

Consultation Responses

Assembly Members (Salaries) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2026

March 2026

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

4th March 2026

Dear Mr Lowry

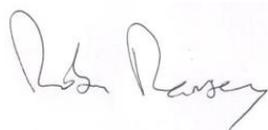
Thank you for your email to the Assembly Commission on 19 February 2026 in which you enclosed a copy of the Independent Remuneration Board draft determination on Members' salaries produced by the Independent Remuneration Board. The Assembly Commission considered your correspondence at its meeting on 4 March 2026 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 impact upon the Assembly Commission's implementation of the final determination. The Assembly Commission has consulted officials and understands that there are no significant implementation issues arising from the draft determination. There may be some minor technical issues to incorporate in the final determination and officials from the Assembly Finance Office can engage with your officials to draw those matters to your attention. A similar process occurred with the Independent Financial Review Panel.

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 and notes that it is open to Members of the Assembly, or their parties on their behalf, 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)

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

4 March 2026

Dear Mr Lowry

Thank you for your email to the Trustees of the Assembly Members Pension Scheme on 19 February 2026 in which you enclosed a copy of a draft determination on Members' salaries produced by the Independent Remuneration Board.

The Trustees note that, under the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, you are required to consult with them on any draft Determination in order to provide an opportunity to highlight issues that may affect the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2016. The Trustees considered your correspondence at their meeting on 23 February 2026 and wish to draw the following matter to your attention. A separate letter will be provided in due course, setting out the Trustees' main points of consideration for the Independent Remuneration Board in relation to the forthcoming Pension Determination.

The earlier *Assembly Members' Salaries and Expenses Determination (Northern Ireland) 2016* included provision 5, which stated that "a member continues to be entitled to a pension in accordance with the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme (as that scheme is from time to time amended)". This provision has been omitted in the *Assembly Members (Salaries) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2026*.

The Trustees note the importance of this provision, as it created a link to the *Assembly Members' Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2016*, made under section 2 of the *Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011* and governing all pension benefits payable under section 48 of the *Northern Ireland Act 1998*. As the 2026 draft Determination revokes the 2016 Determination in its entirety but does not restate this linkage, the Trustees are concerned that that this omission may have unintended legal consequences for pension provision and contributions.

The Trustees therefore respectfully request that this issue be considered in the final version of the Determination.

Yours faithfully

Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA



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

Sinn Féin

a chara,

Firstly, I want to say that I fully respect the Board's independent role in determining remuneration.

Sinn Féin believes it is not appropriate for MLAs to set or, to have any role in, determining their salaries.

In that context, it is vital that the Independent Remuneration Board operates with complete independence.

The board have however asked for our view.

We note the Board's assessment that the uplift proposed in the determination is a 'corrective measure' which addresses;

- a 10-year gap since the previous Independent Financial Review Panel made it's determination in 2016,
- the comparative analysis which indicates that the Assembly lags significantly behind other legislatures.

Sinn Féin consider the proposed increase of 27% to be excessive in the current economic climate and the difficult financial pressures affecting households and public services.

It is Sinn Féin's view that MLA pay uplifts generally should be benchmarked against uplifts in public sector pay.

We fully welcome the Board's recommendations to reduce MLA pay in the event of an Executive not being formed or if the offices of First Minister and deputy First Minister become vacant.

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Sinead Ennis MLA

Sinn Féin Chief Whip

Alliance Party

Dear Mr Lowry,

Alliance recognises the independence of the Remuneration Panel. It would be entirely inappropriate for MLAs to have a role in setting their own pay.

As stated in our initial response, Alliance believes any increase must be cognisant of the unprecedented pressures facing public finances and in line with uplifts in pay for other public sector workers.

We share and understand the public's concern at the level of the proposed hike, which is compounded further by a glacial pace of delivery at Stormont, and the impact of stop-start government over the past decade.

We note that the panel has recommended penalties for periods in which the Assembly and Executive are not operating. These penalties do not go far enough. In addition to the reductions outlined, the salaries of MLAs from those parties who prevent the Assembly from functioning should be stopped completely, as would be the case for other workers engaging in strike action.

However, that such safeguards are deemed necessary, is an indictment of the institutions: rather than the Remuneration Panel being required to plan for future failure, the UK and Irish Governments should instead agree and deliver reform the institutions so no party can hold government to ransom.

Best wishes,

Paula (Bradshaw MLA)



Response to Consultation on MLA Pay and the Recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Board

The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on MLA remuneration and the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Board.

At the outset, we agree that decisions relating to MLA pay are determined by an independent body. The independence of the Panel is crucial in ensuring transparency, objectivity and public confidence in the process. Elected representatives should not determine their own remuneration, and we therefore welcome the role undertaken by the Panel.

Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly carry significant legislative, scrutiny and representative responsibilities. The Assembly and Executive perform vital functions in governing Northern Ireland, and the role of an MLA is demanding, high-pressure and carries substantial accountability. In that context, proposals which bring MLA pay more closely into line with counterparts in Scotland and Wales are, in principle, understandable and capable of justification.

However, any discussion of remuneration must also reflect the wider public context. There is clear public frustration and concern regarding the scale and timing of the proposed uplift. This reaction cannot be divorced from recent experience: prolonged periods of institutional collapse, inconsistent delivery from Executive departments, and growing dissatisfaction with the delivery of public services.

It is therefore not surprising that proposals to uplift the full quantum of MLA pay during the current mandate have been met with a reaction. Public confidence in political institutions has been eroded in recent years, and decisions relating to pay must be sensitive to that reality. In this context, the SDLP would question whether applying the full quantum of any proposed increase before an election is appropriate or defensible.

The SDLP believes that rebuilding trust in the Assembly requires a demonstrable step change in delivery from the Executive. To that end, it is welcome that the Remuneration Board have put forward proposals which help safeguard against further institutional collapse. Securing greater effectiveness, stability and accountability must underpin the work of our institutions. In that regard, we believe a programme of institutional reform is necessary to strengthen governance, enhance resilience, and ensure that the Assembly and Executive function

consistently in the public interest. To this end the SDLP has put forward a series of proposals which we believe could be implemented quickly, but with good effect.

Ultimately, the legitimacy of any remuneration framework depends not only on comparability with other legislatures, but on public confidence in the performance of the institutions themselves. We would encourage careful consideration of both fairness and public trust in reaching final determinations.

Members' Salaries Draft Determination – Consultation (Gerry Carroll Response)

People Before Profit strongly opposes the Remuneration Board's draft determination on Assembly Members' salaries.

Ever since the proposed establishment of the Remuneration Board over a year ago, we have warned that the dice were loaded to recommend a massive pay increase. Despite the repeated dismissals of the big parties, this has proven true.

During the passage of the Remuneration Board Bill through the Assembly, People Before Profit proposed two amendments. The first proposed that a majority of the 'independent' remuneration board should be made up of trade unionists - people who know exactly what pay rises the average classroom assistant, domiciliary worker, cleaner, hospitality or retail worker have been offered. The second amendment limited any future pay increase to no more than CPI inflation (currently 3%).

Both of these amendments were rejected by all Executive parties and the SDLP.

MLAs receive a base salary of £53,000. Those who are members of the Assembly Commission or chairpersons of committees, as well as those who hold Speaker or Ministerial roles, earn significantly more. It should also be noted that at least one in five MLAs have registered interests as landlords, meaning that they will receive rental income **on top of** their MLA salary.

Our MLAs are already extraordinarily well paid, and there is no legitimate justification for a 27% increase.



Public opinion on the issue MLA pay is clear and resounding. An [Act Now petition](#) opposing a potential pay increase has attracted over 3,500 signatures. The Ad Hoc Committee on the Assembly Members (Remuneration Board) Bill engaged in a 'call for views' last year. Almost 70% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal to look to other legislatures when setting MLA salaries. But despite the wishes of the public, that clause remained in the Bill and has now informed the draft determination. It is clear that this call for views was nothing more than a box-ticking exercise.

People Before Profit is significantly concerned about the lack of meaningful public engagement on this issue. The consultation to which we are responding is open only to the Assembly Commission, Trustees and MLAs. This consultation should have been open to the public. We urge the Remuneration Board to extend the current deadline and accept responses from the public.

The salaries of elected representatives in both Westminster and the Dáil are not comparable, as neither of these parliaments are devolved legislatures. Comparisons with the Welsh Senedd and Scottish Parliament would be more appropriate. However, the recent legislative record of both parliaments far outstrips that of the Assembly.

Stormont has passed just ten pieces of legislation in the entire two years since the Assembly has been restored, including the Remuneration Board Bill. It speaks volumes that a legislative priority of the big parties here is to set up the body that will line their own pockets. It is worth noting that in the same period, Scotland has passed three times as much legislation as the Assembly. The Welsh Senedd, which has just 60 members, has passed 13 bills.

Instead of developing legislation, the Executive has published a raft of strategies, including a derisory Anti-Poverty Strategy with no funding or concrete actions to actually reduce poverty, a hugely disappointing Disability Strategy that was met with strong criticism from the sector and



an unambitious Programme for Government devoid of substance and action.

People are rightly outraged that MLAs will pocket a £14,000 pay increase while they wait months or years for an operation, while they can't register with an NHS dentist, while they're living in temporary accommodation riddled with damp and mould, while their child with special educational needs can't get a suitable placement in the local area. A majority of people rightly feel badly let down by the Executive and its inability to materially improve the everyday lives of working class communities. This proposed pay increase is therefore unjustifiable and only serves to reward political failure.

In any case, People Before Profit firmly believes that politicians should earn wages similar to those they represent, regardless of a jurisdiction's legislative record. This is why our elected representatives across Ireland only take home the average industrial wage.

A salary of £67,200 would render our political representatives completely out of touch with ordinary people, and incapable of understanding the daily struggles of the constituents they are elected to represent.

Band 3 Health and Social Care workers are paid around £25,000 per year. Administrative Officers in the Civil Service are paid between £26,000 and £28,000 per year. Last year, teachers were awarded a 4% increase. The Health Minister has failed to confirm whether he'll implement the NHS Pay Review Body's recommended increase of 3.3%. NI Water workers have recently gone on strike for pay parity. Each and every day, hundreds of thousands of retail and hospitality workers struggle to get by on poverty wages and zero hour contracts. The North has the second highest rate of low paid jobs, throughout the whole of Ireland and Britain. In this context, a 27% pay hike for MLAs would be tone deaf and indefensible.

Response to the Independent Remuneration Board Consultation on MLA Pay - submission by Timothy Gaston MLA

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the Independent Remuneration Board's consultation on MLA salaries. However, the context in which this consultation takes place must be honestly acknowledged.

The Board has now proposed increasing the basic salary of MLAs from approximately **£53,000 to £67,200 — an increase of around 26.8%, or £14,200 per year.**

This is a dramatic increase in remuneration for Members of the Legislative Assembly and represents a rise far in excess of the increases that most workers across Northern Ireland have seen in recent years.

Public Reaction and Political Context

It should not surprise anyone that the public reaction to this proposal has been overwhelmingly negative.

Commentators have already noted that such an increase would place MLAs firmly among the top earners in Northern Ireland, and that the proposal has been met with widespread outrage at a time when public services are struggling and many households remain under severe financial pressure.

The optics of this proposal are deeply damaging.

At a time when teachers, nurses, civil servants and police officers have had to fight for modest pay increases — often after prolonged industrial action — the proposal to award politicians a salary increase of more than a quarter risks reinforcing the already widespread perception that politics is detached from the realities facing ordinary people.

Trust in politics is fragile. Decisions such as this do nothing to repair that trust.

The Assembly's Legislative Authority

There is also a deeper constitutional issue that cannot be ignored.

The Remuneration Board's reasoning relies heavily on benchmarking MLA salaries against those paid in other legislatures — including the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the Senedd and the Irish Parliament.

However, the Northern Ireland Assembly does not operate on the same basis as those legislatures.

Through the operation of the Protocol and its successor arrangements, significant areas of law affecting Northern Ireland are now made elsewhere. In practice, large parts of our economy are governed by laws that originate outside this Assembly.

In those circumstances, the claim that MLA salaries should simply be benchmarked against legislators elsewhere is deeply questionable.

Pay should reflect responsibility and authority. When legislative authority is reduced, it is difficult to justify large increases in pay.

The Process Leading to This Point

I also want to reiterate concerns that I have raised repeatedly during debates in the Assembly.

The legislative process that established the current arrangements for MLA remuneration was deeply flawed.

Consultation on the legislation that created the Remuneration Board was restricted to parties represented on the Assembly Commission. Parties outside that circle, and most importantly the public themselves, were excluded from meaningful participation.

At every stage of the process the impression was created that the outcome — a substantial pay increase for MLAs — was already anticipated.

Indeed, even before the legislation passed, Assembly briefing papers openly suggested that an increase of almost £19,000 might result.

Given that background, it is difficult to persuade the public that this process has been impartial.

Representation and Accountability

The people of Northern Ireland expect their elected representatives to act with restraint and judgment when public money is involved.

The Assembly currently consists of 90 MLAs. A £14,200 increase per member represents a significant additional cost to the public purse.

At a time when government departments repeatedly claim that funding pressures prevent them from delivering essential services, the case for such a dramatic increase in MLA pay must be exceptionally strong.

In my view, that case has not been made.

Conclusion

The central issue here is not simply the level of MLA pay. It is public confidence in politics.

A proposed increase of nearly 27% risks reinforcing the perception that political institutions operate according to different rules from those that apply to the public they serve.

If this Assembly wishes to rebuild trust with the electorate, it must demonstrate restraint, accountability and bases any proposed increase on members productivity and delivery of new legislation.

For my part, I do not believe that an increase in MLA pay is justified.

I therefore urge the Remuneration Board to reconsider the scale of the proposed increase and to take full account of the public mood, the current economic climate, and the unique constitutional position of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Only by doing so can confidence in the integrity of this process begin to be restored.

Yours sincerely,

Timothy Gaston MLA

Kellie Armstrong MLA

Dear Remuneration Board

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the 'Assembly Members (Salaries) Determination (NI) 2026'. I am responding as an individual member, not on behalf of any political Party.

Section 1

I am content with the draft wording.

Section 2

While I will not comment on the specific amounts proposed—recognising that decisions on remuneration appropriately rest with the Independent Remuneration Board—I must express my disappointment that the draft determination again treats the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) differently from all other Standing Committees.

All Standing Committees, including the PAC, are listed in Standing Orders and equally meet the criteria set out in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, section 47(2B), which permits remuneration for those holding office on a Standing Committee. Despite this, the draft determination continues to recognise only the Chair of the PAC for office holder remuneration.

Because the Chair of the PAC must be drawn from the Official Opposition, this restricts access to both the role and its remuneration to a very narrow cohort of Members. Recognising only one Standing Committee Chair in this way results in Chairs of other Standing Committees not being remunerated in a fair or equitable manner.

The draft determination does not provide an explanation for why this differential persists.

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 clearly provides for remuneration of office holders:

- Section 47(2B) permits remuneration to be established; and
- Section 47(9A) confirms that office holders are designated as such because they receive a higher salary than ordinary Members. The draft determination therefore does not recognise Chairs of Standing Committee's as official office holders. This is not in line with the NI Act 1998.

The Act anticipates that office holders will receive remuneration reflective of responsibility. Chairs of Standing Committees are included in the Assembly's Chairpersons' Liaison Group, a forum reserved for Chairs of significant Assembly

bodies, Standing Committees are listed in the NI Act 1998 and in Standing Orders. Therefore, it is unfair for the Remuneration Board to continue to treat the Chairs of Standing Committees differently, especially when the PAC is singled out without explanation.

I ask the Remuneration Board to reconsider its decision to remunerate only the Chair of the PAC. I urge the Board to consider either:

1. **Adopting a model similar to the Senedd**, where Standing Committee Chairs receive remuneration at a “Committee Chair (lower)” salary level; or
2. **Providing remuneration on a per-meeting basis**, acknowledging that some Committees meet frequently and undertake a substantial volume of work.

By way of example:

- **The Committee on Procedures** meets every other week, dealing with complex legal and technical matters and bringing forward motions to amend Standing Orders.
- **The Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee** is expected to meet during recess periods to scrutinise new EU legislation and ensure its application under the Windsor Framework.

Despite clearly being official roles within the Assembly, Standing Committee Chairs remain remunerated differently from the Chair of the PAC, even though all are Chairs of Standing Committees.

For these reasons, I request that the final determination either (1) provides remuneration for all Standing Committee Chairs or (2) sets out the rationale for remunerating only one Standing Committee Chair—the Chair of the PAC. Any decision to remunerate Chairs of Standing Committees should be backdated to 1st April 2026 to align with the award made to the Chair of the PAC.

Sections 3–10

I am content with the draft wording in all sections. While I believe we should not be planning for the future collapse of the NI Assembly or delay in becoming operational following an election, the draft wording deals with an issue that is created by the NI Act 1998.

Other Comments

Pre-election period

It would be helpful if the final determination included clarification of remuneration arrangements for members and role holders, listed in Table 1, during a pre-election period. By convention, members cease to receive salary and pension contributions during the pre-election period (previously known as “Purdah”), yet Ministers and other office holders continue to be paid.

If a Member chooses not to contest an election, it would seem reasonable that they continue to be remunerated until the close of polling, consistent with Ministers and other office holders.

If a member is standing for election, while they will be campaigning during the pre-election period they will continue to provide a constituency service, therefore should have their salary reduced for the six weeks pre-election by replicating the arrangements drafted in Section 3 for the ‘initial six weeks after an election’.

Note:

There is no specific law that explicitly states that Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in the Northern Ireland Assembly cannot be remunerated during the pre-election period, previously referred to as “Purdah.”

Pensions

I am disappointed no consideration appears to have been given to pension provision for 2026/2027. With the revocation of the existing determination, it removes provision for member’s pension and any subsequent annual increase (such as rate of inflation).

The current pension scheme for Members does not provide terms and conditions equivalent to those available to MPs or Members of other devolved legislatures.

I urge the Independent Panel to incorporate greater flexibility into the scheme, including:

- Allowing Members to purchase added pension;
- Permitting the transfer of previous pension rights;
- Enabling part of the pension to be exchanged for a tax-free lump sum from minimum pension age (55yrs); and
- Applying the McCloud judgment.

Furthermore, the employer contribution rate should be aligned with that applied to NICS staff or staff employed by the Assembly Commission—neither higher nor lower.

Thank you for your work on the determination. I hope you will consider my points as part of your final decisions.

Yours sincerely

Kellie Armstrong MLA