

## The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Meeting Venue: Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Meeting date: Friday, 19 January 2024

Meeting Time: 9.30 am



Assembly Commission Members:

Alex Maskey, Speaker (Chairperson)

Trevor Clarke MLA

John Blair MLA

Robbie Butler MLA

Nominated Members in attendance:

Sinéad Ennis MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Officials present:

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive

Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services

Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support

Paula McClintock, Head of Finance

Janet Hughes, Clerical Supervisor

*The meeting commenced at 9.35 am.*

### 1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

### 3. ASSEMBLY COMMISSION BUDGET 2024-25

The Speaker noted that the purpose of the meeting was to enable officials to brief Members on the proposed budget requirement for 2024-25, with a view to seeking agreement by written procedure on a response to the Department of Finance's (DoF's) information gathering exercise.

Mrs Hogg stated that the Assembly Commission's budget for 2024-25 had been agreed by the Audit Committee on 30 November 2021 and the Assembly on 23 February 2022. She said that DoF recognised the time that had elapsed since the Assembly Members (Salaries and Expenses) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2016, as amended by the Assembly Members (Salaries and Expenses) (Amendment) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2020 was published, and the very different financial climate that now existed and that DoF had requested more up to date information.

Mrs Hogg informed Members that DoF was seeking savings plans from Government Departments for 2024-25 and whilst recognising that the Assembly Commission's budget does not fall within the Executive's budget setting process, had indicated that it would be helpful if the Assembly Commission could model reductions as per those requested from Government Departments based on three different scenarios i.e. a flat cash position equal to that received on 2023-24 and reductions of 2% and 5% to the flat cash position.

Mrs Hogg and Paula McClintock subsequently outlined the pressures that had emerged since the budget had been agreed by the Assembly and the proposed updated budget requirement for 2024-25, along with information on the impact that a cut at the levels outlined would have on services in 2024-25.

*Colin McGrath MLA left the meeting at 9.52 am.*

*Robbie Butler MLA left the meeting at 9.55 am.*

It was noted due to the significant change in the budgetary planning context and economic climate since the Assembly Commission last agreed its budget for 2024-25 and in light of the fact that the Assembly Commission's budget is used to provide services to the Assembly, there was little or no scope for the Assembly Commission to meet pressures posed by a flat line or reducing budget position without a fundamental impact on the support it could provide to the Assembly.

Mrs Hogg therefore proposed providing DoF with details of savings that could be made if normal Assembly business did not resume during 2024-25. It was also agreed that the Assembly Commission would continue to consider efficiencies that could be delivered and make every effort to deliver the wide range of services required by the Assembly in the most cost effective way.

Members were asked to confirm if they were content with the updated budget requirement for 2024-25 and that the Clerk/Chief Executive would write to DoF outlining the impact of the three scenarios on the Assembly Commission's operational and statutory obligations in supporting the Assembly, by 5pm on 22 January.

*The meeting ended at 10.13 am.*