Independent Remuneration Board

Consultation Summary Report

on the Independent Remuneration Board's draft determination on MLA Salaries for the 2027-2032 Assembly Mandate

Introduction

1. The Independent Remuneration Board sought the views of the statutory consultees listed in Section 11 (5B) Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 as well as the public on its draft determination relating to MLA salaries for the 2027 to 2032 Assembly mandate. Elections for this mandate are scheduled for May 2027.

2. The Board received responses from the Assembly Commission and the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme Trustees. Neither consultee commented on the substance of the draft Determination. The Assembly Commission emphasised the importance of preserving the Board's independence and noted that, having taken advice from officials, it had identified no significant technical or implementation issues arising from the draft Determination. The Commission therefore declined to express a view on the merits of the proposals, noting that political parties and individual Members remained free to submit their own views directly to the Board.

3. The Trustees of the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme considered the draft Determination at their meeting on 23 September 2026 and confirmed that they had no collective comments to make on the proposals. The Trustees noted, however, that individual trustees retained the right to submit separate responses in their capacity as Members should they wish to do so.

4. The Board also received responses from the Alliance Party and Sinn Féin. Both parties expressed opposition to the proposed increase in MLA salaries, citing concerns regarding the appropriateness of a further increase following the substantial uplift implemented in 2026 and the wider context of pressures on

public expenditure and public services. The responses also highlighted the importance of maintaining public confidence in the remuneration framework and ensuring that MLA remuneration remains proportionate, justified and aligned with broader public expectations.

5. Responses from the statutory consultees are available in full at Appendix 1.

6. A public survey was hosted on Citizen Space and was open for four weeks, from 17 September to midnight on 15 October 2026.

7. A link to the survey was published on the home page of the Assembly's website on 17 September and posted on the Assembly's X and Facebook accounts[1]. The same messaging and link to the survey was published once a week, while the consultation was live.

8. The consultation invited views on:

   - the proposed MLA salary of £69,216 to be paid to Members returned following the next Assembly election;
   - the proposed use of the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) as the mechanism for determining annual salary uplifts;
   - the proposed additional salaries payable to Assembly officeholders; and
   - the sanctions regime, involving staged reductions in MLA salaries in circumstances where the Assembly is not formed or where Assembly operations are suspended.

9. A total of 274 responses were received to the consultation survey. All responses were from members of the public responding in an individual capacity. A summary of the responses to each question is provided below.

10. Lastly, the Board received seven email responses from members of the public. Overall, the email responses reflected strong opposition to the proposed salary increase and emphasised themes of affordability, public sector pay comparability, accountability, value for money and public confidence in political institutions.

[1] The NI Assembly has 21k followers on Facebook and 44.3k followers on X.

Public Consultation Summary

MLA Salary Level

11. Respondents were asked for their views on the proposed MLA salary of £69,216 for MLAs returned at the next Assembly election. Respondents were also asked whether they considered the proposed salary appropriately reflected the complexity and importance of the role and whether it would be sufficient to attract capable and committed candidates to seek election to the Assembly.

12. 272 respondents provided their views on the proposed MLA salary of £69,216. The majority of respondents (253, 92.34%) considered the proposed salary to be too high. Fourteen respondents (5.11%) considered the proposed salary to be about right, while five respondents (1.82%) considered it too low. Two respondents did not answer the question.

Table 1: Views on Proposed MLA Salary (£69,216)

Response	Number	%
Too high	253	92.34%
About right	14	5.11%
Too low	5	1.82%
No response	2	0.73%

13. Respondents were asked whether they agreed that the proposed salary fairly reflects the complexity and importance of an MLA's role. All 274 respondents answered this question.

14. A total of 237 respondents either disagreed (42, 15.33%) or strongly disagreed (195, 71.17%) that the proposed salary fairly reflected the role, compared with 22 respondents who agreed (12, 4.38%) or strongly agreed (10, 3.65%). Fifteen respondents (5.47%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

15. Respondents were also asked whether the proposed salary would, on financial grounds, discourage capable and committed people from seeking election to the Assembly. There were 273 responses to this question.

16. Just over half of respondents (147, 53.64%) agreed or strongly agreed that the proposed salary would not discourage prospective candidates from standing for election. Sixty-six respondents (24.08%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 60 respondents (21.90%) neither agreed nor disagreed. One respondent did not answer this question.

17. The consultation responses on the salary level questions indicate that a substantial majority (over nine in ten) of respondents considered the proposed MLA salary to be too high. Respondents also disagreed that the proposed salary appropriately reflects the complexity and importance of the MLA role. Views were more mixed, however, on whether the proposed salary would be sufficient to attract capable candidates to seek election to the Assembly.

Annual Salary Uplifts

18. The Board sought views on its proposal that annual adjustments to MLA salaries should be linked to changes in the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) figures for Northern Ireland, subject to a maximum annual increase of 3%. Respondents were asked whether they agreed that annual salary increases should be capped and, if so, whether the proposed 3% cap was appropriate.

19. 273 respondents provided their views on capping annual salary increases. There was overwhelming support for placing a cap on annual salary increases, with 255 respondents (93.07%) agreeing that increases should be capped. Eleven respondents (4.01%) disagreed, while seven respondents (2.55%) indicated that they did not know. One respondent did not answer this question.

Table 2: Views on Capping Annual Salary Increase

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	255	93.07%
No	11	4.01%
Don't know	7	2.55%
No response	1	0.36%

20. Respondents were then asked whether the proposed cap of 3% was too high, about right, or too low.

21. Of the 273 respondents who answered this question, 228 (83.21%) indicated that the proposed cap was too high. Thirty-six respondents (13.14%) considered it to be about right, while nine respondents (3.28%) considered it too low.

Table 3: Views on Proposed 3% Cap

Response	Number	Percentage
Too high	228	83.21%
About right	36	13.14%
Too low	9	3.28%

22. The consultation responses show support for the principle of restricting annual salary increases through the use of a cap. However, respondents were less supportive of the level proposed by the Board. While over nine in ten respondents agreed that salary increases should be capped, more than four-fifths considered the proposed maximum annual increase of 3% to be too high.

Officeholder Additional Salaries

23. Respondents were asked for their views on the proposed levels of additional remuneration for officeholder roles within the Assembly. They were also asked whether those additional salaries should remain unchanged throughout the mandate or be increased over time.

24. Across all officeholder positions, the most common response was that the proposed additional salary was ‘too high’. This view was particularly frequent in relation to the offices of First Minister and deputy First Minister, where three-quarters of respondents considered the additional salary paid to those office holders excessive. Similar views were expressed in relation to Ministers and the Speaker.

Table 4: Views on Proposed Additional Salaries

Officeholder Position	No of responses to this Q	Too High	About Right	Too Low	Should Not Be Paid	Don't Know
FM/dFM (£72,000)	274	207 (75.55%)	19 (6.93%)	3 (1.09%)	43 (15.69%)	2 (0.73%)
Minister (£38,000)	274	172 (62.77%)	57 (20.80%)	6 (2.19%)	36 (13.14%)	3 (1.09%)
Junior Minister (£12,000)	271	143 (52.19%)	60 (21.90%)	23 (8.39%)	36 (13.14%)	9 (3.28%)
Speaker (£38,000)	272	175 (63.87%)	48 (17.52%)	2 (0.73%)	41 (14.96%)	6 (2.19%)
Principal Deputy Speaker/Deputy Speaker (£12,000)	274	150 (54.74%)	63 (22.99%)	10 (3.65%)	40 (14.60%)	11 (4.01%)
Commission Member (£9,000)	274	150 (54.74%)	53 (19.34%)	9 (3.28%)	50 (18.25%)	12 (4.38%)
Chair of a Statutory Committee, PAC or DSC (£12,000)	273	154 (56.20%)	49 (17.88%)	8 (2.92%)	51 (18.61%)	11 (4.01%)
Chair of a Standing Committee (£6,000)	273	148 (54.01%)	52 (18.98%)	9 (3.28%)	50 (18.25%)	14 (5.11%)

25. The strongest opposition was expressed in relation to the additional salary currently paid to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, with 207 respondents (75.55%) indicating that the amount was too high and a further 43 respondents (15.69%) stating that no additional salary should be paid. Only 19 respondents (6.93%) considered the proposed level to be either about right or too low.

26. For the remaining offices, over half of all respondents also considered the proposed additional salaries to be too high. Between 52.19% and 63.87% of respondents selected this option across the various Assembly and Executive roles. Between 13.14% and 18.61% of respondents additionally expressed the view that no additional salary should be paid for these officeholder roles.

27. Respondents were also asked whether additional salaries for officeholders should remain unchanged throughout the five-year Assembly mandate or increase over that period.

28. A clear majority supported maintaining the proposed additional salaries at their initial level throughout the mandate. Of the 274 respondents who answered the question, 256 (93.43%) agreed that officeholder additional salaries should remain unchanged, while only 18 respondents (6.57%) supported increases during the mandate.

Table 5: Changes to Additional Salaries During the Mandate

Response	Number	Percentage
Remain unchanged throughout the mandate	256	93.43%
Increase during the mandate	18	6.57%

29. The consultation responses indicate opposition to the proposed additional salaries for officeholders. For every officeholder position examined, the majority view was that the proposed additional salary was too high. In addition, a notable minority of respondents considered that no additional salary should be payable for certain officeholder roles.

30. Respondents were also opposed to any increase in officeholder additional salaries during the Assembly mandate, with 93.43% favouring the retention of the proposed rates without further uplift.

Salary Reduction Measures

31. The Board asked for views on its previous determination that set out that MLA salaries should be reduced in circumstances where the Assembly is unable to carry out its core functions. Specifically, respondents were asked whether salaries should be reduced where an Assembly is not formed following an election and where the Assembly is suspended following its formation. Respondents were also asked whether the scale of the proposed reductions was appropriate.

32. The consultation responses demonstrate overwhelming support for the principle that MLA salaries should be reduced where the Assembly is unable to function as

intended. All 274 respondents (100%) agreed that MLA salaries should be reduced if an Assembly is not formed following an election. Similarly, 273 respondents (99.64%) agreed that salaries should be reduced if the Assembly is suspended, with only one respondent (0.36%) disagreeing.

Table 6: Circumstances for Salary Reductions

Circumstance	Yes	No	Don't Know
If an Assembly is not formed	274 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
If the Assembly is suspended	273 (99.64%)	1 (0.36%)	0 (0.0%)

33. Respondents were then asked whether the proposed reductions were too high, about right or too low.

34. The majority considered that the proposed reductions were insufficient. Of the 274 respondents who answered the question, 245 (89.42%) indicated that the reductions were too low. Only twelve respondents (4.38%) considered the proposed reductions to be about right, while 17 respondents (6.2%) regarded them as too high.

Table 7: Views on the Proposed Salary Reductions

Response	Number	Percentage
Too low	245	89.42%
About right	12	4.38%
Too high	17	6.2%

Additional Comments

35. Respondents were invited to provide further comments or suggestions in relation to the Board's draft determination. 194 of the 274 respondents provided comments. Overall, the comments were overwhelmingly negative toward the proposed salary increase and were largely focused on fairness, accountability,

public sector pay parity and Assembly performance. The recurring themes raised in these responses are set out below.

Opposition to the proposed salary increase

36. Respondents frequently stated that: MLAs are already adequately paid and receive expenses; the proposed increase is unjustified; The recent 2026 salary increase should be taken into account before any further increase is considered. The increase is viewed as inappropriate and out of touch with current economic circumstances.

Public sector pay and NHS concerns

37. A large proportion of respondents compared MLA pay proposals with public sector workers including nurses, teachers and civil servants. Many argued that public sector workers are struggling to secure pay awards while MLA salaries continue to increase.

Cost of living pressures

38. Many responses referred to: rising food costs; energy and heating costs; housing pressures; financial difficulties faced by working families. Respondents frequently stated that increasing MLA salaries during a cost of living crisis sends the wrong message.

Assembly performance and value for money

39. A common view was that Assembly performance does not justify higher salaries. Respondents cited: failure to agree a budget; previous Assembly suspensions; limited legislative output; perceived lack of progress on key public services; a perception that politicians are focused on political disputes rather than delivery.

Stronger sanctions when the Assembly is not functioning

40. This was a common recurring themes. Many respondents argued: salary reductions should be larger; salaries should cease immediately if the Assembly is suspended or not formed; and that the current sanctions are too lenient.

Pay linked to performance

41. A substantial number of respondents suggested: performance-related pay; salary reductions linked to failure to deliver outcomes; formal performance management arrangements; payment based on attendance, legislation passed, budgets agreed or targets achieved.

Objections to comparisons with other legislatures

42. Several respondents objected to comparisons with the other legislatures. The main argument was that salaries should reflect: circumstances in Northern Ireland, local performance and local public sector pay rather than salaries elsewhere.

Public confidence and trust

43. Many comments expressed: low confidence in politicians; dissatisfaction with the Assembly; concerns about accountability and transparency.

Consultation process

44. A smaller number of respondents commented on: question design; limited answer options; concerns that the outcome may already have been decided.

45. Overall, the comments provided by respondents reflected concern about the affordability, fairness and public acceptability of the proposals, alongside an expectation that MLA remuneration should be accompanied by effective accountability and meaningful financial consequences when the Assembly is not functioning.

Conclusion

46. The consultation responses demonstrate a consistent pattern across all aspects of the draft determination. Respondents generally favoured lower levels of remuneration than those proposed by the Board, opposed increases in officeholder remuneration during the mandate and supported stronger limits on future salary growth.

47. There was also overwhelming support for the application of salary sanctions where the Assembly is not functioning, accompanied by a widespread view that the proposed reductions should be more severe.

48. Comments provided were overwhelmingly negative toward the proposed salary increase and were largely focused on fairness, accountability, public sector pay parity and Assembly performance.

49. Taken together, the findings indicate a strong public preference for restraint in MLA remuneration and officeholder payments, alongside robust financial consequences where Assembly institutions are unable to discharge their functions.

Appendix 1

Responses from statutory consultees

Alan Lowry

Chairperson

Independent Remuneration Board

By email: remunerationboard@niassembly.gov.uk

30 September 2026

Dear Mr Lowry

Thank you for your email of 17 September 2026 to the Trustees of the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2016, enclosing the draft Assembly Members (Salaries) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2027 for consultation.

The Trustees considered the draft Determination at their meeting on 23 September 2026 and confirm that all Trustees have had the opportunity to review it.

The Trustees have no comments to make collectively on the draft Determination. However, individuals reserve the right to submit separate comments should they wish to do so, in their capacity as Members.

The Trustees have no further comments on the draft Assembly Members (Salaries) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2027.

Yours faithfully

Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA



Chairman of the Trustees
Assembly Members' Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2016

Sinn Féin Submission to the Independent Remuneration Board's Draft Determination on Members' Salaries for 2027

Response

Sinn Féin believes that it is not appropriate for MLA's to be offered a pay raise of more than £2,000 from next May.

This uplift is excessive and comes after a previous 27% increase in pay was issued in April which we were also critical of.

The scale of these uplifts is grotesque given the fact that other workers have not experienced the same wage growth and many are struggling with the cost of living and increased bills.

As we have stated before any uplifts in MLA pay should be benchmarked against uplifts in wider public sector pay.

This would ensure greater equality, fairness and consistency between the pay settlements reached with public sector workers and MLA's

While we respect the independence of the Board we remain opposed to this determination to provide a pay increase from next May, particularly at a time when the Executive itself is pressing for additional money for public services.

Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

7 Farmley Road
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BT36 7TY

Alliance

Alan Lowry
Chair
Independent Remuneration Board

Via email

14 October 2026

Dear Alan

Re: Alliance Party response – draft Determination on MLA pay for the 2027-32 Assembly mandate

I am writing on behalf of the Alliance Party to respond to the consultation on the draft Determination on MLA pay for the 2027-32 Assembly mandate.

Alliance believes that the proposed uplift to MLA pay should not go ahead and urges the Renumeration Board to take any wage increase off the table.

Coming only a matter of months after the Board's last determination on MLA pay; in the context of extreme pressures on public finances; and with ongoing delays in delivering pay uplifts for health staff and other vital public sector workers, there is no coherent argument or justification for any further salary increase for Assembly Members.

MLAs are already more than adequately paid and the mere publication of proposals to further increase those salaries has already been damaging to public faith and confidence in our political system. Alliance, along with every other party in the Assembly, have already made clear our opposition to the uplift and believe there is no basis for the Renumeration Board to continue with this proposal.

We would also reiterate our long-standing position that future MLA pay award, beyond the next Assembly mandate, should be tied to those in the wider public sector and based on strict affordability checks.

Yours sincerely

Paula Bradshaw MLA
Alliance Party Chief Whip

The Assembly Commission and Clerk/Chief Executive's Office

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Alan Lowry
Chairperson
Independent Remuneration Board
By email: remunerationboard@niassembly.gov.uk

15 October 2026

Dear Alan

Thank you for your email to the Assembly Commission on 17 September 2026 in which you enclosed a copy of the Independent Remuneration Board draft determination on Members' salaries for the 2027-32 Assembly mandate.

The Assembly Commission has considered your correspondence and has agreed that I should respond in my capacity as Clerk to the Assembly Commission.

The Assembly Commission notes that you are required by the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act Northern Ireland 2011 to consult with it on a draft determination.

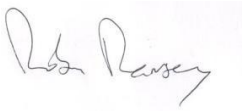
Throughout the passage of the legislation to establish the Board, the Assembly Commission consistently recognised that the independence of the Board was the central principle. The Assembly Commission notes that the requirement for consultation with the Assembly Commission was intended to provide an opportunity to highlight any issues which might affect the Assembly Commission's implementation of the final determination.

The Assembly Commission has taken advice from officials and understands that, notwithstanding the challenging budgetary landscape, from a technical perspective, there are no significant implementation issues arising from the draft determination.

In order to uphold the independence of the Board, the Assembly Commission has agreed that it will not give an opinion on the substance of the draft determination.

The Assembly Commission notes that it is open to the political parties and Members if they wish to respond to you to express views on the contents of the determination.

Yours faithfully



Robin Ramsey
Adviser to the Speaker/ Head of Corporate Support
(On behalf of the Assembly Commission)