

# Councillors' allowances

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## Introduction

Many councillors in local government across the UK receive modest allowances appropriate to the work they do representing taxpayers. Yet while many councillors' workload is extensive, there are rarely appropriate metrics used in the determination of pay. People who live just miles apart from each other may be represented by councillors who have similar workloads but are entitled to vastly different allowances. The disparities between unitary, district and county council allowances in England are most obvious, but such trends can be seen across the UK.

In a time of increasing pressure on local authority resources, it is essential that every penny is spent wisely. Given that allowances are often set by councillors themselves, elected representatives must avoid any perception of feathering their own nests while the vast majority put up council tax. Now more than ever, excessive allowance payments to councillors are difficult to justify.

## Key findings

- The **total sum** of all councillor allowance payments made in the UK in **2018-19** was **£255 million**. This was an increase of 1.8 per cent from 2017-18, when the figure was **£251 million**.
- The highest **basic allowance** in the **UK** in 2018-19 was set by the Scottish remuneration panel at **£16,994** for **all Scottish local authorities**. Of the 32 councils, 26 Scottish authorities paid the maximum basic allowance to their councillors.
- The highest **basic allowance** for councillors in England in 2018-19 was **£16,926**, paid by **Manchester city council**. This was paid to all members of the council including Sir Richard Leese - the leader of Manchester city council. He also received an additional £42,272 in special responsibility allowance. The total payment he received was more than two and a half times median earnings in Manchester during 2019<sup>1</sup>.
- The highest **basic allowance** in **Northern Ireland** in 2018-19 was set by the Department for Communities at £14,775 for **all Northern Irish local authorities**. Of the ten councils, eight Northern Irish authorities paid the maximum basic allowance to their councillors.
- The highest **basic allowance** in **Wales** in 2018-19 was set by the Welsh remuneration panel at £13,600 for **all Welsh local authorities**. Of the 22 councils, 18 Welsh authorities paid the maximum basic allowance to their councillors.
- The highest **basic allowance** for a unitary council in **England** in 2018-19 was **£14,189**, paid by Cornwall.
- The lowest **basic allowance** for councillors in the UK in 2018-19 was **£687**, paid by **Torbay**.
- The highest **special responsibility allowance** in the UK in 2018-19 was **£82,620** paid by **Newham**. This was a £781 increase from 2017-18 for the directly elected mayor.
- The lowest **special responsibility allowance** made in the UK in 2018-19 was **£2,333**, also paid by Torbay.

[Click here to see the full dataset](#)

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<sup>1</sup>ONS, *Earnings and hours worked, place of residence by local authority: ASHE Table 8.7a*, 29 October 2019, [www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/placeofresidencebylocalauthorityshetable8](http://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/placeofresidencebylocalauthorityshetable8), (accessed 15 December 2020).

## UK councillor allowances 2018-19

Table 1: basic allowance figures by region

Region	Highest basic allowance (£)	Lowest basic allowance (£)
East Midlands	Nottinghamshire: 14,325	High Peak: 3,002
East of England	Essex: 12,000	Castle Point: 3,550
London	Brent: 12,000	Kingston upon Thames: 8,086
North East	Northumberland: 14,004	Middlesbrough: 6,363
North West	Manchester: 16,926	Barrow-in-Furness: 2,522
South East	Kent: 15,086	Eastbourne: 2,808
South West	Cornwall: 14,189	Torbay: 687
West Midlands	Birmingham: 16,547	Staffordshire Moorlands: 2,902
Yorkshire and the Humber	Leeds: 15,381	Richmondshire: 3,000
Northern Ireland	Department for Communities set the maximum basic allowance level at 14,775 <sup>2</sup>	Belfast: 14,200
Scotland	Remuneration panel set the maximum basic allowance level at 16,994 <sup>3</sup>	North Ayrshire: 16,926
Wales	Remuneration panel set the maximum basic allowance level at 13,600 <sup>4</sup>	Isle of Anglesey: 13,567

Table 2: special responsibility figures by region

Region	Highest special responsibility (£)	Lowest special responsibility (£)
East Midlands	Leicester: 60,047	High Peak: 9,905
East of England	Essex: 53,804	Harlow: 6,515
London	Newham: 82,620	Westminster: 4,989
North East	Middlesbrough: 63,625	North Tyneside: 10,512
North West	Liverpool: 81,668	Pendle: 4,000
South East	Kent: 48,425	Epsom and Ewell: 3,757
South West	Wiltshire: 51,056	Torbay: 2,333
West Midlands	Birmingham: 50,000	Redditch: 6,669
Yorkshire and Humber	Leeds: 38,619	Craven: 8,170
Scotland	Edinburgh: 50,986	Clackmannanshire: 9,670
Wales	Bridgend: 48,275	Monmouthshire: 16,700
Northern Ireland	Belfast: 29,000	Antrim and Newtownabbey: 5,411

<sup>2</sup> Department for Communities, *LG 12/2018 Covering Letter*, April 2018.

<sup>3</sup> The Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 (Remuneration) Amendment Regulations 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales, *Annual Report 2018/19*, 2018.

## Highest basic allowances across the UK

Scottish and Welsh basic allowance and special responsibility allowance rates are set by a remuneration panel. In Northern Ireland the highest level of basic allowance payments is determined by the Department for Communities. Basic allowance payments in non-English councils varied only slightly to the figure set by their respective remuneration panel or departmental recommendation. Therefore, English councils can be better compared with each other to show disparities in basic allowance payments.

Below are the maximum figures set by remuneration panels for maximum basic allowance payments to councillors in each devolved nation in the previous two financial years.

**Table 3: basic allowances in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, 2017-18 and 2018-19**

Country	2017-18	2018-19
Northern Ireland	14,485	14,775
Scotland	16,927	16,994
Wales	13,400	13,600

Tables 3 and 4 show the ten highest basic allowance payments in England over the previous two financial years.

**Table 4: top ten highest basic allowance payments in England, 2017-18**

Local authority	Type of authority	Basic allowance (£)
Manchester	Metropolitan district	16,614
Birmingham	Metropolitan district	16,267
Leeds	Metropolitan district	15,153
Kent	County council	14,530
Nottinghamshire	County council	13,917
Cornwall	Unitary authority	13,741
Coventry	Metropolitan district	13,687
Bradford	Metropolitan district	13,463
Durham	Unitary authority	13,300
Kirklees	Metropolitan district	13,099

**Table 5: top ten highest basic allowance payments in England, 2018-19**

Local authority	Type of authority	Basic allowance (£)
Manchester	Metropolitan district	16,926
Birmingham	Metropolitan district	16,547
Leeds	Metropolitan district	15,381
Kent	County council	15,086
Nottinghamshire	County council	14,325
Cornwall	Unitary authority	14,189
Northumberland	Unitary authority	14,004
Coventry	Metropolitan district	13,825
Bradford	Metropolitan district	13,463
Kirklees Borough	Metropolitan district	13,360

## Highest special responsibility allowance in UK

Special responsibility allowances are paid to council members holding portfolio or cabinet positions, or any other responsibilities an ordinary member does not fulfil, such as directly elected mayors. The highest payments are usually made to council leaders and deputy leaders. However, some councils include a mayoral allowance for those which have a directly elected mayor.

**Table 6: top ten highest special responsibility allowance payments in the UK, 2017-18**

Local authority	Type of authority	Special responsibility allowance (£)
Newham	London borough	81,839
Liverpool	Metropolitan district	80,177
Lewisham	London borough	67,910
Middlesbrough	Unitary council	63,140
Bedford	Unitary council	62,552
Leicester	Unitary council	58,870
Hillingdon	London borough	54,911
Mansfield	District council	54,863
Greenwich	London borough	52,458
Essex	County council	53,320

**Table 7: top ten highest special responsibility allowance payments in the UK, 2018-19**

Local authority	Type of authority	Special responsibility allowance (£)
Newham	London borough	82,620
Liverpool	Metropolitan district	81,668
Middlesbrough	Unitary council	63,625
Lewisham	London borough	62,538
Leicester	Unitary council	60,047
Kensington and Chelsea	London borough	56,429
Hillingdon	London borough	56,009
Mansfield	District council	54,863
Essex	County council	53,804
Southwark	London borough	53,239

## Methodology

The total number of councillors is based on names provided in allowance payments made to councillors in statement of accounts and scheme of allowances. The figure excludes co-opted members where the council clearly distinguished elected and co-opted members. Co-opted members are unelected members invited to join the council because of their expertise and knowledge in a certain area. Co-opted members allowances were manually removed from the total expenditure on allowances where they were distinguished in the data. Where a spreadsheet showing payments made was not available, we used the council's constitution to determine the number of councillors.

The number of names on payments made in publications does not always correlate with the number of seats in the council's constitution. This is often due to elections, resignations and deaths which count members' allowances for a number of months where payment is eligible.

Total allowances were defined as the total value of payments of the basic allowance plus the total of any special responsibility allowances paid to councillors in a financial year such as transport, subsistence or other expenses like childcare. Pension contributions and national insurance contributions were not included in this total.

The total cost of allowances figure was usually found on the payments made publication or within councils' statement of accounts. On other occasions, the columns were added in the payments made spreadsheet where a total was not provided.

The basic allowance is the basic sum a member can claim. Where possible, this report has used the payments made to councillors' document to determine the council's basic allowance. The figures often vary for basic allowance levels and some councillors may receive more or less. The date in which the member assumed office could mean they received less payment than other members in that financial year.

This report has taken the highest basic allowance payment as the council's basic allowance rate for all councillors. The highest payment was chosen because it provides a more accurate reflection of allowance entitlement. Variations in payments of basic allowances were usually down to deaths, resignations and elections. For non-English councils, this report has used the basic allowance figure provided in the payment made spreadsheet. Most basic allowance payments to Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish councillors correlate with their respective remuneration panel maximum figure. However, some councils paid their members less. Where we could not distinguish clearly the level of basic allowance payment, we assumed that the council paid the maximum remuneration panel figure. On balance, most councils paid the panel or department recommended rate.

Where the basic allowance and special responsibility allowance are amalgamated into a single figure, this paper has deducted the basic allowance from the figure to show the special allowance payment received by a member.

Due to the ad hoc nature of the council's transparency and online data, freedom of information requests were also sent to all UK councils.

The 2017-18 and 2018-19 financial years were used for comparative purposes and constitute the latest fully available data. The 2019-20 figures were excluded because many councils are yet to provide the information in publicly available sources.