

LGA Submission

2026 Review of Allowances for Elected Members

LGA South Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the Tribunal's 2026 review of elected member allowances.

LGA supports the role of the Remuneration Tribunal (RTSA) in setting elected member allowances, recognising its role in providing transparency and confidence to the community that elected officials are appropriately recognised through allowances that reflect the responsibilities and expectations of their role.

At the same time, feedback from councils and elected members across South Australia indicates that the current arrangements do not fully reflect the evolving nature, expectations and demands of the role.

We appreciate that council-specific information may assist in distinguishing between councils, however, LGA does not consider this information material in determining the appropriate allowance model or quantum of elected member allowances.

Feedback from members across the sector has provided a diversity of views on elected member allowances and related support. Noting the matters RTSA must have regard to in making an elected member allowance determination under section 76 of the *Local Government Act 1999* (*the Act*), LGA proposes a set of principles to guide the Tribunal's consideration, informed by sector-wide experience and engagement.

Principles for Elected Member Allowances

LGA proposes the following principles to guide the Tribunal's review:

- Allowances should support greater diversity in candidate nominations, reduce the risk of failed elections due to insufficient nominations, and minimise mid-term vacancies.
- A sufficient base allowance should apply to all council members, reflecting the role as defined in legislation and the responsibilities and expectations that are common across the sector. This base allowance should recognise the time commitment, accountability and complexity inherent in the role, regardless of council size or grouping.
- Any additional variability in allowances should be based on factors that materially affect the role across different councils or groupings, rather than relying predominantly on structural or demographic characteristics.

Helping local government build stronger communities.

- Changes to the allowance model or council groupings should not result in reduced allowances for any elected members.
- Although previously considered outside the Tribunal's jurisdiction, superannuation continues to be raised and addressed in other jurisdictions. It is likely to remain an ongoing issue during the upcoming 2026 Determination period and greater clarity and consistency would benefit the sector.
- Changes to the allowance framework should not reduce existing legislated member benefits such as reimbursements for child or carer support.

Role of Elected Members and Work Value

Elected members perform an important leadership function within their communities. Their role extends well beyond attendance at formal meetings and includes:

- setting strategic direction and overseeing long-term planning
- making decisions on complex financial, infrastructure and service delivery matters
- engaging extensively with community members, stakeholders and other levels of government
- participating in mandatory training and ongoing professional development
- responding to local issues, emergencies and emerging community concerns.

In recent years, the expectations placed on elected members have increased significantly. Community engagement now occurs across multiple channels, including social media, with an expectation of accessibility and responsiveness that is often continuous. Elected members are frequently required to balance competing community views, manage heightened scrutiny, and respond to complex and contentious issues.

Workload expectations are significantly influenced by external factors such as media attention, major events and emergencies. The impact of this can vary between councils.

For many, the role involves a significant time commitment, at times equivalent to full time work, often alongside existing employment or business responsibilities. These demands are not isolated to particular council groupings but are experienced across the sector, albeit in different forms.

The cumulative effect is that elected members carry increasing personal, professional and opportunity costs in undertaking the role.

Attractiveness of the Role and Diversity

A key consideration for the allowance framework is the attractiveness of the role to current and prospective candidates.

Local democracy relies on a diverse pool of candidates from a range of backgrounds, reflecting the communities they serve. This includes diversity in age, gender, cultural background and professional experience.

Where allowances do not adequately recognise the demands of the role, there is a risk that participation becomes limited to those with the financial capacity or flexibility to absorb the associated costs. This may contribute to:

- reduced candidate nominations
- uncontested elections
- mid-term vacancies.

A review of supplementary elections and carried vacancies during the 2018-2022 term and in the current term to-date, indicates a significant increase in uncontested elections and unfilled positions. This trend may, in part, reflect that current allowance levels are not commensurate with both the perceived and actual demands of the role, an issue that councils themselves are not empowered to address.

A well-calibrated allowance framework plays an important role in ensuring that elected office remains accessible to a broad cross-section of the community.

Council Groupings and the Nature of the Role

While LGA acknowledges the Tribunal's requirement to consider council characteristics, feedback from the sector indicates that these factors do not consistently correlate with the responsibilities or workload of elected members.

In particular, LGA considers the amounts set out in the 2022 Determination, particularly for Group 3 to Group 5 councils, are inadequate when measured against the responsibilities of the role.

Consistent with role outlined above, governance, accountability and legislative obligations are uniform across all councils. Council members in Group 1A or 1B do not, by any rule of their classification have greater or lesser obligations than those in a Groups 2, 3, 4 or 5.

While differences in scale, geography or demographics may influence how the role is performed, they do not diminish fundamental responsibilities. While complexity of council operations vary, the fundamental role of a council member as part of the governing body remains the same.

Community expectations also vary between councils and individual members, however, these differences are not directly linked to council groupings. Rather, they are more closely associated with the level of engagement, proximity and accessibility of council members to their community.

As such, there is a strong case for ensuring that the base component of allowances appropriately reflects the shared role of elected members across the sector, with any differentiation applied only where there is a clear and material impact on the nature of the role.

Superannuation

Although previously considered outside the Tribunal's jurisdiction, superannuation continues to be raised as an issue of concern by elected members and is increasingly recognised in other jurisdictions.

South Australia remains one of the few states without a consistent approach to this matter. While LGA acknowledges the limitations of the current framework, greater clarity and consistency would assist the sector, particularly if changes occur during the period of the Tribunal's Determination.

Member Benefits and Supports

Elected members currently rely on allowances as the primary form of recognition for their role, with reimbursements limited to out-of-pocket expenses such as travel and dependent care.

Any changes to the allowance framework should not reduce existing legislated member benefits such as reimbursements for child or carer support. These supports are an important enabler of diversity and inclusion.

Conclusion

Elected members play a vital role in the leadership of South Australian communities. The allowance framework should support this role by recognising its demands, maintaining accessibility, and enabling a diverse and capable cohort of community leaders.

LGA would welcome the opportunity to engage further with the Tribunal, including through an oral submission or workshop, to explore these matters in more detail.