

INDEPENDENT FINANCIAL REVIEW PANEL

10AM ON FRIDAY 7 OCTOBER 2011

IN ROOM 28 PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

APPROVED

Present: Pat McCartan, Chairman
Alan McQuillan

Apologies: Dr Etta Campbell

In attendance: Georgie Campbell, Secretary

Agenda item 6:

Richard Stewart, Director of Corporate Services
Brian Moreland, Head of Internal Audit

1 APOLOGIES

1.1 Dr Etta Campbell was unable to attend this meeting.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

2.1 No interests were declared in relation to the issues scheduled for discussion.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

3.1 The draft minutes of the meeting of 1 September 2011 were agreed without amendment. The inclusion of these minutes on the IFRP website was approved.

4 MATTERS ARISING/ACTION POINTS

4.1 Action Points

The Panel noted that all Action Points had been completed with the exception of three which will be completed before the next formal meeting of IFRP.

4.2 IFRP Register of Interests

The updated Register of Interests was approved and it was agreed that this should be placed on the IFRP website.

ACTION: GEORGIE CAMPBELL

4.3 Survey of Assembly Members

Georgie Campbell informed the Panel that the questionnaires were expected from the printers at the beginning of the following week and that they would be issued to Assembly Members as soon as they were received. The deadline for the return of questionnaires is 26 October ie immediately prior to the Hallowe'en Recess. It was agreed that a reminder should be issued during week commencing 17 October and that this should include a progress report in relation to the work of the Panel.

ACTION: GEORGIE CAMPBELL

4.4 Service Level Agreement

The Secretary reported that the draft Service Level Agreement between the NI Assembly Secretariat and the IFRP had been agreed by the Clerk/DG. It was formally agreed by the Panel and signed by the Chair. Georgie Campbell undertook to arrange for this to be signed also by the Clerk/DG.

ACTION: GEORGIE CAMPBELL

5 REPORTS OF MEETINGS WITH MLAs etc

The Panel noted the summary of the comments made by MLAs and others with whom they had met as part of the consultation process.

6 FINANCIAL ISSUES

6.1 The Panel noted that the Secretary had sought legal advice in relation to a possible interim determination in relation to the Office Costs Allowance. They also noted that the Finance Office has written to MLAs to inform them of the Commission's decision that the 2011 RPI uplift and any subsequent uplifts would not be applied because of budget restraints. It was agreed that this subject would be discussed again when the legal advice had been received.

ACTION: GEORGIE CAMPBELL TO ADD TO AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING

6.2 The Panel was informed that Audit Certificates had been received from Parties which fulfil the current OCE requirements. Mr Stewart also informed the Panel that Office Costs Expenses were only paid on receipt of a statement from the Member concerned that the expenses incurred were wholly necessary and used exclusively to support their Assembly responsibilities. Mr Stewart said that there is currently no protocol in place with the NI Local Government Association re councillor and MLA expenses.

6.3 The Panel was informed that some training can be paid from OCE but not training which is related to Party political activities. Each claim is judged on its merits.

6.4 A discussion took place in relation to constituency office rents. Richard Stewart undertook to provide the Panel with the following information:

- An analysis of constituency office rents
- A average rental cost for both urban and rural constituencies which is considered to be reasonable
- Rental costs for returning Members including any re-evaluation figure
- Rental costs for new Members

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

6.5 Mr Stewart undertook to provide the Panel with a breakdown of the cost of stationery provided to each MLA during the last mandate.

ACTION: RICHARD STEWART

6.6 Mr Stewart confirmed that the Resettlement Allowance is paid only to Members who leave at the end of a mandate, however there is provision for a Member who leaves during a mandate for ill health reasons to be paid such an allowance. He reminded the Panel of the SSRB recommendation that a resettlement allowance should be paid only if a Member fails to be re-elected.

7 RESEARCH INFORMATION

7.1 The Panel noted the information which had been provided.

7.2 A discussion took place in relation to private sector occupations which might be used as comparitors for MLA salaries and it was agreed to await the outcome of the research currently being undertaken by the Assembly's Research Service before pursuing this issue further.

ACTION: GEORGIE CAMPBELL TO INCLUDE ON AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING

7.3 The Panel asked to be provided with a copy of the SSRB Report re the NI Civil Service Pay Round.

ACTION: GEORGIE CAMPBELL

8 REFERENCE MATERIAL

8.1 The Panel noted the information provided and in particular the reference in the report on the effectiveness of the Assembly as a legislature (p19) which relates to the time spent by MLAs on fulfilling their various responsibilities as an MLA. The Panel asked that this report is included on the agenda for their next meeting.

ACTION: GEORGIE CAMPBELL

- 8.2 The Panel asked that the Register of Members Interests is included on the agenda for their next meeting.

ACTION: GEORGIE CAMPBELL

- 8.3 The Panel asked for information on the forthcoming changes to public sector pensions to be provided for their next meeting.

ACTION: GEORGIE CAMPBELL

9 STRUCTURE OF IFRP REPORT AND DETERMINATION

- 9.1 The Panel agreed the structures of the Report and the Determination in relation to MLA Salaries and Office Holder Allowances.

10 MONTHLY REPORTS

- 10.1 The Panel noted the report indicating IFRP spend at 30 September 2011 in relation to their budget for 2011/12.
- 10.2 The Panel noted the statistics in relation to website page views.

11 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

- 11.1 The Panel agreed that they would aim to have a first draft of their Report on MLA Salaries and Office Holder Allowances available for December 2011.

12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no further business.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meetings will take place as follows:

**10am on Thursday 27 October in Room 27 Parliament Buildings
10am on Monday 21 November 2011 in Room 27 Parliament
Buildings**

The meeting concluded at 4.30pm