

I have just had sight of the written communication to Assembly Members headed “Remuneration Board of the National Assembly for Wales” dated 13 July 2016, signed by yourself as Chair of the Board.

Towards the end of the communication one reads:

Proposal.

“The determination (of residential accommodation allowance) is based on the location of the Member’s main home, not their constituency/region. Currently it does not provide for Residential Accommodation Expenditure for a Member whose main home is not in Wales. The Determination is, therefore, based on an assumption that all Members have their main home in Wales. However, there is nothing in the Government of Wales Act 2006, or indeed any other legislation, which provides that Assembly Members must reside in any particular location either when they are elected or subsequently”.

Slightly lower down one finds the actual proposal:

“We propose amending the Determination so that Members whose main home is outside Wales are eligible for residential accommodation expenditure. The board will give effect to such an amendment by extending the “Outer Area (currently the Mid & West Wales and North Wales regions that have the maximum allowance)” to the whole of the UK.

Although I have been active in politics for more than 50 years (and interested in politics since WW 2),

I honestly cannot recall a more preposterous proposal – for 2 main reasons;

- I know of no National Parliament (or Assembly) of any country in the world in which its Members are permitted to live outside that country. Wales must be unique in this respect. The words “will give effect” could well mean that this policy has already been implemented, enabling AMs to live anywhere in the UK – Dover, Carlisle or even Shetland or Derry in Northern Ireland! What an outright absurdity. Are Stormont Members allowed to live in Ipswich or Stornoway? Are members of Jersey’s parliament permitted to live in Orkney? Are MPs allowed to live in France or Russia?

In Wales, even County Councillors have to live (or work) in the county in which the constituency they represent lies. As this is a perfectly reasonable expectation for County Councillors, the expectation that AMs live in Wales is surely a great deal more reasonable. What is desperately needed is not an amendment to the Determination to reward Members whose main home is outside Wales by making them eligible for residential accommodation expenditure but an amendment to

the Government of Wales Act 2006 to preclude people living outside Wales from being AMs (whatever their political affiliations).

- Extending the “Outer Area”, willy nilly, to the whole of the UK introduces a ludicrous anomaly that an 8 year old could readily spot. It means that an AM living in Tutshill in England (2 miles from Chepstow), which is only 34 miles from Cardiff, could claim the maximum allowance permissible for accommodation in Cardiff – the same as an AM living in Anglesey with a 5 hour journey to the capital! Indeed, it is difficult not to view this as an incentive for individuals (especially failed politicians) living nearby in England to put themselves forward as National Assembly candidates - in 2021 and thereafter. It could, theoretically, lead to many – or even all – of Wales’ AMs living in England!

For these very valid reasons the proposal is – without doubt – ridiculous. The sooner it is changed so that Wales has the same arrangements in this respect as all other countries – and even with its own County Councils – the better.