

Independent Review Panel - Financial Support for Members

IRP – 65

Response from Jones, Alun W

26 January 2009

Chris Reading
Clerk, Independent Panel on Members Pay and Allowances

Dear Mr Reading

Call for Evidence Independent Panel on Members' Pay and Allowances

I understand that the timescale for submission of evidence has been extended to the end of this month, and that being so, I hope that you will be able to receive the following.

Perhaps it would be helpful if I were to explain that these are personal views, motivated by my wish to see the highest possible standards in public life being adopted by individual Members and the Assembly.

Members Pay

I believe that the present criteria of linking AM's pay to that of Westminster MP's is equitable. This is of course subject to an acceptance that MP's pay is determined on an objective basis.

It is questionable whether AM's pay should be increased to take account of the changes as a result of the Government of Wales Act 2006. Whilst the corporate responsibilities of the Assembly will of course increase, this does not necessarily mean that those of individual AM's will also increase. AM's will need to devote more time to Plenary and Committee work, but that needs to be measured against their current workloads.

The responsibilities of Ministers and Chairs of Scrutiny Committees will increase, for they will be held personally accountable for the outcomes, and there will be a case for rewarding this.

Members Allowances

Whilst there are written 'rules', the evidence would seem to suggest that there is little control over what AM's can claim, and little scrutiny of their claims.

The media has previously highlighted a number of spurious items, and I will not repeat these, but would wish to make a number of general points;

The Inner Area Constituencies should be reviewed, and extended to include those within a more equitable travel to work area. Why should an AM representing a constituency only 15 miles from Cardiff Bay be paid a second home allowance? Why should another AM who lives 15 miles from Cardiff Bay be entitled to claim travelling expenses of £500 per month for his daily journeys? I would not have thought that there would be very many (if any) other public service or private employees with similar contractual arrangements.

There needs to be greater transparency in relation to the staff employed by AM's. These staff costs, which are met from the public purse, are very considerable; in fact greater than those of AM's themselves. All other appointments in the public services are subject to stringent employment practices, so as to ensure that posts are properly advertised and that the most appropriate person is properly appointed - it is a requirement that an audit trail exists for all other public service appointments. The same should apply to AM's staff, for otherwise, as in Westminster, the improper appointment of family staff could be seen as fraudulent.

The payment of expenses is intended to reimburse 'expenditure necessarily incurred' for Assembly business. However a number of AM's regularly claim £30.65 for meals taken on days when they are at the Assembly. Given that the Assembly has a restaurant which serves subsidized meals, then it is suggested that this is a further area which needs to be examined.

I hope that these comments will be helpful to the Panel

Yours sincerely

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