

DLG 05

Ymchwiliad i amrywiaeth ym maes llywodraeth leol

Inquiry into diversity in local government

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Merthyr Tudful

Response from: Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council unreservedly agrees that elected members need the perspective of the diverse social groups they represent; and the best way to achieve this is for the Councillors to reflect that diversity within the Council Chamber.

In our opinion, formal education has to be the most influential way of establishing a young person's understanding of the democratic process. If a person understands what they are doing and why, they are more likely to become involved. We are hopeful that the recent introduction of representation from the Borough Wide Youth Forum (MTBWYF) on each of Merthyr Tydfil CBC's five Scrutiny Committees and the potential reduction in the voting age, will open doors for us to speak to young people before they leave compulsory education. At the moment, unless a student stays to study 'A' levels they leave school before they're old enough to vote and if their families don't vote, or they don't know what to do and are put off voting the first time, this very often sets a pattern for their future adult life.

We also recognise an opportunity to promote the fact that elected members are paid a salary, and an associated need to widely publicise exactly what the role involves and what training and support is available for successful candidates. This would hopefully reassure anyone thinking of standing for election that the public recognises the need for an appropriate salary because of the significant nature of the contributions made by local councillors. It would also alleviate concerns of their ability to hold office due to physical disabilities or 'qualifications' for example, which, in our opinion, makes promotion an expedient means of encouraging more long term unemployed, carers, single parents and disabled people to stand for election if they knew what was expected of them, and could be confident of the appropriate support.

Suggestions in the Green Paper: Strengthening Local Government: Delivering for People that alluded to changes in structure assisting in the support of diversity are unlikely to achieve success without positive promotion of the role of elected members. The current position does the opposite, by actually encouraging critical reproach and an example of the system doing exactly this and having a detrimental effect on engagement is demonstrated in the attached article that was published by a local newspaper last week, where the salaries of elected members were compared, without explanation, in a deliberate attempt to cause public discord. We will continue to have difficulty encouraging diversity until the role of an elected member is held in the high regard it deserves.

How much our councillors have claimed in past year

HAVE you ever wondered what and how much councillors claim for on their expenses?

Figures recently published by Merthyr Tydfil Council show just that. Each year, councils legally have to publish data which shows councillors' basic salaries, travel allowances, senior salaries and pension contributions, among other things.

In total, just under £584,000 was paid in remuneration to councillors in Merthyr Tydfil in 2017-18.

■ **Salaries**
During the past financial year, £238,000 was paid in basic salaries for councillors in Merthyr Tydfil and £351,000 in senior

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salaries for executive members.

The highest senior salary paid by the council was to the leader Kevin O'Neill, * independent, who got £35,000 in addition to his basic allowance.

The lowest being just over £2,200 paid to councillors Gareth Jones, Thomas Lewis and former leader of the opposition Richard Thomas.

The highest basic salary was more than £14,000, paid to Labour's Councillor Clive Jones, and the lowest was just over £1,300, paid to former councillors Simon Williams, Leighton

Smart, Anthony Chaplin, David Davies, Allan Jones, Brian Mansbridge, John McCarthy and Michael O'Neill. Former mayor councillor Kevin Gibbs received £16,000 in his civic salary.

■ **Travel expenses**
Last year four councillors claimed for a travel allowance.

Councillor Ernie Galsworthy, Labour, claimed for £1,428 and the leader Kevin O'Neill, independent, claimed for £176.

Councillor Harvey Jones, Labour, claimed for £45 and former councillor Richard Thomas claimed £37. Councillor Galsworthy also claimed £631 in subsistence allowance.

■ **Payments from other**

public bodies
Councillor Kevin Gibbs received £736 for being part of the South Wales Police and Crime Panel and more than £1,200 for his role on the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service panel.

Councillor Tony Rogers, independent, received more than £2,400 related to his role on the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and former councillor Raymond Thomas received nearly £530 for this.

■ **Co-opted members**
Allowances were also given to various non councillors who have been co-opted on to committees.

This totalled just under

£4,800 for nine members, with the highest amount (£891) given to David Allan Gibby, who was co-opted on to the audit committee.

■ **Pension contributions**
More than £14,000 was paid to councillors in pension contributions, with the highest being just over £1,600 for deputy leader of the council Lisa Mytton, and the lowest being around £79 to the former opposition leader Richard Thomas and former councillor Allan Jones, although some councillors did not receive a council pension contribution.

Some councillors opted to forgo as much as 2% of their allowances.

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