

Annual Report 2025-26

Contents

Introduction	3
Background	4
Membership	5
The Board's work in 2025-26	6
Meetings	7
Financial Report	8
Governance Statement	8
Code of Conduct	9
Declarations of Interests	9

Introduction

Alan Lowry, Chairperson of the Board

This is the first annual report of the Independent Remuneration Board ('the Board'), which was established by the Assembly Members (Independent Remuneration Board) Act (Northern Ireland) 2025 ('the 2025 Act').

The Board has a similar remit for Members of the Legislative Assembly ('Members') pay and pensions as the Independent Financial Review Panel that existed until 2016, but, unlike the Panel, the Board has no remit for Members' expenses. This role is now carried out by the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, under the enactment of the Assembly Members (Office and Staffing Costs and Allowances) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2025.

The establishment of the Board therefore enabled the first review of Assembly Members' salaries since 2016. The Board concluded at an early stage that, because Members' pay had not been reviewed for a decade, its first Determination would be a corrective measure which, although likely to attract public scrutiny, would fairly reflect the evidence and the statutory parameters.

Acknowledging public concern regarding the 'stop-start' nature of politics in Northern Ireland in recent times, the Board has introduced a salary reduction mechanism if an Executive is not formed after the 2027 election, or if, at any time, the offices of First Minister and deputy First Minister become vacant.

It has been an honour, privilege and challenge for me to chair this new board and utilise the learning from my 40 years in the business world in Northern Ireland and globally.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Board members, Craig Griffiths and Robert Herron, for their commitment to the task at hand as well as their support for both the duties of the Board and to me as Chair.

Lastly, I would also like to put on record the Board's appreciation of the contributions made by Assembly Commission staff who have supported the Board's work during an increasingly busy period for the Assembly.

Background

The Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 ('the 2011 Act') established an independent body to determine the salaries, allowances and pensions payable to Members of the Assembly. The Independent Financial Review Panel issued its first Determination in 2012 and its final Determination in 2016.

In June 2020, the Northern Ireland Assembly conferred powers on the Assembly Commission to determine allowances payable to Members. On 4 February 2025, this authority was extended to include the power to determine allowances for former Members.

The Board was established in September 2025, when the 2011 Act was amended by the 2025 Act. The 2025 Act amended the Board's powers and governance framework and provided for the Board to determine the salaries and pensions, but not allowances, payable to Members of the Assembly.

The legislation provides that the Board is fully independent and is not subject to the control of either the Northern Ireland Assembly or the Assembly Commission.

The Chairperson and two other members of the Board are each appointed for a five-year term.

The Board will make its determinations on salaries and pensions only once in respect of each Assembly; however, the 2011 Act does make provision for further determinations in exceptional circumstances.

The Board's objectives are to provide Members with a level of remuneration which fairly reflects the complexity and importance of their work and does not deter anyone from seeking election on financial grounds. It will also ensure that public money is spent with probity, accountability, value for money and transparency. The legislation also obliges the Board to have regard to the salaries payable to members of the House of Commons; the Scottish Parliament; Senedd Cymru (the Welsh Parliament); and Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann.

The role of the Board is to make determinations in relation to all aspects of salaries and pensions for Members as well as the remuneration of additional officeholders of the Assembly including the Speaker, Deputy Speakers, Assembly Commission Members and Committee Chairpersons - as well as the remuneration of members of the Northern Ireland Executive (the First Minister, deputy First Minister, junior Ministers and Ministers).

Under the 2025 Act the Board must:

‘as soon as practicable after the end of each financial year, provide to the Commission a report on the performance of its functions, including the use of resources, during that financial year.’

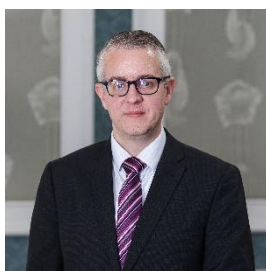
This report is published to fulfil that obligation.

Membership



Alan Lowry (Board Chairperson) is Executive Chair of Environmental Street Furniture. He is also Chair of the Federation of Small Businesses in Northern Ireland, and on their UK-wide policy board since 2021. Previously, he was a director with WT Burdens.

Alan also serves on the UK Government Small Business Growth Forum and is an Export Champion for the Department for Business and Trade. He previously served as Chair of the Electrical Wholesalers Federation and the Institution of Lighting Engineers. He is a guest lecturer at the Ulster University Business School. He is Chair of the charity, Zimbabwe Orphan Care, a role he has held since 2006 - supporting feeding, education and orphanage programmes in Harare, Zimbabwe and operating the ‘Jabulani’ children’s home.



Craig Griffiths (Board member) is the Head of Members’ Business Support with the Senedd Commission, overseeing teams that administer allowances and provide generalist HR support to Members of the Senedd. Prior to taking up this role, Craig was a lawyer with the Senedd’s Legal Services team, where he provided legal advice on a range of business and corporate matters, including to the Independent

Remuneration Board of the Senedd. Although now a non-practising solicitor, Craig practised public and commercial law for 18 years, working in local government and private practice.



Robert Herron (Board member) is a retired Presbyterian Minister. He served as Clerk of the Presbytery of Omagh from 2004 to 2023. He is a past President of the Irish Council of Churches. Currently, Robert is a Trustee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland; a Charity Trustee of the General Investment Fund (PCI); a Charity Trustee of the Presbytery of Omagh; Chair of the Presbyterian Herald Oversight Panel (the official magazine of PCI); a member of the Council for Public Affairs (PCI) and Convener of the State Education Committee (PCI). He represents the Presbyterian Church on the Transferor Representatives' Council. Robert is a former Chair of the Western Education and Library Board and a past President of the NI Association of Education and Library Boards. He was appointed to the Board of the Education Authority (EA) in 2015 and served until 2025. During his membership of the EA, he was Chair of the Resources and People Committee; the Remuneration Committee; the Membership and Teaching Appointments Committee; the Education Committee and a member of the Strategic Planning and Policy Committee. Robert has forty years' experience as a school governor and in 2015 was awarded an OBE for services to education.

The Board's work in 2025-26

The work of the Board since its first meeting in November 2025 has concentrated on developing and publishing its first Determination relating to Members' salaries. Work in the 2026-27 financial year will focus on ensuring it meets its obligation to publish both a salary determination and a pension determination at least 6 months before the date of the poll for the election of the 2027-32 Assembly; expected in May 2027.

For the salary determination, the Board sought views and feedback on its draft determination from Members, the Assembly Commission and the Assembly Members' Pension Trustees through a two-week consultation. The consultation closed on 5 March 2026, after which the Chairperson and members of the Board considered the responses received and presented a final Determination to the

Assembly Commission for publication and implementation. The unsolicited views of members of the public who contacted the Board at this time were also considered.

The resulting Determination increased salaries for Members from £53,000 to £67,200 per year (26.8%), from 1 April 2026.

In recognition of public frustration at periods of institutional non-functioning in Northern Ireland, the Board considered that significant financial sanctions should apply if an Executive is not formed following the next and subsequent elections - or if at any time the offices of First Minister and deputy First Minister become vacant.

As the Chairperson of the Board said when the draft Determination was published:

'In reaching our determination, we also took into account the current salaries of elected representatives in the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments as well as those in Westminster and Dublin. Between 2016-25, an MP's salary went up by 25%, while Members of the Welsh Senedd, Scottish Parliament and Irish Dáil saw increases of 19%, 23% and 34% respectively. In the same period, MLA pay increased significantly less, by 8%.'

With the previous Independent Financial Review Panel last making a determination in 2016, it is clear the system has not been working properly for 10 years, and any delay would only further exacerbate the situation.

Having taken this corrective measure, we can now move forward to a situation where any changes to MLA pay levels are likely to be more in line with normal inflationary trends.

Meetings

The Board held a total of five meetings during the period of this report with no apologies. The minutes of those meetings are published on the Board's webpage. The dates of those meetings were: 24 November 2025; 16 December 2025; 19 January 2026; and 16 February 2026. At these meetings, members considered research papers, heard from officials and considered feedback to consultation exercises.

Financial Report

£6,481.44 was spent on the fees of the Board members, £1,167.63 was spent on travel costs and £196.27 on hospitality. All clerical and administrative support to the Board comes from existing Assembly Commission resources.

2025-26 Amount Spent £	
Board fees	
Alan Lowry, Chairperson	£3,879
Craig Griffiths	£1,154.44
Robert Herron	£1,448
Total Board Fees	£6,481.44
General Administrative Expenditure	
Travel expenses	£1,167.63
Hospitality	£196.27
Total General Administrative Expenditure	£1,363.90
Overall Total	£7,845.34

Governance Statement

The Board is committed to publishing all material it considers when making its decisions subject to data protection and other legal limitations.

During the reporting period the Board received and responded to four Freedom of Information requests. It submitted a draft Retention and Disposal Schedule to the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland for consideration. It also published the following on the Board's webpage:

- Board Code of Conduct;

- Board Complaints Procedure;
- Board Rules of Procedure; and
- Privacy Notice.

Code of Conduct

A copy of the Code of Conduct is available on the Board's webpage.

The Board is committed to reviewing its Code of Conduct annually. No breaches of the Code of Conduct occurred during the reporting period.

Declarations of Interests

The Board's Code of Conduct contains a commitment to maintain a Register of Interests. In addition, at each meeting of the Board, there is a standing agenda item to allow the Chairperson or members to declare any interests that they have in relation to the issues to be discussed. The purpose of the Register is to provide information on any financial interests or other material benefits that the Chairperson or a member of the Board receives, which might reasonably be thought by others to influence his or her actions or decisions taken in his or her capacity as Chairperson or member of the Board.

The Chairperson and each Board member is responsible for his/her own entry and for providing any additional information that may be relevant at meetings of the Board. Entries are amended on an ongoing basis as necessary. Board members' interests can be viewed on the Board's webpage.

For further information on the work and membership of the Board please contact us at the following email address:

remunerationboard@niassembly.gov.uk

