

## AMs update following Remuneration Board meeting 19-20 June 2014

Dear Assembly Member,

The Remuneration Board held its third meeting of 2014 on 19-20 June. I am writing to keep you abreast of progress and to alert you to two forthcoming consultations concerning AMSS and changes to the AM pension scheme.

The Board considered a letter from the Assembly Commission and a summary of responses to our AM survey. We also considered feedback from the meetings of the representative groups for AMs and AMSS.

We were eager to inform you of our proposals in this letter as soon as possible and more detail will be provided in two consultation documents we will issue within the next couple of weeks. One consultation will cover pensions, and the other issues relating to AM Support Staff. These consultations will seek your views on the following:

### **Introduction of the role of AM Senior Advisor**

In order to increase the capacity of Assembly Members in the Fifth Assembly, we are proposing to permit all AMs to employ a **senior advisor** if they wish to do so. We consulted on a similar idea in 2012-13 but it did not receive widespread cross-party support. We know, though, that many Members are supportive of the idea and our new proposal has been revised to take account of some of the objections we heard last year. Our proposal for the role is now as follows:

- the pay scale of a Senior Advisor would be equivalent to that of the existing role of Additional Group Support staff (currently £31,016 - £37,885);
- staffing allowance would be increased to a level sufficient to allow the employment of a Senior Advisor and two other FTE staff (on today's salary scales, to £94,000);
- the job description for a Senior Advisor would be drawn from the illustrative components annexed to this letter;
- the selection and appointment procedure for Senior Advisors would be the same as for any other AMSS post;
- Members who did not wish to use their staffing allowance to appoint a Senior Advisor would be free to use the remaining balance in other ways eg the appointment of temporary staff or supplementing their Policy and Research Fund.

### **Apprenticeship Scheme**

In our discussions with party leaders and others, we found considerable support for the introduction of an apprenticeship scheme offering young

people the opportunity to work for individual Assembly Members or political parties. The Board did not consider any detailed proposal last week but it is enthusiastic for the principle of such a scheme. We agreed that, if such a scheme were introduced, it should be managed by the Assembly Commission to ensure that the young people involved receive appropriate professional support and training. We will be writing to the Commission separately to discuss how the introduction of a scheme could be achieved.

### **Policy & Research Fund**

We received positive feedback from the Assembly Commission and from Members who have used the Policy and Research Fund. We feel that the fund is a useful tool for AMs of all parties in holding the Government to account and wish to develop it further. As a result, we are minded to increase the size of the fund, and to broaden its remit to include local communication and engagement. Specifically, our thinking is that the money could also be used – with appropriate care – to help increase understanding of the Assembly and to engage, say, schools or particular sections of the local community in its work.

In our consultation we will be seeking your views on whether and how such funding could be used to enhance local communication and engagement in the Assembly's work.

### **Support for Groups**

The current Determination provides for financial support to be provided to all political Groups in the Assembly tiered according to their number of members. Before reaching any conclusions on funding support to Groups in the Fifth Assembly, we will be seeking views on the current approach and whether there are any particular considerations that we should take into account.

### **AMSS pensions and redundancy**

AMSS representatives had also asked whether staff made redundant because their Member stands down could waive their right to a redundancy payment and instead be appointed to a new post with the incoming Member. Under their proposal AMSS would not need to undergo an open recruitment competition and they would benefit from both appointments counting towards their period of continuous service. The taxpayer would benefit because redundancy payments would not be made to staff who are promptly re-employed in a similar role by an incoming Member.

We are sympathetic to this idea and would like to make it work. Unfortunately, the legal advice we have received makes it highly unlikely that we will be able to introduce the change. We will be sharing that advice with the established reference groups of Members and support staff and will explore the issue

further with our equivalent bodies in Westminster, Scotland and Northern Ireland in an attempt to find a solution.

Pension arrangements available to AMSS are broadly on a par with those available in other Parliaments. However, we are sympathetic to requests for a 'death-in-service' payment to provide for the families of AMSS if tragedy were to strike. The details of how this would be provided will need further work but we will consult on the introduction of a death in service provision for AMSS to the value of two times salary.

We also received requests to lift redundancy payments for AMSS from one and a half times the statutory minimum to two times. Given the position described above in relation to redundancy and continuity of service, and the fact that many AMSS will have long notice of redundancy (eg an AM not seeking re-election), the Board is not minded to make any change to the current redundancy terms which are already above the statutory requirement.

### **Standard contract**

We believe the standard contract benefits both employers and employees and should remain. The only change to the standard contract we propose relates to the period of notice required prior to dismissal/resignation. At the moment, one week's notice is required in the first 12 months of service and four weeks after 12 months. Our proposal is to require one week of notice in the first 3 months of service and 4 weeks notice thereafter.

The Board received calls for the annual leave entitlement for staff to be increased from the current level of 31 days plus public holidays. The Board believes that 31 days is a generous leave entitlement and does not propose to change it.

### **AM Pensions**

The Board considered the responses to our recent consultation on pensions and is grateful to those individuals and groups who took the time to respond. The next step is to issue a further consultation document – before the end of term – that will set out in more detail the new proposed pension scheme for Members. This will be a public consultation exercise but we hope that current Members will also respond.

### **Other business**

The Board agreed the format of its annual report, and also received a briefing on its obligations under Freedom of Information legislation. We reiterated our commitment to work in as open and transparent a manner as practical, and will in future advise consultees that, as far as possible, we intend to make formal consultation responses publicly available through our website (as IPSA has done). In that spirit I also intend to make this letter (and future versions)

publicly available through our website, once Members have had a chance to read it.

As always, I am happy to meet with individual AMs or party groups to discuss any aspects of the Board's work. If you would like to meet, please contact the Board's clerk Gareth Price [remuneration@wales.gov.uk](mailto:remuneration@wales.gov.uk) to make arrangements.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sandy Blair". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Sandy Blair CBE**  
**Cadeirydd / Chair**  
**Bwrdd Taliadau/Remuneration Board**