



Safest People, Safest Places

Combined Fire Authority

14 March 2025

Members Allowances Scheme

Report of the Clerk and the Treasurer

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to provide members with information on the level of allowances for councillors that are appointed onto the Combined Fire Authority (CFA) and to seek approval of the allowances payable from 01 April 2025.

Background

2. County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) is a corporate body and as such is required to have a scheme of allowances. These allowances are set under The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.
3. Regulations require the Authority to determine, prior to the start each financial year, Basic (payable at the same rate to all Members) and Special Responsibility Allowances, together with levels for reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses to Members. The Regulations also provide that, where an automatic uprating methodology is used, this should only apply for a maximum period of four years pending a more substantive review.
4. The Authority leads the Service setting the strategic direction, setting and overseeing the budget and ensuring the delivery of the overall objectives. The Authority is comprised of 25 elected members drawn from two constituent local authorities: Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council.

5. The structure supporting the authority's work as outlined in the constitution is:
 - a) Full authority meetings take place seven times a year which has a nominated Chair, Vice Chair and spokesperson for the minority group.
 - b) A supporting committee structure comprising:
 - a. The Audit & Finance Committee (meeting 4 times a year)
 - b. The Human Resources Committee (meeting 4 times a year)
 - c. The Performance Committee (meeting 4 times per year)
 - c) In addition, there is a bi-annual strategic planning session to update the Authority on important issues outside of the formal process and consult on future plans.
 - d) Finally, there is member representation on the Local Pensions Board which meets bi-annually and the Appointments and Appeals Committee which meet when required.

6. The Chair, Vice Chair, Spokesperson for the minority group as well as the Chair of the sub committees all receive a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) for undertaking that role.

Existing Allowances

7. The initial level of allowances that are paid by the Authority were established in 1996, when Durham Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order came into force. Allowances were set at that time taking account of the allowances that were paid in the two constituent councils in Durham and Darlington.

8. The existing allowances that are paid to Fire Authority members are as follows:

| Allowance Type | Annual Amount (£) | Number of Members | Total Annual Amount (£) |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Basic Allowance | 1,158 | 25 | 28,950 |
| Chair | 10,673 | 1 | 10,637 |
| Vice Chair | 6,595 | 1 | 6,595 |
| Minority Group Spokesperson | 1,738 | 1 | 1,738 |
| Committee Chairs | 1,064 | 3 | 3,192 |
| Total | | | 51,112 |

Constituent Authority Schemes

9. Both Durham County Council (DCC) and Darlington Borough Council (DBC) use independent panels to review their schemes of members allowances.

10. DCC reported the outcomes of their panel recommendations to the Council on 22 January 2025. DBC's last review was undertaken in December 2019 and the Panel's report was considered by Full Council on 30 January 2020.

11. In June 2023, DCC agreed that there would be no further changes to the existing allowances scheme until after the local elections in 2025 but requested that the Panel conduct a fundamental review of the scheme to take account of the changes under the Local Government Boundary Commission Review, which are to be implemented from May 2025. The panel recommended:
- a) The basic allowance is increased by an interim 5% to reflect the reduction in the number of members and is not to be reflected in a linked increase in Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs), which are to be frozen until the review is complete following the elections.
 - b) The basic allowance is increased for 2025, with reference to the September 2024 CPI rate of 1.7% and link further future increases to the CPI for a period of up to 4 years, as permitted by legislation, based on the CPI rate as of September of the preceding year.
12. The Darlington Borough Council independent panel recommended that the Basic Allowance for 2020/21 should be increased subject to any indexation that may apply. In making this recommendation the Panel noted that the Basic Allowance has not increased since 2012 (apart from a two per cent increase in 2017 to compensate for a tax exemption withdrawal). The Panel also noted that the Council had chosen not to increase the Basic Allowance as recommended as part of the 2016 review and that it had also chosen not to apply indexation for the last seven years.
13. In relation to Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA's), the Panel recommended no change in any of the current SRA's payable except for the payment of SRA's to the Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny, the Chair of the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group and the Chair of the Audit Committee. They also recommended that Members continue to claim only one SRA and that any indexation apply to all SRA's.

County Durham and Darlington Fire Authority Member Allowances

14. Taking into account the allowances agreed by both DCC and DBC, it is proposed that the Authority's basic allowances are increased by the September 2024 CPI rate of 1.7% and further future increases are linked to the CPI for a period of up to 4 years, as permitted by legislation, based on the CPI rate as September of the preceding year and SRA's will be frozen at the current rate.
15. Therefore, the revised rates would be as follows:

| Allowance Type | Annual Amount (£) | Number of Members | Total Annual Amount (£) |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Basic Allowance | 1,177 | 25 | 29,425 |
| Chair | 10,673 | 1 | 10,637 |
| Vice Chair | 6,595 | 1 | 6,595 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|---|---------------|
| Minority Group Spokesperson | 1,738 | 1 | 1,738 |
| Committee Chairs | 1,064 | 3 | 3,192 |
| Total | | | 51,587 |

16. All other allowances remain the same. An updated copy of the members allowances guide is attached as Appendix A.

Recommendations

17. Members are requested to:

- a) **Note** and **have regard** to the outcomes of the independent panels for both DCC and DBC.
- b) **Agree** with the recommendation to increase basic allowances by the September 2024 CPI rate of 1.7% from 01 April 2025 and further future increases are linked to the CPI for a period of up to 4 years, as permitted by legislation, based on the CPI rate as September of the preceding year
- c) **Agree** that SRA's will be frozen at the current rate.