

**Opening Speech to JOC by Minister of State John Paul Phelan,  
9:00am, Wednesday, 27 November 2019**

Mr Chairman

I would like to thank you and the members of the Committee for the invitation to attend this morning.

I would also like, at the outset, to acknowledge the strong and ongoing efforts that Members of this Committee and of the Oireachtas, together with the AILG and LAMA, have made in both highlighting the important work being undertaken by councillors and the supports that are available to them.

As we have discussed here before, the main financial support that councillors receive is the Representational Payment for work undertaken in their role as public representatives. When I assumed office, in June 2017, as Minister of State for Local Government and Elected Reform, the amount of the Representational Payment was €16,645.

The Representational Payment has since been increased by €714 to €17,359 per annum.

In addition, a new allowance worth €1,000 per annum, for work carried out at municipal district or area committee level, was introduced and backdated with effect from 1 July 2017.

I might point out that this is an increase of some 10% in salary type payments to councillors in that two and half year period.

A new vouched expenses allowance worth up to €5,000 per annum was also introduced in the same period, for which members may choose to opt instead of their unvouched miscellaneous expenses allowance that is worth approx. €2,500 per annum.

Notwithstanding the improvements that have been delivered, I have, from the beginning of my term in this office, acknowledged that more needs to be done to ensure that the supports that are available are fit for purpose and can support people from diverse backgrounds to participate in local government.

For that reason, and as a result of feedback from local authority elected members and their representative bodies, and indeed members of these Houses, regarding councillors' current remuneration regime, my colleague, the Minister for Finance and

Public Expenditure and Reform, and I agreed that Ms Sara Moorhead SC would be invited to carry out a review of the role and remuneration of local authority elected members.

Ms Moorhead has since submitted an Interim Report to me, which is publicly available on my Department's website. Members may recall that we discussed her interim report in this Committee at the time.

In conducting the review, Ms Moorhead surveyed all local authority elected members and sought financial information from all local authorities. In both cases, I understand that deadline extensions were granted to allow sufficient time for comprehensive responses to be made.

I also understand that the Review has involved extensive consultation with individual councillors, councillor representative organisations, local authorities, political parties and other stakeholders. A desk based examination of the remuneration regimes of local representatives in other jurisdictions was also carried out.

I expect that the Review will more comprehensively define the role of councillor and make recommendations for modernising the

remuneration regime in order to ensure it is commensurate with the new role envisaged.

I expect also that the Review will consider the kind of non-remunerative supports that could be put in place to assist councillors in fulfilling their role as local representatives.

In my view, the aim must be to ensure that the role of councillor can be for any person wishing to become involved in local government and that it is sustainable for them if they succeed in reaching that achievement. The aim should also be that our local Councils reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

I recognise that non-remunerative supports may be particularly important, for example, for women who wish to enter local politics.

While the outcome of the 2019 local elections was positive in this regard, I think we can all agree that there remains work to be done in growing the presence of women in local government.

I believe that a sustained effort involving a multi-faceted approach is necessary in this regard, including ensuring that the role of councillor

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is an attractive, manageable and sustainable one for women in terms of time commitment and financial reward for the work they do.

Let me conclude by taking this opportunity to thank Ms Sara Moorhead for the very extensive work that she has done so far in carrying out her Review.

Following the necessary drafting process Ms Moorhead is currently finalising her Report.

In accordance with the agreed terms of reference for her Review, Ms. Moorhead's Report will be submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for discussion, but also in order that it has regard to the wider public pay context.

I thank the Members once again for their interest in this important matter. I look forward to hearing the views of the Committee this morning.