



Councillors' allowances

Councillors' Allowances are governed by Statute

Provision is made for the following types of payments

(a) Allowances:

- (i) Basic Allowance
- (ii) Special Responsibility Allowance
- (iii) Civic Dignitaries Allowance
- (iv) Dependants' Carers' Allowance
- (v) District Policing and Community Safety Partnership Allowances (DPCSP)

(b) Expenses:

- (i) Travel
- (ii) Subsistence

Belfast City Council follows the instructions set out by the Department of Environment in 'Guidance on Allowance' March 2012 and further circular updates.¹

(a) Allowances:

(i) Basic Allowances

A Basic Allowance is intended to recognise the time commitment of all Councillors, including such inevitable calls on their time as meetings with officers and constituents, including "Approved Duties". Basic Allowance is also intended to cover incidental costs incurred by Councillors in their official capacity, such as the use of their homes.

Councillors on the Existing Council Only

- Councillors who remain as Members of the Existing Belfast City Council receive an annual basic allowance of **£9,889** payable monthly in arrears with effect from 1 April 2014. Councillors received a 2.2% pay increase from 1 January 2015, therefore, the total amount can be broken down as follows: 9/12 of £9,835 = £7,376 plus 3/12 of £10,051 = £2,513. This will be funded by the existing Belfast City Council.

Councillors on the Shadow Council Only

- Councillors who are elected to the Shadow Council in May and who are not existing Councillors of Belfast City Council will receive a basic allowance of **£8,250** payable

¹ Circular No. LG 09/2014 20 March 2014, and LG 46/2014 December 2014

monthly with effect from 1st June, 2014 which is 7/12 of £9,835 = £5,737 (Jun/Dec) plus 3/12 of £10,051 = £2,513 (Jan/Mar). This will be funded by the NI Executive.

Councillors on both the Existing Council and the Shadow Council

- Councillors will receive 2/12 (Apr/May) of the annual allowance of £9,835 (2/12 of £9,835 = £1,639 funded by the existing Belfast City Council).
- With effect from June 2014 to March 2015 (10 months) a Member on both Councils will receive 10/12 of the payment received by Members of the Shadow Council which is £8,250 (7/12 of £9,835 = £5,737 (Jun/Dec) plus 3/12 of £10,051 = £2,513 (Jan/Mar) funded by NI Executive).
- And also, 10/12 of 50% of the payment received by a member of the existing Belfast City Council which is £4,125 (7/12 of 50% of £9,835 = £2,869 plus 3/12 of 50% of £10,051 = £1,256 funded by the existing Belfast City Council).

The result is that a Member serving on both Councils will receive an annual allowance payment for the year commencing 1st April, 2014 of £1,639 + £8,250 + £4,125 = **£14,014**

New Council post April 2015

- The new annual allowance payable with effect from 1st April, 2015 will be £14,200 payable monthly and will be entirely funded by the new Council.

These Allowances will all be paid in equal monthly instalments via the Payroll section and are subject to tax, National Insurance and pension deductions where applicable.

If a Councillor ceases to be a Councillor before the end of his or her term of office, payment of the Allowance ceases and a pro rata calculation is made to ensure that the Councillor receives the correct amount of allowance. If necessary, an adjustment for under or over payment may have to be made to ensure that the correct final payment is made, and the Council reserves the right to recover any overpayments of Basic Allowance.

(ii) Special Responsibility Allowances

The Council also pays Special Responsibility Allowances to those Councillors it considers to have significant, additional responsibilities over and above the generally accepted duties of a Councillor. These special responsibilities are related to the discharge of the Council's functions.

The maximum rate of Special Responsibility Allowance is determined by the Department of the Environment. The division of the Special Responsibility Allowance is based upon the positions held by individual Councillors as agreed.

Councillors on the Existing Council Only

- There will be a special responsibility allowance threshold of £83,276 for that year which the Council may pay to positions of responsibility. No more than 50% of the Councillors

can receive a special responsibility payment and no individual member can receive more than one special responsibility payment from this overall budget. This will be funded by the existing Belfast City Council.

Councillors on the Shadow Council Only

- There will be a special responsibility allowance threshold of £108,000 which the Shadow Council may pay to positions of responsibility. No more than 50% of the Councillors can receive a special responsibility payment and no individual member can receive more than one special responsibility payment from this overall budget. This will be funded by the NI Executive.

Councillors on both the Existing Council and the Shadow Council

- Please note that a member serving on both Councils will be able to be paid a special responsibility allowance for both the existing Council and the Shadow Council should they undertake duties which attract that payment on both Councils.

New Council post April 2015

- The Special Responsibility threshold for the new Council will be £108,000 per annum.

Special Responsibility Allowance is paid in equal, monthly instalments. Special Responsibility Allowances are liable for tax, National Insurance and pension deductions where applicable

In the event of a Councillor ceasing to hold an office which entitled him or her to receive a Special Responsibility Allowance before the term of office is completed, payment of the Allowance ceases, If necessary, an adjustment for under or overpayment may have to be made to ensure that the correct final payment is made, and the Council reserves the right to recover any overpayments of Special Responsibility Allowance.

(iii) Civic Dignitaries Allowance

Section 32 of the Finance Act provides that a council may pay to the Civic such allowances as it considers reasonable to meet the expenses of those offices and they should be considered totally separate from SRA arrangements.

The Civic Dignitary Personal Allowances are paid in equal, monthly instalments and are also liable for tax, National Insurance and pension deductions where applicable

The entitlement for the financial year 2014/2015 per annum is as follows:-

- Lord Mayor £34,800
- Deputy Lord Mayor £6,250
- High Sherriff £6, 250

(iv) Dependants' Carers' Allowance

This allowance is open to all Councillors who are the main carers of a dependant where care is required to enable the Member to perform an Approved Duty. The allowance may be paid for a dependant who requires full-time care and who resides with the Councillor as part of their family. Councillors may claim this Allowance for periods when they are carrying out any 'Approved Duties'. This includes travel time associated with the Approved Duties. The list of Approved Duties forms part of this scheme and is detailed below.

The rates of Allowances are determined by the Department of the Environment.

Dependants' Carers' Allowances are liable for tax and National Insurance deductions.

A dependant is defined as:-

- a child 15-years-old or under
- a child over 15-years-old, where there is medical / social work evidence that full-time care is required
- an adult with recognised physical/mental disability where there is medical / social work evidence that full-time care is required
- an elderly relative requiring full-time care.

A carer is defined as a responsible person over 16-years-old who does not normally live with the councillor as part of that family and is not a member of the immediate family. A specialist carer is a qualified person who is needed where it is essential to have professional assistance. Receipts must be obtained from specialist carers and must accompany the claim form and Councillors may claim only one DCA for each instance of childcare/carer service.

The hourly rates of Allowances are determined by the Department of the Environment and are currently²:

Standard Care	£6.50 per hour
Specialist Care	£13.00 per hour

Councillors on the Existing Council Only

The maximum monthly amounts for standard care and specialised care have been capped at the equivalent of 26 hours per month. Maximum payable per month for claims by existing Council Members only are subject to the undernoted limits:

Standard Care	£169 per month
Specialist Care	£338 per month

² Circular No. LG 40/2014 18 September 2014

Councillors on the Shadow Council and New Council

The maximum monthly amounts for standard care and specialised care have been capped at the equivalent of 52 hours per month. Maximum payable per month for claims by Shadow Council Members only are subject also to the undernoted limits:

Standard Care	£338 per month
Specialist Care	£676 per month

Councillors must disclose any financial support provided under DCA, when applying for other care services offered by another public body.

To claim Dependants' Carers' Allowance, Councillors must complete the relevant forms which are available from Democratic Services.

(v) District Policing and Community Safety Partnership Allowances (DPCSP)

This allowance is paid to councillors who are members of the District Policing and Community Safety Partnership. Each councillor is allowed to claim £60 per attendance at each meeting and can only claim for up to 20 meetings a year. Each member can also claim for mileage for attending each meeting directly from DPCSP.

Chairpersons of each DPCSPs would be entitled to claim for an additional 10 meetings per year of the DPCSP. In addition the Chairperson of the 4 DPCSPs also sit on the Belfast Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) and are entitled to claim for up to 20 meetings per year of this partnership.

Forgoing Allowances

A Councillor may forgo all or part of any allowances to which he or she is entitled, provided he or she has given notice in writing to the Chief Executive.

(b) Expenses

Travel and subsistence allowances for “Approved Duties” for the Shadow Council and New Council will remain at current rates of the Existing Council.

(i) Travel

Motor Mileage Claims

The rates of Travel and Subsistence Allowances, including motor mileage and pedal cycle rates, are reviewed annually by the Department of the Environment, following consultation with the Northern Ireland Joint Council for Local Government Services. Alternatively, Councillors may choose to travel by public transport and there is provision to reimburse the cost of these fares.

Claims can only be made where expenditure is incurred in relation to the Councillors undertaking Approved Duties. However, motor mileage is not payable for site visits in relation to Town Planning applications.

Travel Claim forms are prepared and circulated for Councillors’ attention at the beginning of each month and include details of all Council and Committee meetings attended during the previous month. It is a matter for each individual Councillor to ensure that the details are accurate and amend the claim form to include any other Approved Duties in respect of which they may be entitled to make a travel claim.

In some instances mileage claims may be liable for tax and National Insurance deductions.

The following rates are currently in use, with most Councillors getting the maximum amount of 65.0p per litre:

Casual Users

	451-999cc	1000-1199cc	1200-1450cc
0-8,500 miles	46.9p	52.2p	65.0p
After 8,500 miles	13.7p	14.4p	16.4p
Amount of VAT per mile in petrol element which can be reclaimed by BCC	1.567p	1.727p	1.881p

(ii) Subsistence

If Councillors attend conferences or undertake visits as representatives of the Council they are entitled to receive appropriate subsistence allowances.

Before a Councillor attends an event, they must obtain Committee approval or they may attend events as part of their Personal Development Plan (PDP).

Any hotel and flight arrangements for conferences are made by the Council Departments concerned.

Councillors should take a careful note and keep receipts for any expenses they incur while they are away on Council business because they may be able to claim for these as part of the their subsistence allowances or as incidental expenses. This relates to such things as meals, bus and taxi fares, necessary telephone calls, etc.

The following table shows the rates of subsistence that should be adhered to³:-

	BRITISH ISLES			LONDON		
			<i>Total</i>			<i>Total</i>
Overnight			£100.70			£122.45
Breakfast			11.50			11.50
Lunch			13.50			13.50
Tea			4.70			4.70
Dinner			20.95			20.95
Total Meal Allowance			£50.65			£50.65

Departments will assist Councillors in the completion of claim forms and Councillors should make contact with an appropriate officer immediately upon returning from the conference to give details of additional expenses incurred and to sign the necessary claim forms.

The rates for subsistence allowance are determined by the Department of the Environment. There are differences in the subsistence arrangements for conference which take place outside the United Kingdom.

³ DOE Circular LG16/06

Within the UK

Councillors do not receive a standard daily rate for attending conferences within the UK, however, they may claim for any expenses incurred as outlined above.

Claims without receipts should rarely happen, however, Councillors must use the Lost or Unobtainable Receipt Voucher to claim reimbursement for expenditure they have incurred when no receipt is available.

Outside the UK

If a Councillor travels outside of the UK, the following Subsistence Allowance is given;-

- The Council meets directly the cost of accommodation in terms of bed and breakfast
- The daily amount to cover other meals, etc. to be fixed at £75.
- In the event of a part day, the rate should be £45.00.
- In exceptional circumstances expenses can be reimbursed on an actual cost basis to my approval and the submission of vouchers and receipts.

Approved Duties

Under the existing Regulations Councillors are entitled to claim expenses in relation to an approved duty. An approved duty may be defined as:-

- (a) attendance at a meeting of the Council or of any of its Committees
- Or
- (b) attendance approved by the Council for the purpose of, or in connection with, the discharge of the functions of the Council.

No real problems arise under (a), but it should be pointed out that Councillors would normally only be paid expenses (travelling allowance) for attending Committees to which they have been appointed. A Councillor, however, will be paid for attending a meeting of a Committee to which he or she has not been appointed if he or she is attending at the invitation of the Committee concerned or has been sent by another Committee to state a particular case.

Such difficulties as have arisen have mainly been concerned with the interpretation of the term "approved duty". The Department of the Environment has issued guidance on what duties, apart from attendance at Council or Committee meetings, should be considered as approved duties. These include the following activities:-

- attendance by appointed Councillors at meetings of Advisory/Liaison Committees
Steering Groups/ Working Groups
- attendance at approved Conferences, Courses, Study Visits or Seminars as a representative of the Council
- attendance by appointed Councillors at meetings of District Partnerships

- attendance by appointed Councillors at meetings of Community Centre Committees
- attendance on a Council or Committee deputation relevant to the functions of the Council
- attendance by appointed Councillors at meetings of Outside Bodies.

This list is by no means exhaustive and the Council has also agreed that training courses and general briefing sessions should also be considered as approved duties. In addition, the Chief Executive can authorise as approved duties certain miscellaneous functions.

In relation to the attendance of Councillors at meetings of outside Bodies, the question of whether or not payment of expenses (travel/subsistence) are appropriate is determined by the functions exercised by the Bodies concerned. If these relate to the statutory functions of the Council, expenses would be paid. If they do not, no payments would be made. In addition, expenses cannot be claimed where remuneration is made to the Councillor from the Outside Body to which he or she has been appointed.

Submission of Claims

There is a 3 month time limit for submitting claims for the claimable Allowances above i.e. Dependants' Carers' Allowance and Travel and Subsistence Allowances. Any claims made outside of this time limit cannot be processed.

Councillors' Pension Scheme

From May, 2009 Councillors are enabled to participate in the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers Superannuation Scheme. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide a pension in retirement for Councillors. The benefits paid under the Scheme are based on length of membership of the Scheme and career average pensionable pay.

The pensionable pay of a councillor consists of the Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowance payments only. The contribution rate depends on how much each Councillor is paid but will be between 5.5% and 7.5% of the pensionable allowances received.