

**Draft Response to Consultation by the
Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales**

Flintshire County Council makes the following comments on the draft annual report issued by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRPW) for consultation.

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1. The council recognises and agrees with the IRPW that in the current economic climate it is not appropriate to increase the amount that is paid to individual members or co-opted members of the council.

Pages 5, 6 & 18

2. The council believes that there should be an increase in the maximum percentage of members that are eligible to receive what the IRPW calls senior salaries. Flintshire has 70 members and the current cap limits senior salaries to less than 25% of the membership. Flintshire obtained specific approval from the IRPW to pay what was then a special responsibility allowance to the Chair of the Clwyd Pension Fund, yet this is not taken into account in capping the number of members that can receive such payments.

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3. Flintshire does not agree with the withdrawal of local choice arising from paragraphs 3.9 and 3.10 of the draft report. Each council's circumstances are different. Flintshire, for example, has a relatively large number of Overview & Scrutiny Committees at six. It does not have one large opposition group but a number of smaller groups. The largest group without a seat on the council's Cabinet is the Independent Alliance Group of 9 members. If not withstanding the representations the council makes the Panel decides to implement paragraphs 3.9 and 3.10 then it should at least increase the cap on the proportion of members eligible to receive so called senior salaries.
4. The council believes that the IRPW should revert to making annual payments to co-optees rather than payments according to meetings attended. The council responded to initial consultation pointing out that the change would generate extra administrative and bureaucratic work and experience has shown this to be the case. If the IRPW is not prepared to revert to the previous annual payments, it should at least amend eligibility so that attendance at training and briefing meetings, qualify for payments.

Pages 7 – 9

5. The council welcomes the proposals in chapter 4 and in particular, leaving it to the local choice of town and community councils as to whether or not to implement the payments to its members.

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6. The council disagrees with the proposal in paragraph 6.1 on page 13 that implementation of the report will be effective from the date of the annual meeting of each relevant authority. The council believes that implementation should be from the same date for each authority as has been the practice to-date. Ideally the same date should be the 1 April 2013. Whilst an item relating to members' allowances can always be put on the annual meeting agenda, it can not be guaranteed that the meeting will take a decision on it.

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7. The council disagrees with the proposal in paragraph (viii), third bullet point that the annual public declarations of payments to members should include payments from all public service appointments held by elected members. This paragraph is prejudging the separate consultation by the Welsh Government on this issue. The council agrees with the need for transparency but believes this is best done by the individual public bodies themselves publicising the payments they make. For county councils to do so it generates additional work which delays the publication of the annual figures. It also confuses the public who believe that such payments are being made by the county council rather than by the separate public body. If notwithstanding the council's representations this is to proceed then county councils need to be given the powers to require the prompt provision of such information from all public service bodies.
8. In relation to the fourth bullet point under paragraph (viii) on page 19, the council reiterates its previous representation that it is not in a position to negotiate such block tax dispensations for its councillors and any such negotiations should be undertaken on an all Wales level rather than by the individual authorities.

Page 20

9. In relation to reimbursement of mileage expenses, the draft report is ambiguous. Page 20, paragraph i) starts by saying that the Panel has decided there will be no change in 2013/14 to mileage rates that can be claimed for travel but then goes on to state that all authorities may only reimburse travel expenses for their members and co-opted members at current HMRC rates. At present Flintshire pays its members and co-opted members 40p per mile (up to 10,000 miles in the year) and would wish to retain its local choice whether to continue such payments or increase them to the HMRC rate of 45p per mile. In an e-mail of the 9 August 2012 it has

been indicated that the Panel intends to address the ambiguity on page 20 of its report by requiring mileage claims to be paid at the full HMRC rate rather than a lesser rate. The council believes there should be no change to the existing arrangements and that HMRC rates should just be the maxima that can be paid.

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10. Annex 2, paragraph 1 (b) is inaccurate as the definition in (a) is for the regulations in annex 2. The regulations in annex 2 differ from those that came into force on the 1 April 2012. If the IRPW is going to change the regulations each year then paragraph 1 needs to have separate definitions for each year's regulations.