

**PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO
COUNCILLORS'
REMUNERATION**
**Findings of research from the
MORI Social Policy Monitor**

**PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO COUNCILLORS'
REMUNERATION**

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2005

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Executive summary

The Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee has, among other things, a remit to advise Ministers on all aspects of councillors' remuneration. The committee has an obligation to ensure that its advice is acceptable to the public. In meeting this requirement a module of twelve questions was commissioned in MORI's Social Policy Monitor to gauge public views of councillors' duties and remuneration.

The questions in the councillors' remuneration module addressed issues related to:

- respondents' knowledge of the work of local councillors and how long councillors spend on council duties
- preferences for councillors' surgeries and when councillors should be available for constituents
- awareness and perceptions of councillors' current allowances and how much councillors should receive in allowances.

The key findings of the study were:

- Respondents felt they had limited knowledge about the work and duties carried out by a local councillor, with 80% saying that they had limited or no knowledge and only 20% saying they were at least 'quite knowledgeable'. Young people were least well informed.
- Respondents expected to have access to their councillor at times that were convenient for them. Working respondents placed more emphasis on evening access whereas other respondents placed more emphasis on daytime access.
- There was a general expectation that councillors should be available at various occasions throughout the week: typically 2-3 evenings a week and at the weekend, on 2-4 Saturdays or Sundays throughout the month.
- Just over a quarter of respondents (26%) said they did not know how many hours a week local councillors currently spend on their council duties. For over 40% of those that offered an estimate, the duties of councillor were thought to occupy up to 20 hours each week
- Overall, respondents felt that councillors should spend more time on council duties – both those without additional responsibilities and council leaders.
- Almost 60% of respondents thought that an ordinary councillor would receive less than £20,000 per year in allowances. A majority thought that a council leader would receive more than £30,000 per year.
- In general, estimates of allowances were linked to estimates of time spent on council duties – respondents who thought councillors and leaders spent more time on council duties also thought they received higher amounts in allowances. A small minority felt that councillors and leaders received high sums in allowances for a relatively small number of hours.

- When asked how much councillors and leaders should receive in allowances, there was a tendency to increase the amount received by ordinary councillors and reduce the amount received by leaders, narrowing the perceived differential between the two.
- When asked to compare a councillor's role to other occupations, the most common comparators for an ordinary councillor were a community worker (28%) and a teacher (23%).
- When asked to compare a council leader's role to other occupations, a head teacher was the most common comparator, selected by 28% followed by a teacher (18%) a police officer (12%) and a doctor/GP (12%).

Survey results

Background and introduction

The Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC) is a statutory Committee set up under the provisions of the Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004. Its remit is to provide advice to Ministers on all aspects of remuneration, including pension arrangements and the severance scheme for councillors choosing to stand down at the next election.

Ministers have placed a legally binding instruction on the Committee to consider two criteria: role weighting criterion and public opinion. The public opinion instruction states that:

The Committee shall use reasonable endeavours to secure that its advice, so far as practicable, shall be acceptable to the local government electorate in Scotland, and having regard to their responses to any consultation or publicity by the Committee of the proposals.

At its inception meeting in March 2005, SLARC requested that the Scottish Executive's Local Government and Public Services Reform Research branch commission a public opinion survey to meet the above criteria. Subsequently, a module of twelve questions was commissioned in MORI's Social Policy Monitor to gauge public views of councillors' duties and remuneration.

The Social Policy Monitor is a multi-client survey carried out among a random sample of adults across Scotland. This wave of the Social Policy Monitor involved interviews with 1,015 adults, with data weighted to reflect age and sex profile of the Scottish population and the geographical distribution across local authorities.

The questions in the councillors' remuneration module addressed issues related to:

- respondents' knowledge of the work of local councillors and how long councillors spend on council duties
- preferences for councillors' surgeries and when councillors should be available for constituents
- awareness and perceptions of councillors' current allowances and how much councillors should receive in allowances.

This report provides details of the findings from these questions. Additional tables of data and a data file in SPSS format were also produced.

Knowledge of councillors' work

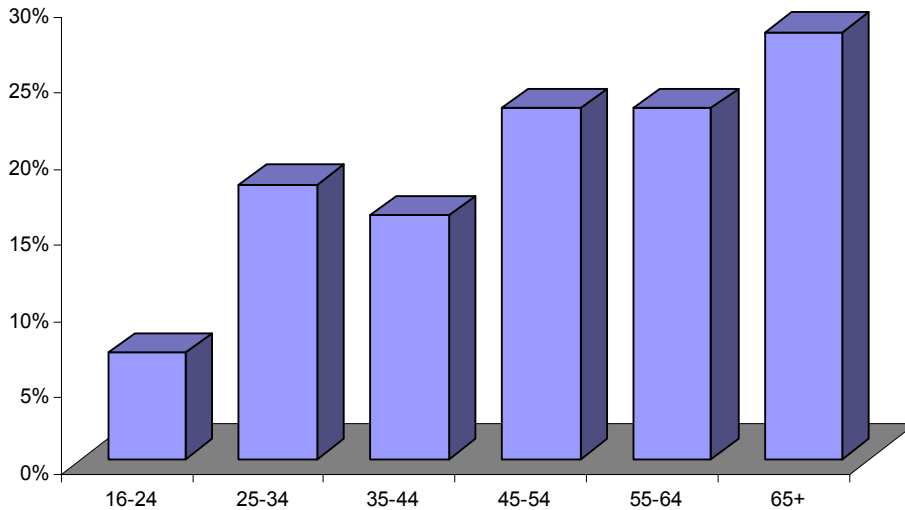
In general, respondents felt they were poorly informed about the work and duties carried out by a local councillor, with 80% saying that they had limited or no knowledge and only 20% saying they were at least 'quite knowledgeable'.

The main factor influencing respondents' views on how knowledgeable they are about councillors' work was age, with younger respondents significantly less likely to feel they are knowledgeable compared with older respondents (Figure 1). Only 7% of 16-24 year olds felt knowledgeable about councillors' work compared with 28% of respondents aged 65 years and over. This pattern is reflected in other respondent characteristics. For example, retired

respondents felt they are better informed than those in work (28% said they were knowledgeable compared with 18% of employed respondents) and respondents in the least deprived areas felt better informed than those in the most deprived areas (23% compared with 13%).

Figure 1 – Knowledge of councillors’ work or duties by respondent’s age

In general, how knowledgeable are you with the work and duties carried out by a local councillor?



Access to councillors

Respondents were asked what time periods councillors should be available to see members of the public. On the whole, a majority of all respondents expected to be able to see their councillor on weekdays – Monday to Friday – with almost 60% mentioning normal working hours (57%) and evenings (58%). Around 1 on 4 (24%) wanted to be able to see their councillor on a Saturday and 1 in 9 (11%) on a Sunday. Working respondents were more likely to mention weekdays in the evening (63%) whereas non-working respondents were more likely to mention weekdays during normal working hours (68% of those who were looking after the home or unable to work).

Most respondents only selected one time period when they would like to be able to see their councillor: 30% only mentioned weekdays during the day and 32% only mentioned weekdays in the evening. A further 14% mentioned both weekdays during the day and weekday evenings.

Although there was a substantial proportion of respondents who mentioned weekends, there were very few respondents for whom Saturdays and Sundays would be the only times they would want access to their councillor. Just 4% of respondents only mentioned Saturdays and Sundays.

In terms of evening working, a majority of respondents who thought that their councillor should be available in the evening, thought they should be available on 1 or 2 evenings per week and a further fifth thought they should be available on three evenings in the week. 15%

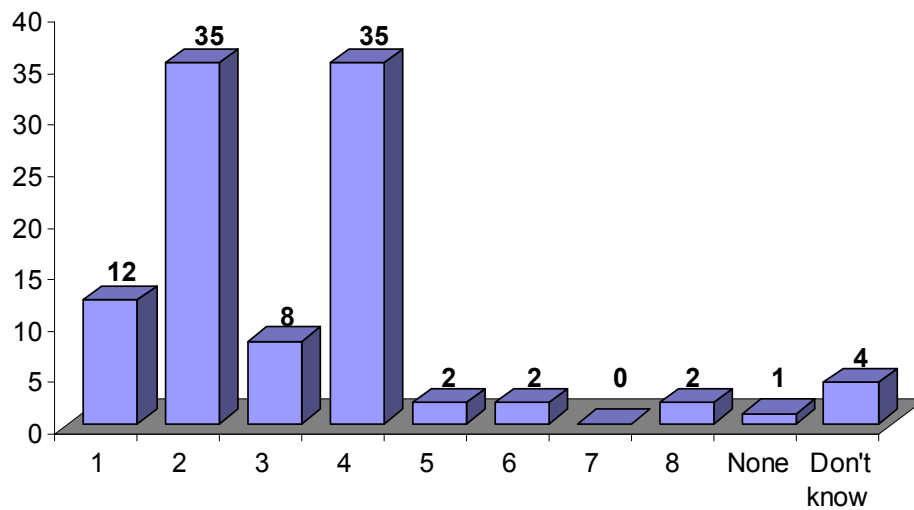
of respondents thought they should be available on 5 evenings per week although these were most likely to be people who only said that councillors should be available in the evening.

Although access to councillors at the weekend was almost always combined with weekday access, 70% of respondent who mentioned weekend access thought that councillors should be available to see local residents on either 2 or 4 out of the 8 weekend days in an average month.

Figure 2 – Number of weekend days councillors should be available to see local residents

Base = Respondents who thought their councillor should be available at the weekend (n=245)

Out of 8 Saturdays and Sundays in a month, how many should your councillor be available to see local residents?



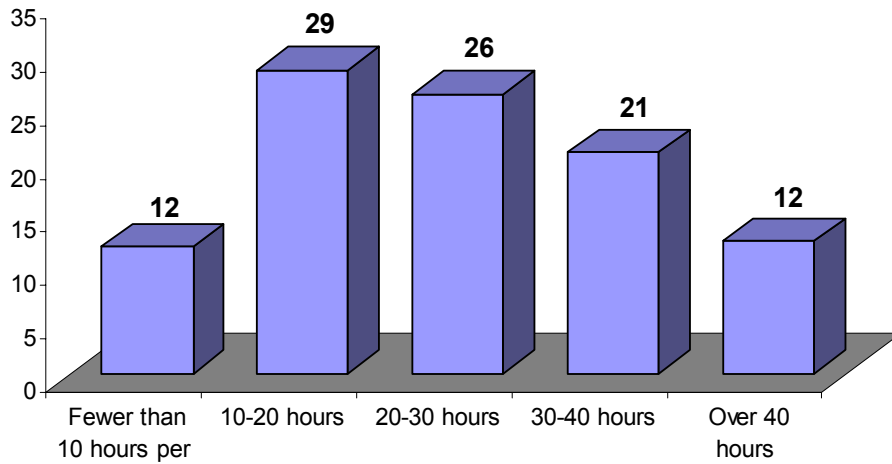
Councillors' working hours

Just over a quarter of respondents (26%) said they did not know how many hours a week local councillors currently spend on their council duties. For over 40% of those that offered an estimate, the duties of councillor were thought to occupy up to 20 hours each week and a further third thought that their duties require councillors to work 30 hours a week or more (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Number of hours currently spent on council duties

Base = respondents who gave an estimate of time spent on council duties (n=755)

On average, how many hours do you think local councillors currently spend on their duties as a councillor?



Young people aged 16-24 years gave lower estimates of the time councillors spend on their duties, with only 25% thinking they spend 30 hours or more and 46% estimating that councillors spend less than 20 hours a week on their council duties.

Overall, respondents felt that councillors should spend more time on council duties – both those without additional responsibilities and council leaders. Whereas a third of those who expressed a view said that councillors currently spend 30 hours a week or more on their council duties, over 50% think that a backbench councillor should spend 30 hours or more on council duties and over 80% think that a council leader should spend 30 hours or more on council duties.

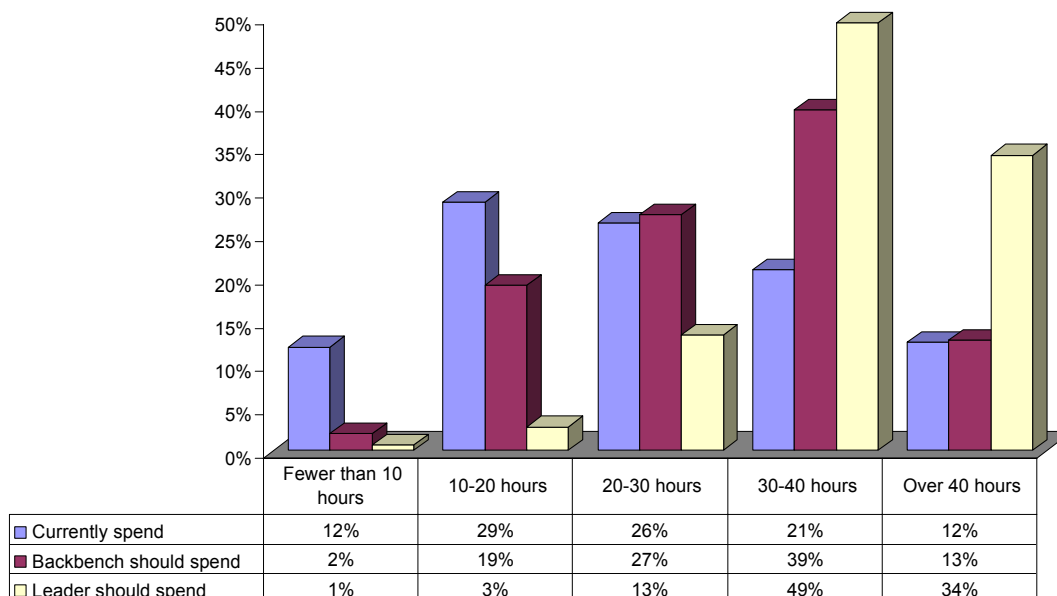
Respondents in the most deprived areas¹ were more likely to say that a councillor with no additional responsibilities should spend 30 hours or more each week on council duties but there were no significant differences in the views of leaders' hours.

¹ Based on the most deprived 20% of areas using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

Figure 4 – Time councillors currently spend on duties and time a backbench councillor and council leader should spend

On average, how many hours do you think local councillors currently spend on their duties as a councillor?

How many hours a week do you think a councillor with no additional council responsibilities / a council leader should spend on their duties as a councillor?



Councillors’ allowances

Respondents were asked how much councillors should receive for their duties and, as expected, there was a significant difference in the amount of allowances that should be received by councillors without additional duties and council leaders.

In both cases a third of respondents did not know how much councillors receive in allowances and did not give a value. Of those who did give a value, only 30% were confident in their assessment of the amounts received by councillors and council leaders. Taking these together, only a fifth of respondents felt able to confidently estimate the amounts received in allowances. As with the general measure of respondents’ knowledge of councillors’ duties reported above, younger respondents were less likely to be able to give an estimate of councillors’ allowances.

For ordinary councillors, a majority (56%) estimated that a councillor with no duties in addition to council and ward duties would receive less than £20,000 each year. A further 20% estimated between £20,000 and £24,999 (see Figure 5).

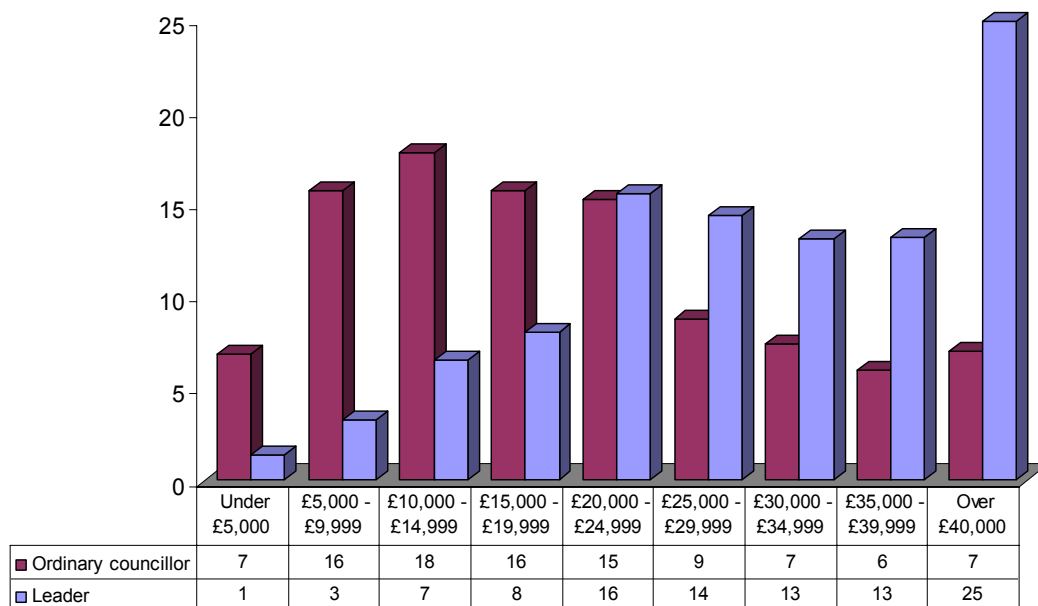
Respondents thought that council leaders were better paid, with only 19% estimating that a council leader would receive less than £20,000 and a total of 35% estimating less than £25,000. A majority thought that a council leader would receive £30,000 or more in allowances, with a quarter believing they received in excess of £40,000 per annum. Figure 5 compares the amounts that respondents expected an ordinary councillor and a council leader to receive.

Figure 5 – Estimates of the allowances received by an ordinary councillor and a Council leader

Base = respondents who gave an estimate of amount received (n= 677 for ordinary council and 676 for leaders)

Councillors receive allowances for carrying out the council duties. How much do you think an ordinary councillor, who carries out his/her ward duties and council duties but has no additional council responsibilities, receives in payment/allowances each year?

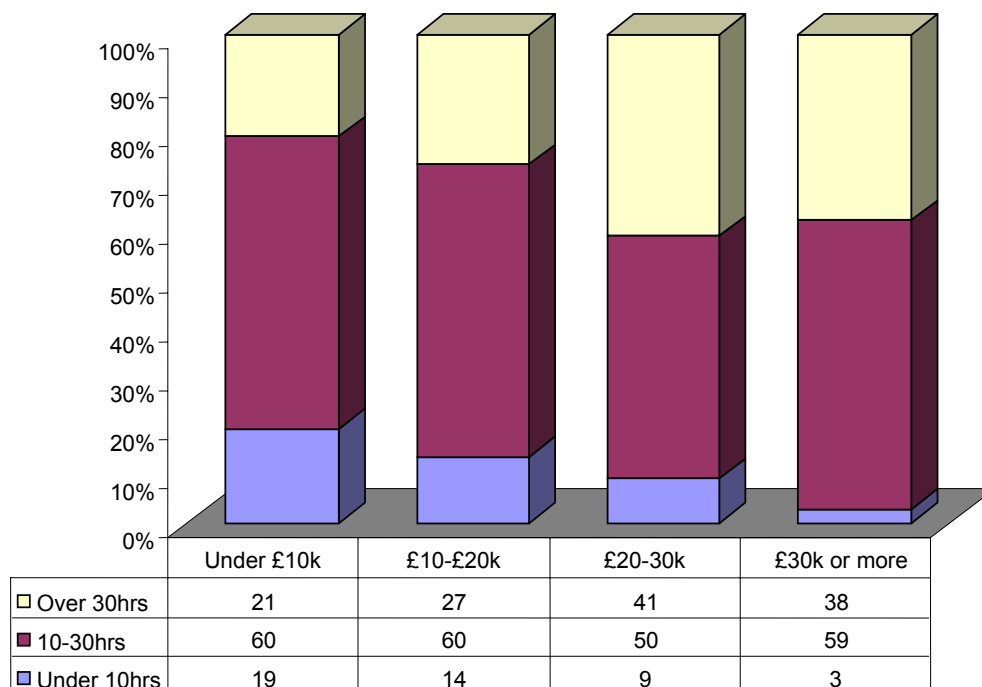
And how much do you think a council leader receives in payment/allowances each year?



There is some relationship between the amount that respondents estimate councillors receive and the number of hours they think each type of councillor spends on council duties. As Figure 6 shows, on the whole, respondents who think councillors and leaders spend longer on council duties also think they receive higher payments and allowances. For example, 19% of respondents who think that councillors receive under £10,000 in allowances also think they spend less than 10 hours on council duties compared with only 3% of those who think a councillor receives over £30,000. Similarly, 21% of those who think a councillor receives under £10,000 think they spend over 30 hours on council duties compared with 41% of respondents who think they receive £20-30,000.

Figure 6 – Estimates of hours and remuneration for ordinary councillors

Base = respondents who gave an estimate of both the hours a councillor should spend on their duties and their remuneration (n=605)



The link between leaders’ hours and remuneration is much less clear, mainly because there is much less variation in respondents’ estimates of how long a council leader should spend on council duties.

Respondents were also asked what they thought councillors and leaders should receive in allowances. The general picture is similar to the range of values that were suggested for what councillors currently receive (Figure 7). Overall, although there is still a significant range of views about what councillors and leaders should receive in allowances, compared with perceptions of what they do receive, the profile shows a more pronounced peak between £15,000 and £25,000.

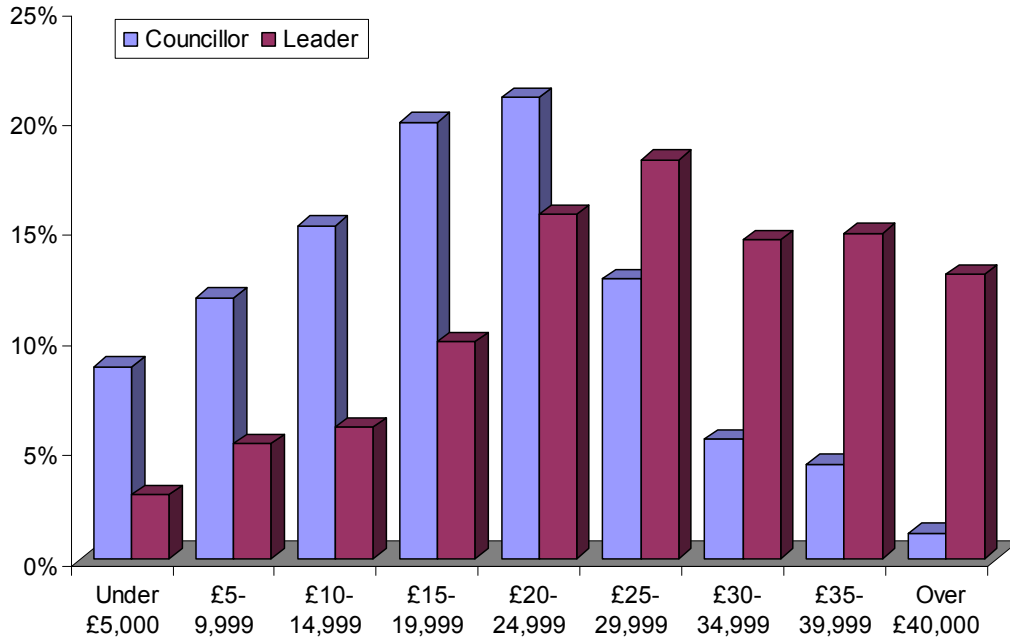
The amount councillors should receive is strongly related to respondents’ views of the amount currently receive, although the relationship is quite complex. Among respondents who thought that councillors currently receive less than £10,000, a third thought they should receive more. Where respondents thought that councillors currently receive between £10,000 and £20,000, 12% felt they should receive less and 30% more. Where respondents thought that councillors currently receive more than £20,000 there was very few believed they should receive more and a greater tendency to say they should receive less – only 43% of respondents who thought leaders received over £30,000 thought they should receive as much.

A similar pattern is seen with council leaders although where respondents think leaders currently receive under £10,000 there is very little inclination to increase the amount – 86% say they should receive the same. Among respondents who thought leaders currently receive £10-£20,000, 40% thought this should be increased and where respondents thought leaders currently receive £20-£30,000, 28% felt it should be increased although 18% thought it

should be reduced. Where respondents thought leaders were already receiving over £30,000, 36% thought this should be reduced. Thus, as with councillors, the range of values has a stronger peak between £20-£30,000 compared with perceptions of what leaders currently receive.

Figure 7 – Amount that councillors and council leaders should receive in allowances

How much do you think an ordinary councillor/council leader should receive in payment/allowances each year?

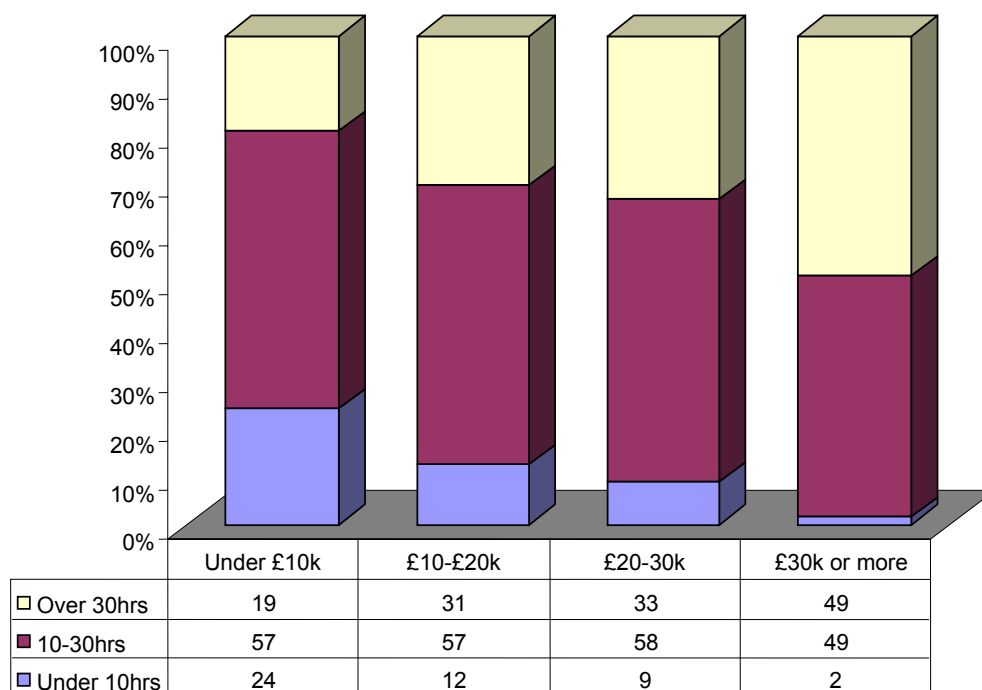


Comparing councillors and leaders, respondents seem to feel that there is currently a substantial differential between ordinary councillors and leaders and their preference is to bring the amounts closer together.

The relationship between what councillors should receive and the time they should spend on council duties was very similar to that shown in Figure 6. Figure 8 shows that respondents think the link between the hours councillors spend on council business and the remuneration they receive for this should be stronger than is currently the case.

Figure 8 – Estimates of hours and amount ordinary councillors should receive in allowances

Base = respondents who gave an estimate of both the hours a councillor should spend on their duties and how much they should receive in remuneration (n=605)



Comparison of councillors and other occupations

In the expectation that respondents might have difficulty assigning financial values to councillors’ allowances, respondents were also asked to provide an assessment of councillors and council leaders in terms of a comparison with other jobs and professions. They were asked, “thinking about different types of job, which of the jobs or professions on this card do you think would be the closest comparison for paying an ordinary councillor?”. The comparison options were; a shop assistant, secretary, community worker, nurse, teacher, police officer, head teacher, and a doctor/GP.

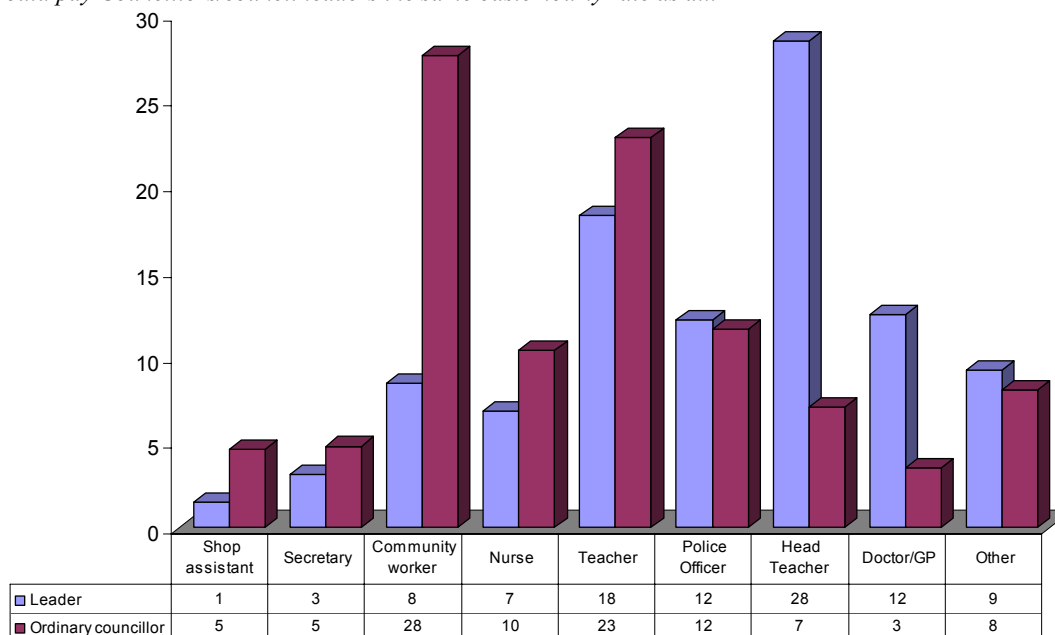
The most common comparators for an ordinary councillor were a community worker (28%) and a teacher (23%). A police officer (12%) and nurse (10%) were the next most common. These four were selected by 73% of respondents, with very little variation across the sample.

For council leaders, a head teacher was the most common comparator, selected by 28% followed by a teacher (18%) a police officer (12%) and a doctor/GP (12%).

Figure 9 – Comparator occupations for councillor and council leader

Base = all respondents (n=1015)

I would pay Councillors/council leaders the same basic hourly rate as a...



Comparing the comparators for councillors and council leaders is difficult without making a judgement about the relative standing of the professions. A quarter of respondents made no distinction between a councillor and a council leader, selecting the same job/profession for both. There were few cases where a council leader was compared with a lower level occupation than had been assigned to a councillor (for example, a nurse for the leader and a GP for the councillor). However, in most cases, respondents made a distinction between the councillor and leader, comparing the leader to a higher grade occupation than had been assigned to the councillor.

For both councillors and leaders there is a strong link between the amount respondents think a councillor or leader should receive in allowances and their assessment of the occupation that best reflects each role. Table 1 shows the proportion of respondents who thought that a councillor and council leader should receive either under £20,000 or £30,000 or more for each occupation selected as a suitable comparator. For example, where respondents felt that a councillor’s role was comparable to a shop assistant, 93% felt they should receive less than £20,000. Where a head teacher was selected, 25% felt they should receive £30,000 or more.

Almost two-thirds of respondents who compare a council leader to a head teacher or a Doctor/GP think they should receive more than £30,000 per year compared with under half of those who compared a councillor to the same positions.

Table 1 – Comparator occupations and allowances for councillors and council leaders

Base = respondents who gave estimate of allowances that should be received (n=704)

	Councillor		Council leader	
	Under £20k	£30k or more	Under £20k	£30k or more
Shop assistant	93	2	93	7
Secretary	85	3	65	4
Community worker	66	3	53	15
Nurse	60	4	30	19
Teacher	45	9	24	32
Police Officer	33	24	27	29
Head Teacher	44	25	13	61
Doctor/GP	40	35	15	67

There was also some relationship between the comparators chosen and the respondent's own occupation, most clearly for the comparison of a council leader. Respondents who were themselves in managerial and professional occupations were more likely to equate a council leader to a head teacher (between 35% and 43% compared with 28% of all respondents). Respondents in lower supervisory and technical occupations were more likely to equate a council leader to a doctor/GP (25% compared with 11% of all respondents).

Conclusions

There are three broad themes that emerge from this analysis. First, the general public appears to be poorly informed about the work of councillors. Only 20% of respondents said they were either quite or very knowledgeable. Young people are particularly poorly informed, with only 7% of 16-24 year old respondents saying they were at all knowledgeable about the work of councillors.

Respondents' own perceptions of how knowledgeable they are has very little impact on their view of the other issues covered by the survey. On the whole, there are very few significant differences between the responses of those who said they were knowledgeable compared with those who felt they had little or no knowledge about councillors' work.

Secondly, respondents expect councillors to be available to see constituents at times that reflect their own periods of free time. For example, working respondents placed more emphasis on availability in the evenings and weekend whereas non-working respondents were more likely to mention weekday daytime access. There was a general expectation that councillors should be available at various occasions throughout the week: typically 2-3 evenings a week and at the weekend, especially Saturdays, on 2-4 occasions throughout the month.

Thirdly, while there is no real consistency in how councillors are perceived: respondents estimated a wide range of hours spent on council duties and a wide, and not necessarily consistent, range of amounts received in allowances. When asked how much time councillors and leaders should spend on council business, there was again a broad range of responses. Council leaders are more consistently viewed, at least in terms of the hours they should spend on council business although this still produced a wide range of estimates of remuneration. Compared with the estimates of what councillors and leaders currently receive, these estimates tended to be more clustered around core amounts of £15-25,000 for a councillor and £20-30,000 for a council leader. This tended to bring councillors' and leaders' remuneration closer together (compared with perceptions of what they currently receive) while still maintaining a differential that paid leaders more than ordinary councillors. When asked to compare councillors and leaders with other occupations, there was again a wide range of responses, although two or three occupations were most commonly selected: a community worker or a teacher as comparator for councillors and a teacher or head teacher for a council leader.

Module questions

1 In general, how knowledgeable are you with the work and duties carried out by a local councillor?

- Very knowledgeable
- Quite knowledgeable
- Limited knowledge
- No knowledge

2. Looking at this card, when do you think your councillor should be available to see local residents?

Multi-code

- | | |
|---|---|
| Monday-Friday during normal working hours | 1 |
| Monday to Friday in the evening | 2 |
| Saturday | 3 |
| Sunday | 4 |

if “evening” coded

In an typical week, how many evenings should your councillor be available to see local residents

If “Saturday” or “Sunday” coded

In a typical months, how many Saturdays or Sundays should your councillor be available to see local residents?

3. On average, how many hours a week do you think local councillors *currently spend* on their duties as a Councillor?

- Over 40 hours per week
- 30-40 hours per week
- 20-30 hours per week
- 10-20 hours per week
- Fewer than 10 hours per week
- Don’t know

4. How many hours a week do you think a councillor with no additional council responsibilities *should* spend on their duties?

- Over 40 hours per week
- 30-40 hours per week
- 20-30 hours per week
- 10-20 hours per week
- Fewer than 10 hours per week
- Don’t know

5. And how many hours a week do you think a council leader *should* spend on their duties?

- Over 40 hours per week
- 30-40 hours per week
- 20-30 hours per week
- 10-20 hours per week
- Fewer than 10 hours per week
- Don’t know

6. Councillors receive allowances for carrying out their council duties. How much do you think an ordinary councillor, who carries out his/her ward and council duties but has no additional council responsibilities, receives in payment/allowances each year?

Under £5,000
£5,000 - £9,999
£10,000 - £14,999
£15,000 - £19,999
£20,000 - £24,999
£25,000 - £29,999
£30,000 - £34,999
£35,000 - £39,999
Over £40,000
No idea at all

7. And how much do you think a council leader receives in payment/allowances per annum?

Under £5,000
£5,000 - £9,999
£10,000 - £14,999
£15,000 - £19,999
£20,000 - £24,999
£25,000 - £29,999
£30,000 - £34,999
£35,000 - £39,999
Over £40,000
No idea at all

[Filter: Ask all who provided a figure]

8. How confident are you about these estimates?

Very confident
Quite Confident
Not very confident
Not at all confident

9. How much do you with an ordinary councillor *should* receive in way of payment/allowances each year?

Under £5,000
£5,000 - £9,999
£10,000 - £14,999
£15,000 - £19,999
£20,000 - £24,999
£25,000 - £29,999
£30,000 - £34,999
£35,000 - £39,999
Over £40,000

10. And, how much do you think a council leader *should* receive in way of payment/allowances per annum?

Under £5,000
£5,000 - £9,999
£10,000 - £14,999
£15,000 - £19,999
£20,000 - £24,999
£25,000 - £29,999
£30,000 - £34,999
£35,000 - £39,999
Over £40,000

11. Thinking about different types of job, which of the jobs or professions on this card do you think would be the closest comparison for paying an ordinary councillor?

On the card

I would pay Councillors the same basic hourly rate as a ...

Shop assistant

Secretary

Community worker

Nurse

Teacher

Police Officer

Head Teacher

Doctor/GP

Other (please state)

12. Thinking about different types of job, which of the jobs or professions on this card do you think would be the closest comparison for paying a council leader?

On the card

I would pay Councillors the same basic hourly rate as a ...

Shop assistant

Secretary

Community worker

Nurse

Teacher

Police Officer

Head Teacher

Doctor/GP

Other (please state)