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Ariane Burgess MSP
Convener
Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

By email: localgov.committee@parliament.scot

5 October 2022

Dear Ariane,

I am aware that your Committee has been exploring ways of supporting the promotion of more diverse local representation in Local Government and has undertaken an inquiry into understanding barriers to elected office. I therefore thought it would be helpful to write to you to provide an update on the work we have been jointly progressing with COSLA around reviewing Councillor remuneration.

At the start of this year, COSLA published the findings of its Barriers to Elected Office Special Interest Group's survey on Councillor remuneration, which suggested the current remuneration provided to Councillors fails to adequately reflect the current breadth of duties undertaken by them or to recognise the number of hours they work. They were clear that low pay was a major barrier to recruiting and retraining Councillors. I held a meeting with the COSLA Presidential Team to discuss those findings and we issued a joint [statement](#) on 18 February confirming we were committed to undertaking an independent review of Councillor remuneration.

Having explored options for taking forward this one-off review it was clear that we had to reconstitute the Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC), which was previously stood down in 2013. SLARC was established under the provisions of the Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 to advise Scottish Ministers on the payment by Local Authorities of remuneration (including pensions), allowances and the reimbursement of expenses incurred by local authority Councillors in accordance with criteria specified by Scottish Ministers as required. As SLARC is the body recognised to recommend any changes to remuneration, it would not be appropriate to deal with the matters SLARC is established in law to provide advice on without reconstituting the body.

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My officials have been working to progress this over the last few months and the [advert](#) for the Convener and Member appointments to SLARC was published on 23 September. It is expected that the Committee will be up and running at the start of next year and they should report, with recommendations, by 31 August 2023. For your information, I have attached a copy of the Committee's remit as an Annex.

I am keen that we attract a diverse range of applicants and raise as much awareness of this advert as possible. If you or your committee members are aware of any suitable candidates, then please feel free to share details of the SLARC advert with them.

I hope this information is helpful and I will endeavour to keep you updated on this work as it progresses.

Best regards,

BEN MACPHERSON

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Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC)

Questions for SLARC to consider, and to consider how evidence can be collected

- Q1.** Has the workload and responsibilities of Councillors increased and become more complex?
- Q2.** Has the use of email, social media and other digital platforms increased pressure on councillors and increased demands from their constituents, including expecting speedier responses?
- Q3.** Has there been an increase in formal committee meetings (and the duration of these meetings) and informal meetings, such as working groups within a council?
- Q4.** What is the breakdown of the average time spent by a Councillor carrying out their day to day duties e.g. committee meetings, constituent queries etc?

Draft Remit

The Committee is asked to review the remuneration of all Councillors and consider whether the present levels of remuneration, for ordinary and senior Councillors, are appropriate for the current context.

In making recommendations the committee should consider:

- i. The workload of Councillors, including advising whether the role of an ordinary councillor should now be considered as full time rather than part time. If still part time, which proportion of their time should be required to enable them to reasonably undertake their council duties and role as a local representative in their respective ward.
- ii. The responsibilities of Councillors, particularly those in senior positions, and whether the numbers to hold senior positions should be revised, and if so whether this should be across all or only for specific individual councils.
- iii. Whether the mechanism introduced in 2017 to align Councillors' annual pay increase to the percentage increase in the median annual earnings of public sector workers in Scotland remains appropriate, or consider what alternative arrangements should be adopted.

In addition, the Committee should assist the Scottish Government to review and amend the [Councillors' Remuneration: Remuneration, Allowances and Expenses – Guidance](#), which has not been revised since April 2010.

The Committee is also asked to review whether the current methodology for determining the banding of councils is appropriate and, if so, if the current bands allocated to councils remains accurate.

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Criteria

Recommendations from SLARC should:

- establish whether the role of a modern-day ordinary Councillor is full time or part-time and what the commensurate pay for that work should be;
- seek to ensure that remuneration does not act as a barrier to encouraging people to stand for elected office;
- encourage a wider and more diverse range of people with varied lived experience from across our communities to stand for elected office; and
- be affordable on an ongoing basis.

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