

[Private and Confidential*]

SLARC Final Report - Recommendations for Councillors' Remuneration and Expenses

Summary and Recommendations

The Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC) was reconvened in April 2023 to undertake an independent review of councillor remuneration, having last reported in 2011. The report details 22 findings pertaining to issues including remuneration, support, councillor training, expenses and public image of local government. Of the 22 recommendations 8 are within the control of local government either in collaboration with partners or to be undertaken individually.

This paper invites Leaders to:

- i. Note the contents of the report and agree an initial position on the SLARC report to allow for a COSLA response.
- ii. This report also asks for a clear steer on the recommendations to guide the work of COSLA officers in lobbying, work planning and partnership building.

References

Previous reports on [topic / include URL if available]:

- LSB24017 – Scottish Local Authority Remuneration Committee (SLARC) Final Report – February 2024
- LSB23080 Councillor Remuneration – November 2023

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Purpose

1. This report provides Leaders with an overview of the final report by the Scottish Local Authority Remuneration Committee (SLARC) to be published on Friday 16th February. This report invites Leaders to provide a steer on the COSLA response to the report and agree initial next steps. (The final SLARC report should be available on the Scottish Government website and a link will be sent to all elected members via the elected members briefing on the 16th of February 2024).

Current COSLA Position

2. SLARC was reconvened in April 2023 to undertake an independent review of Councillor remuneration, having last reported in 2011. The final report sets out the remit set by Scottish Government and COSLA. It describes how the committee engaged with local government and other stakeholders, the techniques applied, the evidence considered and the committee's findings.
3. SLARC was asked to consider the following: workload and responsibilities of councillors, use of social media and other technology, increase in formal committee meetings, breakdown of the average time spent carrying out duties.
4. Evidence for the committee's conclusions is linked to two main areas: the Councillor survey which received responses from 64% of all Councillors. The second set of evidence comes from council engagement sessions which the committee undertook between July and August 2023.
5. The committee highlighted how the report is evidence based and produced a table showing the links between the recommendations, the remit and the evidence they gathered, a copy of this is included as **Appendix 1**.

What is changing?

6. In recommendation 6 SLARC proposes setting councillors' salaries at 80% of the median salary for all employees in the public sector in Scotland as published in the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). This results in an annual salary of **£24,561** with effect from 1 April 2024, if accepted into the current Scottish Government budget 2024/2025.
7. The publication of the final SLARC report will have implications for several work streams, should Leaders decide to adopt the relevant recommendations. This will have implications for internal work linked to the barriers to elected office special interest group but will also have implication for external partnerships. For example, recommendation 13 specifically focuses on the joint work between COSLA and Police Scotland on Councillor safety which is set out in the COSLA-Police Scotland-SPA Partnership Delivery Plan 2022-2027. Recommendations 16, 17, 19 and 20 may also require collaboration with the Improvement Service and other bodies.

8. The timing of the final report is unfortunate due to the publication of the Scottish Government budget for 2024/2025 having been on the 19th December 2023. It had previously been hoped that the report would be published, and the recommendations considered prior to the budget. This therefore places barriers to implementation during the coming financial year. The delays in publication are for a range of practical factors including the committee convening 3 months later than initially intended.

Proposed COSLA Position


9. Leaders are asked for a clear steer on the SLARC recommendations that fall within the remit of local government. If accepted COSLA will progress these recommendations through the work of the Barriers to Elected Office special interest group and provide updates to Leaders as appropriate.
10. On the recommendations that fall outside the scope of local government Leaders are asked for any initial reflections and may wish to include these in a public response or provide a steer to officers for discussions with Scottish Government and other partners. Attention is drawn to discussions of full time/part time councillors, changes to council bandings, the continued link to ASHE and the linking of the Leader's salary in current Band D to that of an MSP. More details on these recommendations can be found in **Appendix 2** under 'Recommendations for Scottish Government Action'.
11. Leaders are asked for a clear steer on whether comment should be made on the reports timing in relation to the Scottish Government budget 2024/2025.

Next Steps

12. Officers have been working with SLARC to organise an online seminar that can be rolled out to all elected members. Leaders are asked to take a view on if this would be helpful.
13. It will be for the Scottish Government to accept or reject the recommendations set out in the report. COSLA Leaders are asked to comment on the full report and provide a collective view either accepting or rejecting those recommendations which fall within local government control, as set out in **Appendix 2**.

Date Considered:
23 February 2024

Contribution to agreed COSLA Plan and Verity House Agreement:

	Priority Areas	
	Strengthen Local Democracy	√
	Secure Sustainable Funding	√
	Improve the Wellbeing of Individuals, Families and Communities	
	Enhance Education and Support for our Children and Young People	
	Deliver a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy	
	Support the Most Vulnerable in our Communities	
Verity House Agreement	Shared Priorities	
	Tackling Poverty	
	Just transition to net zero	
	Sustainable Public Services	√

APPENDIX 1

The table below is taken from page 44-48 of the final SLARC report and sets out which areas of the remit each recommendation responds to and the evidence it draws on to support these conclusions.

SLARC's Remit and Recommendations

Table 7 – SLARC Recommendations

Theme	Recommendations	Evidence
Council bandings	R1 On the basis of the evidence gathered, the Committee recommends that the role of councillor continues to be fulfilled on a part-time basis, while the role of Senior Councillors is likely to require to be fulfilled on a full-time basis.	SLARC Councillors' Survey returns Council Engagement Sessions
	R2 Notwithstanding R1 above, the Committee recommends that the definitions "full-time" and "part-time" should no longer be applied when describing the role of councillors, and that the role should be treated as a public office within Scotland's democratic processes, as is the case for MPs and MSPs.	SLARC Governance Survey
	R3 The Committee recommends that all 10 councils currently within Band A should be funded to enable the appointment of up to a maximum of 10 Senior Councillors, and that no other changes to the maximum numbers of Senior Councillors in Bands B, C and D are required.	Council Engagement Sessions. SLARC analytical work
	R4 The Committee recommends that all councils currently within Band A should move into Band B, and that there should be no change to the councils currently within Bands C and D.	
	R5 The Committee recommends that all bandings are reviewed by SLARC in advance of each Council election.	
Remuneration	R6 The Committee recommends that the salaries of councillors be set at 80% of the median salary for all employees in the public sector in Scotland as published in the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) resulting in an annual salary of £24,581 with effect from 1 April 2024.	SLARC Councillors' Survey returns Council Engagement Sessions

	<p>R7 The Committee recommends that this proportionate link to median public sector salaries in Scotland is accepted as the methodology on which councillor salaries are established.</p>	SLARC analytical work
	<p>R8 The Committee recommends that the salaries of Council Leaders in the current Band D (Glasgow and Edinburgh) are benchmarked at the salary of a Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP).</p>	
	<p>R9 The Committee recommends that the salaries of Council Leaders in the current Band C be set at 85% of the salary of those in current Band D; and those in the combined Bands A and B be set at 70% of the salary of those in the current Band D (Table 5, Page 36).</p>	
	<p>R10 The Committee recommends that the salaries of Civic Heads and Senior Councillors continue to be set at up to a maximum of 75% of the salary of their Council Leader (Table 5, Page 36).</p>	
	<p>R11 The Committee recommends that the salaries of all councillors continue to be uplifted on an annual basis as per the current arrangements introduced in 2017, which are in line with the median increase in earnings of public sector employees in Scotland, as published by the ASHE.</p>	
Councillors' Expenses	<p>R12 The Committee recommends that the current regulations (2010) on councillors' expenses for travel, subsistence and accommodation should be replaced by the provisions applying to officers in their respective Councils.</p>	<p>SLARC Councillors' Survey returns</p> <p>Council Engagement Sessions</p> <p>SLARC analytical work</p>
Use of Social Media	<p>R13 The Committee recognises the joint work underway by COSLA and Police Scotland aimed at tackling the issue of councillors' safety, including online safety, and recommends that training and resources for councillors should continue to be developed and kept under review by both organisations.</p>	<p>SLARC Councillors' Survey returns</p> <p>Council Engagement Sessions</p> <p>SLARC analytical work</p>

Resettlement Payments	R14 The Committee recommends that resettlement (severance) payments are introduced for councillors losing office. This should be modelled on the system applied to MSPs and should be in place for the next election cycle.	SLARC Councillors' Survey returns Council Engagement Sessions SLARC analytical work
Councillors' Activities	R15 The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government considers whether existing legislation needs to be reviewed to strengthen requirements on councillors to perform their duties. Given the Committee's recommended link of councillor pay to 80% of median public sector pay, councils should monitor and report upon councillor activity levels and attendance at formal council meetings.	SLARC Councillors' Survey returns Council Engagement Sessions
Governance Reviews	R16 The Committee recommends that all councils should review their internal and partnership governance arrangements, to assure themselves that councillors are able to fulfil their statutory duties.	SLARC Governance Survey SLARC Councillors' Survey Council Engagement Sessions
Councillor Training and Development	R17 The Committee recommends that all councils continue to provide induction for new councillors as well as ongoing topic-based training using a variety of delivery methods to ensure maximum take-up. It is important when these opportunities are provided, that councillors take advantage of them, and participation levels should be reported publicly.	SLARC Governance Survey SLARC Councillors' Survey Council Engagement Sessions
Recognising the role of Councils and Councillors	R18 The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government and COSLA make a joint public statement endorsing the important role played by councils and councillors in delivering a wide range of critical local services. This statement should spearhead a wider multi-media public awareness campaign between now and the next Council Election, designed to raise	SLARC Councillors' Survey Council Engagement Sessions Councillor role descriptions

	public awareness and encourage potential candidates to stand for office.	
Preparation of Candidates	R19 The Committee recommends that COSLA develops a Pre-Election Induction Programme for potential council candidates. This should provide potential candidates with an accurate understanding of the role of the councillor and the demands they are likely to face. This should also contain details of how political parties will support candidates before, during and after their election campaign, including unsuccessful candidates.	SLARC Councillors' Survey Council Engagement Sessions
National Dataset	R20 The Committee recommends the establishment of a national dataset showing the demographic composition of the country's councillors, and how this is changing. Over-time, such data will identify key population groups who continue to be under-represented within councils to enable action to be taken to remove barriers and enable wider participation.	SLARC Councillors' Survey Council Engagement Sessions
People with Disabilities	R21 The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government and COSLA, working alongside representatives drawn from all under-represented groups, should consider how best to enhance supports for councillors in these groups, and develop proposals to support, encourage and enable more people from under-represented groups to stand for office, particularly women, young people and people with a disability.	SLARC Councillors' Survey Council Engagement Sessions SLARC analytical work
Office Support	R22 The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government and COSLA work together to ensure adequate provision is made to provide a minimum level of Members Support Services.	SLARC Councillors' Survey Council Engagement Sessions SLARC analytical work

APPENDIX 2

Summary of SLARC recommendations

Recommendations for Scottish Government Action

- **R1/R2** the role of Councillor can be fulfilled on a part time basis while the role of Senior Councillors is more likely to require a full-time commitment. The role should however continue to be viewed as a public office and therefore the definitions of full and part time should no longer be applied.
- **R3/R4/R5** all councils currently in band A should move to band B this will include increasing the maximum number of senior Councillors to 10 in the smallest councils. The committee also recommends that these bandings be reviewed by SLARC in advance of each council election.
- **R6/R7/R11** Councillor salaries will be set at 80% of the median salary for all employees in the public sector in Scotland as published in the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) resulting in an annual salary of **£24,581 with effect from 1 April 2024**. The committee also recommends that this link with ASHE is accepted as the methodology on which Councillor salaries are established. The committee also recommends that the salaries of all Councillors continue to be uplifted on an annual basis as per the current arrangements introduced in 2017.
- **R8/R9** the salaries of Council Leaders in the current band D (Glasgow and Edinburgh) are benchmarked at the salary of an MSP. Band C to be set at 85% of band D and band A/B to be set at 70% of band D.
- **R10** the salaries of the Civic Heads should continue to be set at 75% of the salary of their Council Leader.
- **R12** the committee recommends that the 2010 regulations on Councillor expenses for travel, subsistence and accommodation should be replaced by the provisions applying to officers in their respective Councils.
- **R14** recommends that a resettlement (severance) payment should be introduced for Councillors losing office, modeled on the current arrangements for MSPs. This should be in place for the next election cycle.
- **R15** recommends that the Scottish Government considers whether legislation needs to be reviewed to strengthen requirements on Councillors to perform their duties.

Recommendations for COSLA action

- **R13** recognition of the joint work between COSLA and Police Scotland on Councillor safety. Recommends that training and resources for Councillors should continue to be developed and kept under view by both organisations.
- **R16** all Councils should review their internal and partnership governance agreements, to assure themselves that Councillors are able to fulfil their statutory duties.
- **R17/ R19** Councils should continue to provide induction for new Councillors as well as ongoing topic-based training, with participation levels publicly reported. Additionally, COSLA should develop a pre-election induction program for potential council candidates, including details on the role of the councillor, and how political parties will support candidates before, during and after an election.
- **R20** establishment of a national dataset showing the demographic composition of the country's Councillors and how this is changing.

Recommendations for joint Scottish Government / COSLA action

- **R18** COSLA and Scottish Government should make a joint public statement endorsing the important role played by Councils and Councillors in delivering a

wide range of critical local services. This statement should spearhead a multimedia public awareness campaign to raise encourage potential candidates to stand for office in the next election.

- **R21** COSLA and Scottish Government should work with under-represented groups to consider how best to enhance support for Councillors in these groups and encourage more people to stand for office.
- **R22** COSLA and Scottish Government should work together to provide a minimum level of member support.