

To: Members of the Senedd
Cc: All support staff

27 July 2021

Dear Members,

Summary of meeting held on 7-8 July 2021

The Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd met on Wednesday 7 and Thursday 8 July 2021. The majority of the discussions over the two days were focussed on developing the Board's strategic aims for the remainder of its term in office. The Board review its findings at its September meeting with a view to publishing a strategy in the autumn term.

The remainder of this letter provides a summary of the Board's discussions and decisions made at the formal meeting held on Thursday 8 July 2021. Previous updates following meetings are available on the Board's [website](#).

Covid-19 update

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

Return to Offices Covid-19 Fund

While the pandemic is far from over, governments across the UK are removing restrictions in order to attempt to restore some normality to our daily lives. As a result, it is recognised that Members may now want to take steps to open, or re-open, offices - both as a workplace and as a venue for meeting constituents. In order to assist with this, the Board wishes to draw Members' attention to the Return to Offices Covid-19 Fund that has been available since last year. The Fund was established to provide funding to purchase equipment that is necessary to minimise the risk of infection by Covid-19 to individuals present in their constituency or regional office. Such equipment may include (but is not restricted to) sanitiser, face masks and screens.

In order to claim from the Fund, a Risk Assessment is needed to underpin the measures and evidence the required spend on items. The goods or services identified as necessary will, of course, still be subject to the usual principles of the Determination, including value

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for money and reasonableness. Guidance on how to undertake such an assessment is provided by the Senedd Commission in its document "[Planning the safe use of office spaces](#)".

If a Risk Assessment conducted by a Member identifies a requirement for goods or services worth more than £500 in total, such claims may be subject to further scrutiny and verification, before they are accepted. This type of check and balance is consistent with other provisions of the Determination and ensures such claims align with the Board's principles (as set out in Chapter 1 of the Determination) to ensure the proper use of resources.

This Fund does not apply to offices located on the Senedd Estate, including Tŷ Hywel, as responsibility for those workplaces are a shared responsibility between Members and the Senedd Commission.

No claims have been made against the Fund since February this year. Given the recent relaxation of restrictions and the likelihood that some Members will now seek to open or re-open offices, the Board would encourage you to apply for any funding you require to assist with opening offices safely.

Changes to office layouts

The Board also considered the matter of larger, more significant structural changes to office layouts and whether it would fall within the scope of Return to Offices Covid-19 Fund. It is appreciated that some Members may be experiencing particular problems in ensuring their offices are "Covid-secure", for example from a size, layout or airflow perspective to enable a safe working environment.

The Board noted that it is likely that there will be constraints on Members' ability to undertake such changes as leaseholders. Whether such measures are permissible will depend on the specific terms of that lease, given that such changes are usually the responsibility of the landlord. Further, the Board noted that if any changes were made, it may be necessary for these to be reversed at the end of the lease term in order for the office premises to be reinstated to their original condition. As it stands, the winding up budgets available to outgoing Members (as per Chapter 9 of the Determination) would not extend to such work.

The Board considered whether it was necessary and value for money to allow Members to claim for such measures. It is conscious that a Welsh Government review of the alert level and associated regulations and guidance has taken place since its meeting on 7 and 8 July 2021. The message remains that people should continue to work from home wherever possible. However, there is a clear pathway for all premises reopening but ensuring that "reasonable measures" are taken to manage the risk of Covid-19 in those premises. The

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Welsh Government has indicated that such measures should be determined on the outcome of a specific risk assessment, including in relation to physical distancing.

The Board is of the view that, in line with the Welsh Government's approach of taking "reasonable measures", Members' Risk Assessments will need to consider various options to flex around the structural limitations of their offices. This could mean for instance, that staff might have to work at home or in shift patterns in the office to address any risks. Any such approach would be subject to the numbers allowed under Welsh Government guidance, and each Members' risk assessment.

The Board anticipates that in most cases, a Member will be able to undertake a Risk Assessment without the need for specialist health and safety advice. Although specialist health and safety advice is unlikely to be a necessity for most Members, if Members consider that they require expert advice and opinion they are free to contract a Health and Safety professional. These services can be funded from their Office and Constituent Liaison Fund.

Future review of Covid-19 support

Finally, as was outlined in the **May update**, the Board will review the support provided to Members in relation to Covid-19 (as per section 2.5 of the Determination) at its meeting on 30 September 2021.

As part of this review, the Board is keen to enhance its understanding of the challenges facing Members' offices as they continue to work throughout the pandemic. To that end, the Board would be grateful if Members could share an outline of the issues they encounter in their work. Such issues may be related to returning to offices safely; supporting a permanent move to a mix of office and home working; or being able to engage with constituents in a safe manner.

If Members wish to submit evidence for the Board's review, please provide an outline of the issue(s), how they can be mitigated and an estimated cost of this. The Board would be grateful if submissions are restricted to two sides of A4 and are **sent to the secretariat** by **no later than Friday 3 September 2021**.

Following the review in September, the Board will inform Members of any changes to the support available to them in responding to the circumstances created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the meantime, the current support measures put in place under section 2.5 of the Determination will remain in place until we have undertaken this review and at least until the end of September 2021. These include:

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- **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".

Engagement with Members and their staff

As outlined in the [May update](#), 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.

To this end, the Board is grateful to those Members who attended the drop-in session on Wednesday 7 July. The Board valued all feedback provided. Also, given the value of these meetings, the Board has agreed to seek to hold such drop-ins more regularly. Therefore the Board will seek to arrange a drop-in session once a term from now on.

The Board will also be meeting with the Representative Groups ahead of its meeting on 30 September, so if you have any matters arising, please do inform your representative.

Committee Chair Remuneration

Following the establishment of committees for the Sixth Senedd and subsequent election of Chairs at the end of June, the Board considered the additional office holder salary rate payable to Committee Chairs for this Senedd term. The Determination provides for two rates, a higher rate at £13,741, and a lower rate at £9,154.

The Board has decided that given the remit and responsibilities of Committee Chairs, and the importance of the role of all Senedd Committees in holding the Government to account and discharging the Senedd's functions, all Chairs elected on 29 June will be entitled to the higher rate. This means the additional salary for Committee Chairs appointed on 29 June will be £13,741 per annum, subject to annual indexation in accordance with the Determination. This additional salary will be effective from 29 June.

The Board also agreed to retain the lower rate should it be required in the future.

Members' Pension Scheme rule change

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As you will be aware, the Board has decided that it should remedy the discrimination that exists within the Members of the Senedd Pension Scheme Rules. This follows a case in which certain provisions contained in the Judicial and Firefighters' pension schemes were challenged on the basis that younger members were treated less favourably on the grounds of age. These provisions were ruled to be discriminatory. Similar provisions exist in the Members of the Senedd Pension Scheme and affect Members who were:

- in active service on 1 April 2012;
- under age 55 on 1 April 2012; and
- in active service on 6 May 2016.

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.

New Board website

The Board is pleased to announce that it will be launching its new website on Monday 2 August 2021. The site is hosted on the Senedd website and will be a central hub for all the information you require regarding the Board's work. The Board would welcome any feedback you have on the new look website.

Bereavement

We were deeply saddened to learn of Carys Evans's passing. As her colleagues on the Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd, we would like to send our deepest condolences to her family and colleagues at the Senedd.

We consider ourselves fortunate to have both known and worked closely with Carys over the past few years. As you may know, Carys was clerk during the first term of the Remuneration Board of the National Assembly for Wales, as it was then. She set the standard for the clerks who have subsequently followed.

More lately, we were fortunate to have Carys' support and presence at our Board meetings as the Head of Members' Business Support. She applied her great intellect to work with the Members of the Senedd and the Board to find solutions to ensure Members received the support they needed to enable them to do their job on behalf of the people of Wales. We, like many others, will miss her greatly and we send our heartfelt sympathies to her wider family, friends and colleagues at this time.

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,

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Dr Elizabeth Haywood

Chair, Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.