pay.

**Recommendation 6: The permanent employment contract should be updated to reflect the current legal allowance for 39 weeks maternity pay, granting 26 weeks at full pay, and the remaining 13 weeks at Statutory Maternity Pay.**

## **Workplace Conditions**

### **Human Resources**

AMSS do not have access to specific human resources support. This has the potential to cause difficulties over the lack of access to impartial advice should they need guidance or if problems arise with their employer. To an extent, an existing service covering human resources does exist, but it is felt to be inadequate.

**Recommendation 7: AMSS should have access to an independent human resources service. This can be achieved by a member of the Assembly Commission's existing HR staff gaining responsibility for advising AMSS.**

### **Recruitment**

The absence of guidelines for the process for recruitment (from the advertising of posts, through to interviews and the appointment of successful candidates) has the potential to cause difficulties in office staffing. Awareness of the opportunity for new and existing staff members to join a union is also low.

**Recommendation 8: Clear guidelines should be provided on the process for staff recruitment. Protocols for newly appointed staff should also be clearly defined. New members of staff should be informed that they may, if they choose to, pursue union membership.**

### **Staff management training for Assembly Members**

Newly elected Assembly Members are given insufficient advice on office and personnel management.

**Recommendation 9: Mandatory staff management training on essential areas including recruitment, staff management, and pay should be provided to new Assembly Members. Further management training should be offered should they wish to pursue it.**

### **Health and Safety**

Current health and safety procedures are considered poor. While volunteer health and safety assessors within the group have been trained, there is insufficient coordination with the relevant Assembly Commission staff.

In contrast the civil service workers who are assessed upon joining, no full assessment of existing AMSS has ever been made, and no procedure is in place for new staff members.

Where requests for health and safety approved equipment have been made, following a member of AMSS developing a work-related complaint (commonly back, hand and wrist pain), delays in delivery have been excessive. For

example, the current wait for the large *Senator* office chair is set at eight weeks. This is not acceptable for staff members who, at the point of ordering an item, will already be experiencing significant discomfort and/or pain. While fire marshals have also been appointed for the floor, no full fire drills and evacuations have been carried out in Ty Hywel in recent years. It is inconceivable that this situation would have been allowed to arise in a private sector organisation. There is also poor awareness among AMSS of the different alarm types and evacuation procedures.

**Recommendation 10: Health and Safety assessment should be significantly improved from the current ad hoc arrangements, all current AMSS should be assessed as a matter of priority, and guidance should be put in place to assess new members of staff when they join. The procurement arrangements for approved office equipment should be improved to ensure items are supplied in a reasonable timeframe.**

**Recommendation 11: Procedures and awareness of fire and emergency evacuation drills should be brought up to standards comparable with the private sector.**

### **Training**

Despite training being considered a valuable means for career progression for longer-serving members of staff, awareness of how to access it are very low among members of AMSS.

New members of AMSS are also offered little in the way of induction training for their role. Informal training between individual offices varies considerably, and official training is piecemeal in its coverage.

Given the multiple demands on resources from the Additional Staff Salary budget, such as mileage, few resources are typically remain for staff training.

**Recommendation 12: The capacity for in-house training should be investigated. Information on available training opportunities and how to access them should be provided to AMSS, with specific induction training provided for all new members of AMSS.**

### **Annex**

#### **Staff Facilities**

The Assembly has a public commitment to sustainability, yet has no facilities (showers and locker room) for staff working in Ty Hywel to cycle to work, and has no substantive arrangements to encourage healthy living.

The provision of on-site gym facilities is considered the norm for large private sector organisations. The National Assembly for Wales is also the only representative body in the United Kingdom that does not currently have such facilities for its staff.

**Recommendation 13: Locker rooms and shower facilities should be installed within Ty Hywel. The installation of gym facilities within Ty Hywel or partnerships with nearby private gyms should be given consideration.**