

Appendix 2

An Ceann Comhairle

Seomra 39
Foirgnimh na Parlaiminte
Baile Lios na Scáth
Cnoc an Anfa
Béal Feirste, BT4 3XX

Guthán: +44 (0) 28 9052 1130
r-phost: speakersoffice@niassembly.gov.uk



The Speaker

Room 39
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast, BT4 3XX

Tel: +44 (0) 28 9052 1130
email: speakersoffice@niassembly.gov.uk

Peter Weir MLA
Chairperson
Assembly and Executive Review Committee

29 September 2021

Dear Peter

RE: REVIEW OF OPPOSITION ENTITLEMENTS

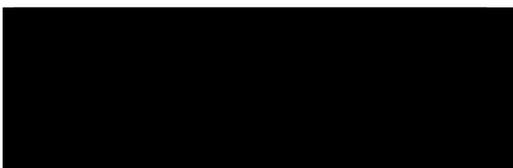
I refer to your predecessor Pam Cameron's letter dated 5 July 2021 to me as Speaker in my role as Chairperson of the Assembly Commission to seek the Assembly Commission's views on the report prepared by Mr Trevor Reaney to inform the Committee's review on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Statement of Entitlements for an Official Opposition.

The Assembly Commission's consideration of the report was naturally focused on the financial implications that might arise from its recommendations given that the Assembly Commission has responsibility for preparing and laying any Scheme that is made under the Financial Assistance for Political Parties (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 ('the 2000 Act'). I should point out that the 2000 Act requires that any FAPP Scheme prepared and laid by the Assembly Commission shall not come into force unless it is approved by a resolution of the Assembly.

The Assembly Commission considered the matter at its meetings on 8 July 2021 and 9 September 2021. In all, the Assembly Commission considered 7 of the recommendations made by Mr Reaney in his report. For ease of reference, the Assembly Commission's agreed responses are set out in the attached table.

I trust that the Assembly Commission's input will assist the Committee in its work.

Yours sincerely,



ALEX MASKEY MLA

Number in Review Report	Recommendation	Assembly Commission Response
4 (page 34)	If the official opposition comprises more than one party, that the parties involved should develop and publish operating procedures for their voluntary grouping in relation to the business of the Assembly. This should be done at the commencement of the operation of the official opposition and be a condition of accessing funding under the FAPP Scheme.	The Assembly Commission proposes to include this condition in the drafting of a future FAPP Scheme.
12 (page 36)	A significant increase in resources available to the official opposition should be provided in the FAPP Scheme to support the effectiveness of the official opposition. The increase should provide an opposition party of 10 members with an addition of £100,000 over the general FAPP funding, with figures for official opposition parties of larger or smaller size varying according to size.	The Assembly Commission is currently reviewing the rates payable to parties. The Assembly Commission will be mindful of the will of the Assembly when the Assembly debates the Committee's report on the Review of the Adequacy and Effectiveness of the Statement of Entitlements for an Official Opposition as it prepares a revised FAPP Scheme.
13 (page 36)	The FAPP Scheme should no longer be constrained by the requirement to adhere to a "cost neutral" principle (i.e. that additional resources are made available to increase the FAPP budget and that no reduction should be made to the level of funding provided to other parties if an official opposition is in place).	The Assembly Commission's review of the FAPP Scheme has not been bound by a principle of cost-neutrality.
14 (page 37)	The conditions and guidance associated with receiving funds under the FAPP Scheme should be set out in more detail to increase transparency, probity and fairness, including a cap on the maximum salary payable under the Scheme.	<p>The Assembly Commission proposes to publish detailed guidance as part of the development of a revised FAPP Scheme.</p> <p>However, the Assembly Commission is not convinced of the need for a salary cap to be included in a revised FAPP Scheme as parties assign differing priorities to the activities that are funded under a FAPP Scheme.</p>
15 (page 37)	The FAPP Scheme should be simplified into a single funding stream that incorporates the current Whips' Allowance and provides support for all aspects of the work of the official opposition including support for the Office of the Leader of the Official Opposition.	<p>The Assembly Commission proposes to prepare a revised FAPP Scheme that contains a single funding stream.</p> <p>While financial support will cover an Opposition Leader's Office, this will not be via a separate funding stream. Instead, it will be included in the additional financial support that is made available to an Opposition party.</p>

Number in Review Report	Recommendation	Assembly Commission Response
16 (page 37)	The review of funding for the official opposition (and that available to all parties) should take account of the fact that there has been no increase in the rates payable under the FAPP Scheme since 2016.	The Assembly Commission proposes to uplift the rates provided in a future FAPP Scheme.
17 (page 37)	A mechanism for an annual cost of living increase should be built in to a revised FAPP Scheme.	The Assembly Commission proposes to include an uprating mechanism in a revised FAPP Scheme.