

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE INDEPENDENT
FINANCIAL REVIEW PANEL WHICH TOOK PLACE AT 9.45AM
ON THURSDAY 8 MAY 2014 IN ROOM 236 PARLIAMENT
BUILDINGS**

APPROVED

Present: Pat McCartan, Chairman
Dr Etta Campbell

Apologies: Alan McQuillan

In attendance: Kiera McDonald, Legal Adviser for Agenda item 6
Georgie Campbell, Secretary

1 APOLOGIES

1.1 Alan McQuillan had conveyed his apologies to the Chairman immediately prior to the commencement of the meeting.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

2.1 No interests were declared.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 11 APRIL 2014

3.1 The minutes of this meeting were approved without amendment.

4 MATTERS ARISING/UPDATES

4.1 It was agreed that any issue arising from the previous meeting would be dealt with under substantive agenda items.

5 PENSION SCHEME CONSULTATION

5.1 Chairman's letter of 29 April 2014 to the Chair of the Pension Trustees

The contents of this letter were noted. The Panel agreed to give further thought to the level of Death in Service benefits as requested by the Trustees.

ACTION: PANEL MEMBERS

5.2 Next Steps

The Panel agreed that the level of pension contributions could not be finalised until the Actuarial Report is available. It was therefore decided not to issue a Determination re the Assembly Members' Scheme until the Panel has had an opportunity to scrutinise the Actuarial Report.

Kiera McDonald, Legal Adviser, joined the meeting for discussion of the next agenda item.

6 DETERMINATION FOR ADDITIONAL YEAR OF THE MANDATE

- 6.1 Section 11(1) of the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 states that the Panel shall make a Determination only once in respect of each Assembly. Section 11(3)(b) allows the Panel to make a further Determination should there be exceptional circumstances. The Panel agreed that the provision in the recently enacted Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 which extended the length of the current and future mandates of the Northern Ireland Assembly from four years to five years constituted "exceptional circumstances".
- 6.2 The Panel identified a number of provisions in the current Determination which will cease to apply after 2015 thus making it essential to have a Determination to cover the additional final year of the mandate. The Panel agreed that since a full consultation exercise had taken place prior to the March 2012 Determination, there would be no need for a further consultation on the provisions for the extra year.
- 6.3 The Panel discussed the issues to be addressed in a new Determination with Ms McDonald and the Secretary undertook to follow up the Panel's verbal requests with formal instructions.

ACTION: SECRETARY

- 6.4 The Secretary undertook to draft the following for the Panel's approval:
- Covering letter to the Speaker and Clerk/Chief Executive
 - Covering letter to MLAs
 - Covering letter to other legislatures etc
 - Press Release

ACTION: SECRETARY

- 6.5 It was agreed that the Determination should issue in June 2014.

7 CONSULTATION RE CONSTITUENCY OFFICE LEASES

7.1 Consultation Document draft 5

The Panel discussed the draft Consultation Document which is aimed at informing the Panel's Determination for the next Assembly mandate. Some minor drafting changes were made and the Secretary undertook to provide Panel members with an updated draft for their comments.

ACTION: SECRETARY

7.2 Consultation methods

It was agreed that the consultation should take the same form as that of the Pension Scheme. The Secretary undertook to draft covering letters to the Assembly Commission, Clerk/Chief Executive, MLAs and other legislatures etc for the Panel's approval.

ACTION: SECRETARY

7.3 Consultation Timetable

It was agreed that the Consultation Document should issue in June 2014 with a closing date for comments in September 2014.

7.4 Draft Press Release

The Panel approved the draft Press Release with some additions.

ACTION: SECRETARY TO INSERT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

7.5 Draft Press Advertisement

The Panel approved the draft press advertisement.

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

8.1 Members of the Assembly who are also councillors

In its current Determination the Panel stated that the salary of any member of the Assembly who is also a councillor will be abated by the full amount of the councillor basic allowance with effect from 1 April 2013. The Panel understands that this deduction is currently made by the relevant council. The Panel agreed to write to the Director of Corporate Services asking that, in the case of any councillor elected in the May 2014 council elections who is also an MLA, the full amount of the councillor basic allowance should be deducted from the Member's salary by the Assembly Secretariat and not the council.

ACTION: SECRETARY TO DRAFT A LETTER TO THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES FOR THE CHAIRMAN'S APPROVAL

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place on Friday 23 May in Room 236 Parliament Buildings. Kiera McDonald should be invited to attend.

ACTION: SECRETARY TO ARRANGE