

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE INDEPENDENT FINANCIAL REVIEW
PANEL AT 10AM ON FRIDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2015
IN ROOM 241 PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

Present: Mr Pat McCartan, Chairperson
Mr Alan McQuillan
Dr Etta Campbell

In attendance: Mrs Cathy McGowan, Ms Marion Johnson, Dr Robert Barry was present for Item 6, Mr Richard Stewart and Mrs Louise Anderson were present for Item 7, Mr Hugh Widdis and Mr Jonathon McMillen were present for Items 8 – 10.

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were noted for the meeting.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Mr McQuillan declared an interest in relation to Item 5.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS IFRP MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2015 were agreed without amendment.

Action:

- *Minutes to be forwarded for publication on IFRP Website.*

4. MATTERS ARISING

4.1 Draft note of Liaison Meeting between IFRP and Officials

The Panel noted the draft minute of the liaison meeting between IFRP and Officials on the 15 January 2015. It was further noted that the next liaison meeting would take place on Thursday 26 February 2015 in room 25. The Panel agreed several possible agenda topics which could be forwarded for consideration.

Action:

- *Possible topics for discussion to be forwarded to Clerk/Director General in advance of the meeting.*

4.2 Consultation on the Employment of Assembly Members' Staff

The Panel noted that two further responses had been received in relation to the consultation on the employment of Assembly Members' staff.

4.3 Issues arising from the BBC Spotlight Programme

The Panel noted the further information provided by the Finance Office in relation to an analysis of the transcripts arising from the Spotlight programmes in November 2014.

- 4.4 Update on Chairperson's meeting with the Commissioner for Standards**
The Chairperson informed the Panel that he had had a very useful meeting with Mr Douglas Bain, Commissioner for Standards on 29 January 2015 and provided an overview of the issues discussed.

5 PENSION MATTERS

Mr Stewart and Mrs Anderson joined the meeting at 10.45am

Mrs Anderson provided the Panel with an update in relation to queries raised at the last meeting. Mrs Anderson informed the Panel that the HR and Finance Offices do not have staff who are qualified to provide financial advice nor are they regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. She highlighted that as agreed by the Panel, in order to ensure that the best outcome is achieved a Pension Consultant is required to assess the workforce, identify the requirement, assist in drawing up tender documentation, provide support through the tender process and implementation of an appropriate scheme.

Mrs Anderson further informed the Panel that she had received confirmation from the Pensions Manager in the National Assembly for Wales that they had a single scheme with AVIVA which was made auto enrolment compliant. She highlighted that in 2011 entry into the scheme was made contractual so at the auto enrolment staging date there were only a small number of staff to be auto enrolled. The Panel agreed that Mr Stewart would seek further information, including costs from the Scottish Assembly and IPSA in relation to equivalent schemes and approaches for consideration by the Panel.

The Panel further considered the process for the procurement of a Pensions Consultant to provide the initial technical framework for the Scheme which would then be merged with the policy direction/s provided by the Panel. In conclusion, Mr Stewart sought the Panels views on the management of the process to recruit a Pensions Consultant and it was agreed that Mr McCartan would act as a member of the evaluation panel.

Actions:

- *Mr Stewart to seek further information on comparable schemes from the Scottish Assembly and IPSA; and*
- *Pensions Manager to make arrangements for Mr McCartan to act as a member of the evaluation panel.*

6. EXCEPTIONAL DETERMINATION 2015

Mr Widdis and Mr McMillen joined the meeting at 11.15am

Mr McMillen drew the Panels attention to his legal advice in relation to the drafting of an exceptional Determination and sought the Panel's instructions in relation to several policy queries to assist him in finalising an Exceptional Determination. The Panel considered each of Mr McMillens' queries and agreed that a further and final draft of the Determination, as per their instructions, would be made available for consideration at their next meeting

on 18 February 2015. Mr Widdis highlighted that the exceptional Determination would require associated guidance and it was agreed that the final draft would be shared with the Director of Corporate Services to allow for any required changes or additional direction to be made to the Members Financial Handbook.

Actions:

- *Determination to be updated as instructed and considered by IFRP at their next meeting on 18 February 2015; and*
- *Upon approval, draft exceptional Determination to be shared with the Director of Corporate Services.*

7. PREPARATION FOR 2016 DETERMINATION

The Panel discussed the indicative timings in relation to the drafting of the 2016 Determination and it was agreed that they would consider the use of an external drafting service to facilitate the development of the Determination. It was agreed that Mr Widdis would provide the Panel with a Commission business case under which access to external drafting services could be sought.

The Panel also considered the schedule of work required to complete the Determination within the anticipated timeline and agreed that they would adopt a modular approach to provide drafting instructions and facilitate the development of instructions under each of the main headings within a new Determination.

Mr Widdis asked for drafting instructions in modules as soon as possible so as to allow drafting to commence and as much expenditure kept in 2014/15 as possible.

Action:

- *Mr Widdis to provide the Panel with a business case under which access to external drafting services could be sought; and*
- *Modular approach to be adopted in taking forward policy directions for a new Determination.*

Mr Widdis and Mr McMillan left the meeting at 12.40pm

8. CONSULTATION ON MEMBERS SALARIES AND ALLOWANCES

Dr Robert Barry joined the meeting at 12.45pm

The Panel considered a briefing note, prepared by Dr Barry which compared MLA salaries with the basic salaries paid to Members of the other legislatures in the UK and Ireland. Following consideration, the Panel requested that the costs analysis be amended to include the potential for a reduced membership of the Assembly. It was further agreed that Dr Barry would also insert salary comparators within the 'role relativities' table for consideration.

The Panel also noted the information provided by the Finance Office relating to expenditure by Members for each of the smaller allowances under OCE. Following consideration it was agreed that further information would be sought to provide an annual breakdown from 2011. The Panel also agreed that an explanation should be requested from the Finance Office in relation to how the codes are broken down within each category.

The Panel further agreed that consultation on the matters of salaries and allowances would proceed as two separate consultation exercises. The first on Members' Salaries and the second on Allowances payable under Office Costs Expenditure.

Actions:

- *Dr Barry to update table on salaries and include comparable figures within 'role relativities' table;*
- *Finance Office to provide further detail relating to OCE expenditure for each year of the Mandate;*
- *Finance Office to provide an explanation on how are codes broken down within each category; and*
- *Draft consultation paper on salaries to be considered at an early meeting.*

9. IFRP BUDGET 2015-16

The Panel considered any committed costs within their budget for 2014/15 and agreed to consider a draft budget for 2015/16 at an early meeting.

Action:

- *Add Item to Agenda for future meeting*

10. REFERENCE DOCUMENTATION

The Panel noted a copy of the 'Scheme for the provision of Secretarial Assistance for Members who are not Office Holders (March 2011) from the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Panel further noted that Mr S Mooney from the Houses of the Oireachtas had agreed to attend a future IFRP meeting in March 2015. Panel Members agreed that this would be an informal meeting to gain operational information on the process within the Oireachtas and it was further agreed that an invitation should be extended to the Director of Corporate Services and the Head of Finance.

Action:

- *Invitation to be extended to Mr Stewart and Mrs McClintock to attend an informal meeting with Mr Mooney on 20 March 2015.*

11. CORRESPONDENCE

The Panel noted correspondence received and issued from its last meeting in January 2015.

Actions:

- *Check with Clerk/Director General if he had received any correspondence from IPSA in relation to the matter raised by Mr Allister MLA referring to circumstances when a constituency office is shared with an MP; and*
- *Draft response to Mr Allister MLA as directed by the Panel's discussion to be cleared by correspondence.*

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

12.1 Schedule for future meetings

The Panel noted the revised schedule for future IFRP meetings and proposed Liaison meetings with Secretariat Officials. It was agreed that meetings would take place on a bi-monthly basis.

12.2 Potential models to determine and administer financial support for Members

The Chairperson reminded the Panel of their discussion at the last Liaison meeting where they requested to contribute to the Commission's consideration of models for members' salaries and allowances. He informed the Panel that the matter had been discussed at the last Commission meeting and a response sheet had been devised to seek input from Parties. Mr McCartan informed the Panel that a copy of the proforma had been sent for their attention. Following consideration of the document, the Panel agreed that they would like further time to consider the matter.

Action:

- *Item to be added for consideration at an early meeting.*

12.3 Media Request

The Panel noted a request from Mr Gordon seeking further clarification in relation to the consultation exercise on Members rental costs. The Panel considered and agreed a draft response.

Actions:

- *Agreed response to Mr Gordon to be issued*

12.4 SP+15 Programme

The Panel requested information in relation to the SP+15 Programme being undertaken within the Secretariat.

Actions:

- *Further information on SP+15 to be included in Members packs for the next meeting.*

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that IFRP would hold their next meeting on Wednesday 18 February 2015 at 10.00am in Room 241.

The meeting ended at 2.00pm