

To: Members of the Senedd
Cc: All support staff

16 June 2021

Dear Members,

Summary of meeting held on Thursday 27 May 2021

I am writing to provide you with an introduction to the work of the Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd as well as to update you on our recent meeting.

First of all, congratulations on being elected to the Senedd. The scale of the challenge facing Wales as it begins to recover from the impact of the pandemic cannot be underestimated. The Board stands ready to work with you to ensure that you have the appropriate resources to fulfil your role in representing the people of Wales and their interests.

The Board's main responsibility is making decisions on the pay and direct support for Members of the Senedd. These provisions are outlined in the [Determination on Members' Pay and Allowances](#), commonly referred to as "the Determination". The most recent version was published in March 2021; an overview of the main changes compared to the 2020-21 Determination are outlined in the accompanying [report](#).

In summary, the Determination for this new Senedd term includes provisions which are intended to remove potential barriers to standing for public office e.g. for those with caring responsibilities (section 3A of the Determination). Also, some provisions have been strengthened to ensure they are transparent; provide value for money; are fair to both Members and the Welsh taxpayer. The Board will consider the operation of the Determination later this year as part of its regular annual review. It normally consults Members and staff on any changes.

The remainder of this letter provides a summary of the discussions from the Board's meeting on Thursday 27 May 2021. A similar update will be provided to you following each Board meeting. Updates following meetings are also available on the Board's [website](#).

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Engagement with Members and their staff

The Board engages regularly with Members and support staff, either through the Representative Groups or by meeting to discuss specific issues of concern or any matters which are subject to consultation. These meetings help the Board to develop a better understanding of the issues facing both Members and support staff. The meetings also provide an opportunity for issues to be raised directly with the Board. Such issues could include matters that impact your work or ideas you may have on how the allowances provided to you could be improved.

At the start of a new term, the Board is keen to maintain these engagement opportunities. Therefore, the Board will continue to meet with both the Members and support staff Representative Groups on a termly basis. The Board will be in touch with the political party groups and the individual Member to confirm the membership of the two Representative Groups.

The Board re-started its programme of engagement with constituency/regional offices in the last few months of the Fifth Senedd. The Board wishes to continue these either as virtual meetings or in person (also dependent on the relevant Covid-19 regulations in force at that time). The Board will approach offices to ask if they would like to meet. However, should your office wish to meet sooner rather than later, please do inform the secretariat who will make the necessary arrangements. It is hoped that these meetings will form a regular schedule of engagement between the Board and Members' offices.

The Board is also considering how it can host its annual 'drop-in' with Members, usually held in July in the Senedd, during Plenary meetings. Further details on how you can participate will be shared nearer the time.

Update on Senedd election results

The Board also held a discussion on the results of the recent Senedd election. It was briefed on the outcome of the election and the appointment of key officers. It also considered the limited information that is available on equality and diversity matters arising from the election. This is important to the Board as it considers what it can do, within its remit, to reduce potential barriers to standing for election.

The Board also discussed when it would be required to take a decision on Committee Chair remuneration. The Determination provides two rates of pay for Committee Chairs; a higher and lower rate. The additional rates of pay are only payable after the Board has determined which rate each Committee Chair should be paid. The Board's decision is based on a number of factors. This includes, but is not limited to, the responsibilities of the chair of a particular committee. The Board agreed to consider this matter as soon as possible to ensure committee chairs are paid promptly for their additional responsibilities.

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Covid-19 support to Members' offices

The Board considered the latest information regarding the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on Members, their offices and the work of the Senedd.

Since the start of the pandemic last spring, the Board has put in place a number of measures to support Members and support staff. Such measures are made under section 2.5 of the Determination and include:

- **Home Working Allowance:** a monthly allowance of up to £26 per month paid directly to support staff to help with the additional costs of working from home. This rate is in line with guidance set by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs;
- **Online DSE Assessments:** an online course providing training to enable Members and support staff to undertake a DSE assessment to identify any adjustments that are required to work safely. Members can claim the costs of equipment required to make any adjustments from their Office and Constituent Liaison Fund allowance;
- **Return to Office Covid-19 Fund:** funding to provide support to Members with the costs of meeting health and safety requirements to make their constituency/regional offices "Covid-secure".

MBS can provide further information to Members on the support available as above. Over the last year, there have been changes to working practices with some staff continuing to work from home and others returning to the office. Naturally, consideration needs to be given to how permanent such working arrangements will be in future. In addition, there is also continued uncertainty on the restrictions put in place for public health reasons, and how these will change in future.

Given all of this, the Board intends to review these provisions over the summer. Further details will be made available following the Board's next meeting in July. In the meantime, the support already in place will remain.

Members' Pension Scheme rule change

At its January meeting, the Board considered the impact of the McCloud and Sargeant cases on the the Senedd Pension Scheme. These cases concerned a challenge to the transitional provisions contained in two pension schemes on the basis that younger members were treated less favourably on the grounds of age. Similar provisions exist in the Members of the Senedd Pension Scheme and affect Members who were active in the Scheme on 1 April 2012 and continued in active service until 6 May 2016. In January, the Board decided to return to the matter once the Pension Scheme's Board of Trustees had discussed the matter.

At its meeting in May, the Board considered the views provided by the Pension Scheme's Board of Trustees and legal advice. Following consideration of this advice, the Board has

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decided that it should remedy the discrimination that exists within the Pension Scheme Rules.

The remedy that is being proposed will seek to remove the inequality that exists with minimum interference to the rest of the Scheme. The Board will write to those Members who are affected by this issue and invite them to participate in a consultation on the proposed remedy. Further information will be provided later this month.

Personal security devices

The Board takes the security of Members and their support staff seriously. Since 2016, there has been a significant increase in the security support provided. The Board's role in security is to put in place the funding for appropriate security measures. It does this by outlining the funding that is available in different sections of the Determination including reimbursement of costs for enhanced security if recommended by the Senedd Commission Security Team (see section 6.6 of the Determination).

At its meeting, the Board noted an update from the Senedd Commission regarding the roll out of personal security devices to Members. The Board encourages you to use these devices in order to enhance your personal safety. The Board will receive a further update on security matters later this year.

In the meantime, if you have any concerns regarding your security, or that of your support staff, please do speak to the Senedd Commission's Security Team for advice and assistance.

New Board website

The Board reviewed draft pages of its new website. The new website will be hosted on the Senedd website and will be a central hub for all the information you require regarding the Board's work. The new site will be published before the summer recess.

Strategy and future work programme

As part of the development of its strategy, the Board undertook a further scenario planning session to consider implications for its work if there was no reform of the Senedd. This follows a similar session held in January where it considered what it might need to do if legislation for a larger Senedd was passed in this term. These discussions will feed into the development of the Board's strategy for 2021-26, which will take place in July, and will be published later this year.

Departure of Board member

Finally, I would like to inform you that following four years of service, Ronnie Alexander will be leaving the Board this month. This follows his decision to take up another appointment.

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I have personally valued his contribution to the Board enormously since I became Chair last year. I am sure you will join my fellow Board members in thanking Ronnie for his contributions and to wish him well for the future.

As outlined at the start, these updates will be provided to you on a regular basis so that you can be informed of our work. In the meantime, should you have any matters you wish to raise with myself or the Board, please do not hesitate to get in touch through the secretariat.

Best wishes,



Dr Elizabeth Haywood

Chair, Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.