



Northern Ireland
Assembly

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR POLITICAL PARTIES SCHEME 2024

Administrative Guidance

V1 July 2024

Contents

Contents	i
1 The Purpose, Provisions and Interpretation of the FAPP Scheme.....	1
1.1 Purpose of the FAPP Scheme	1
1.2 Provisions of the FAPP Scheme	1
1.3 Interpretation of the FAPP Scheme.....	2
2 The General Rules of the FAPP Scheme	5
2.1 Principles of the Scheme	5
2.2 The Role of the Finance Office	8
2.3 Submission rules	8
2.4 Declarations	12
2.5 Review of Decisions and Improper Claims	13
2.6 Breaches and Sanctions.....	13
2.7 Annual Audit of the FAPP Scheme.....	14
2.8 Publication of Expenditure	14
2.9 Elections	15
3 Funding under the provisions of the FAPP Scheme.....	16
3.1 Payments to parties	16
3.2 Additional payments to Opposition parties	17
3.3 Supplementary payment.....	17
3.4 Changes to Party Membership	19
4 Party Support Staff Costs	20
5 Other Expenditure	24
6 Budgetary Control.....	25
Appendix A Examples of Admissible and Inadmissible Expenditure	27
Appendix B The Seven Principles of Public Life	30
Appendix C Standing Order 45A. The Opposition	31

1 The Purpose, Provisions and Interpretation of the FAPP Scheme

1.1 Purpose of the FAPP Scheme

- 1.1.1. The Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme 2024 (the FAPP Scheme) provides for payments to a political party based on the number of connected members that the party holds within the Assembly.
- 1.1.2. The FAPP Scheme is laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly under powers conferred on the Assembly Commission by the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Act (Northern Ireland) 2000.
- 1.1.3. The FAPP Scheme provides financial assistance to a party for the “*purpose of assisting members of the Assembly who are connected with that party to perform their Assembly duties*”. In the FAPP Scheme, this is termed the ‘authorised purpose’. All financial assistance provided to parties must be used solely for the authorised purpose.
- 1.1.4. Funding is provided to Members under the provisions of the Assembly Members (Salaries and Expenses) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2016, as amended by the Assembly Members (Salaries and Expenses) (Amendment) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2020 (the ‘Determination’). This funding for Members for Members is not related to any funding made available to parties through the FAPP Scheme, and is only available to enable Members to carry out their duties as a Member, which are defined in Paragraph 47 (3) (a) - (g) of the Determination.

1.2 Provisions of the FAPP Scheme

- 1.2.1. Under the 2024 FAPP Scheme there are a number of distinct elements.
- 1.2.2. The first element of the FAPP Scheme (Paragraph 3 refers) provides financial assistance for a party for the purpose of assisting Members of the Assembly to perform their Assembly duties. The payments to a party under this Paragraph are based on the number of connected Members that the party holds within the Assembly.
- 1.2.3. The second element of the FAPP Scheme (Paragraph 4 refers) provides additional financial assistance for an eligible Opposition party (as defined in paragraph 1.3.9 over). The same authorised purpose applies, i.e., for the purpose of assisting Members of the Assembly to perform their Assembly duties. This payment comprises of two components: (i) a base payment, and (ii) a scale payment, based on the number of connected Members that the party holds within the Assembly.

- 1.2.4. The third element of the FAPP Scheme (Paragraph 5 refers) provides supplementary financial assistance to help fund the costs of providing long-term sickness, maternity, adoption, shared parental or statutory redundancy payments in each financial year. This element of the assistance is not subject to a financial cap; however, it must only be applied to the expenditure incurred in line with the provisions of Paragraph 5.

1.3 Interpretation of the FAPP Scheme

- 1.3.1. As noted in paragraph 1.1.3, the FAPP Scheme provides financial assistance to a party for the “*purpose of assisting members of the Assembly who are connected with that party to perform their Assembly duties*”, i.e. the authorised purpose. For the avoidance of doubt, funding cannot be made available for any other purpose and will not be made available to any other entity other than a political party.
- 1.3.2. This section sets out a number of important definitions and important terms that are used within the Scheme, and which are of particular note.

Political Party

- 1.3.3. ‘Party’ is defined as “*a political party registered under Part II of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000*”. Funding will only be made available to parties that qualify under this definition.

Authorised Purpose

- 1.3.4. ‘Authorised purpose’ is defined as “*the purpose of assisting Members of the Assembly, who are connected with that party, to perform their Assembly duties.*” Where ‘Member’ is a member of the Assembly and a Member is ‘connected’ with a party if that person is a member of the party.
- 1.3.5. For the purpose of this Guidance, ‘authorised purpose’ may be taken to include the following:
- (a) The provision of central administrative support by the party to assist Members of the Assembly, who are connected with that political party, to perform their Assembly duties;
 - (b) The provision of central research, to assist Members of the Assembly, who are connected with that political party, to perform their Assembly duties;
 - (c) The provision of education or training by the party, to assist Members of the Assembly, who are connected with that political party, to perform their Assembly duties;
 - (d) The provision of central engagement / media support services by the party to assist Members of the Assembly, who are connected with that political party to perform their Assembly duties; and

- (e) The provision of equipment or services (the costs of which may not be met from any other source) to assist Members of the Assembly who are connected with that political party, to perform their Assembly duties.

Assembly Duties

- 1.3.6. Funding for a party under the FAPP Scheme **can only** be provided to enable that party to assist its connected Members with their Assembly duties. In this regard, Assembly duties means the undertaking of any task or function which a Member may reasonably be expected to carry out in his or her capacity as a Member of the Assembly. The FAPP Scheme defines Assembly duties as including:
 - (a) attending a sitting of the Assembly;
 - (b) attending a meeting of a committee or sub-committee of the Assembly of which he or she is a member or which he or she is required to attend by virtue of the fact that he or she has a responsibility for a Bill or other matter under consideration by the committee or sub-committee or for any other valid reason relating only to the business of the committee or sub-committee;
 - (c) undertaking research or administrative functions which relate directly to the business of the Assembly;
 - (d) attending, with the approval of the Assembly Commission, any ceremony or official function or national or international conference as a representative of the Assembly but not including attendance that relates wholly or mainly to that member's role as a party spokesperson or representative.
- 1.3.7. Expenditure incurred in the administrative support of a party's Whips' Office, which was recovered under previous versions of the FAPP Scheme, may continue to be recovered, provided such expenditure only continues to be incurred for the authorised purpose of the Scheme.
- 1.3.8. Examples of admissible and inadmissible expenditure of the FAPP Scheme are provided at Appendix A of this Guidance.

Opposition Party

- 1.3.9. The FAPP Scheme provides additional funding for an 'opposition party'. For the purpose of the FAPP Scheme 'opposition party' is defined under Paragraph 4.3 as follows:
 - (a) a party which does not have a Member who is a Minister, but which was entitled to nominate a person to Ministerial office under section 18(2) to (6) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 at the time when those nominations were made; or
 - (b) a party whose members comprise 8% or more of the total number of Members, and which does not contain a Member who is a Minister.

- 1.3.10. The Finance Office will take direction from the Business office as to which party, or group of parties, has formed the Opposition and the date that this took place.

More than one party in Opposition

- 1.3.11. It is recognised that the Opposition can be comprised of a grouping of more than one party. Any funding provided under the FAPP Scheme is only available to a political party. This means that funding for parties in Opposition is not available to the Opposition “group”; the additional amount is only available to each party within the group which qualifies as an Opposition party, as defined under Paragraph 4.3 of the Scheme.
- 1.3.12. Should a party wish to avail of the additional funding available to the Opposition, each party in that group must qualify independently under the following conditions:
- (a) Meet the definition of a political party
 - (b) Meet the definition of an opposition party as defined under Paragraph 4.3.

Dissolution of Opposition

- 1.3.13. Standing Order 45A provides further information on when the Opposition dissolves. Parties should have regard to this provision as it will have a direct impact on the amounts payable to an Opposition party. It has been replicated in Appendix C for ease of reference. Standing Order 45A (4) states:
- “the opposition is dissolved if either of the following conditions are met –
- (a) the Assembly is dissolved; or
 - (b) all Ministers cease to hold office in accordance with section 18(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.”
- 1.3.14. During any periods where the above conditions are met, the additional amount payable to Opposition parties will cease at the date where either 1.3.13 (a) or 1.3.13 (b) occurs.
- 1.3.15. Parties in opposition should pay particular regard to the impact of the loss of the additional payments on the contractual arrangements for support staff and take steps to prepare accordingly.

2 The General Rules of the FAPP Scheme

2.1 Principles of the Scheme

2.1.1. In claiming financial support, political parties are expected to:

- (a) adhere to the FAPP Scheme Principles;
- (b) comply fully to the requirements of the FAPP Scheme; and
- (c) have regard for any guidance and briefing notes issued by the Assembly Commission.

FAPP Scheme Principles

2.1.2. The financial support framework for Members of the Assembly is underpinned by two sets of principles:

- (a) 'The Seven Principles in Public Life', namely: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership¹. These are included at Appendix B for ease of reference.
- (b) In 2010 the Assembly agreed a further set of ten principles, following recommendations made within 'Report on the Financial Support and Pensions for Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly' which were developed in consultation with party leaders. These are referred to as 'The Ten Principles'.

2.1.3. Both sets of principles also underpin the FAPP Scheme. The Ten Principles as applied to political parties are as follows:

Principle 1: Political parties have a duty to observe the seven Nolan Principles of Public Life in all aspects of incurring and claiming expenditure. (The Nolan Principles are set out in Appendix B).

Principle 2: Political parties have a right to be properly supported in assisting the Members of the Assembly to carry out Assembly duties.

Principle 3: Any amount claimed by a party must be in respect of expenditure that has been wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred for an "authorised purpose" as defined by the FAPP Scheme.

Principle 4: The system for claiming expenditure incurred by political parties must be based on the recovery of actual expenditure, not on an entitlement to assistance.

¹ Also called the 'Nolan principles' See *First Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life MPs, Ministers and Civil Servants, Executive Quangos* Cm 2850, 11 May 1995

- Principle 5:** Openness and transparency about expenditure incurred by political parties will predominate, subject only to data protection, security considerations and inordinate or disproportionate costs.
- Principle 6:** Resources provided to enable political parties within the Assembly to assist Members to undertake their Assembly duties must not, directly or indirectly, benefit party political funding or be used for party political activities.
- Principle 7:** Arrangements should be avoided which may give rise to an accusation that a political party is obtaining an element of profit from public funds, or that public money is being diverted for the benefit of a political organisation.
- Principle 8:** Political parties will seek to ensure that any expenditure incurred provides value for money for the taxpayer.
- Principle 9:** The nominated signatory of each political party obtaining assistance under the FAPP Scheme will take responsibility for ensuring that any claims made in the party name for expenditure incurred in respect of the “authorised purpose” are correct and proper.
- Principle 10:** For all expenditure claimed, political parties must act within the spirit of this direction as well as within the letter of the direction. The Assembly Commission will publish the rules and guidance on the system for claiming expenditure under the FAPP Scheme and Assembly officials will provide any further guidance that may be required by political parties.

Application of the principles

- 2.1.4. While not exhaustive, it is proposed that the following list of questions be used to assist in ascertaining whether an item of expenditure can be appropriately claimed under the provisions of the FAPP Scheme:
- (a) Is the expenditure compatible with the Ten Principles?
 - (b) Has this expenditure been wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred by the party to assist Members who are connected with the party to perform their Assembly duties?
 - (c) Is the claim for expenditure consistent with the purposes of financial assistance to political parties as set out in the FAPP Scheme and this guidance?
 - (d) Does the claim for expenditure demonstrate Value for Money?
 - (e) Has the party considered this claim for 'admissible and inadmissible' expenditure as detailed in the guidance? and
 - (f) Could the claim in any way have a negative impact on the reputation of the Assembly?

Demonstrating value for money

- 2.1.5. As noted in Principle 8 over, it is best practice to demonstrate value for money when using public funds to procure goods or services. It is recognised that parties do not have to adhere to the requirements of public procurement regulations and that internal procurement policies are a matter for each individual political party. However, in the interests of openness, fairness, equality and transparency, it is recommended that best practice is followed.
- 2.1.6. As such, Parties must seek to ensure that any expenditure incurred and recovered under the FAPP Scheme provides value for money and represents the most reasonable option available. Evidence of considerations in respect of value for money should be documented and retained for audit purposes.
- 2.1.7. Where expenditure incurred on a single item is over £5,000 parties are required to clearly define or specify the requirements to be met and then seek and obtain a minimum of three quotations for each purchasing decision. The quotes must be attached to the claim upon submission for payment.
- 2.1.8. The Finance Office will assess such claims, giving regard to current guidance and/ or the treatment of any similar claims. It is accepted that in some instances the cheapest option will not necessarily be the most cost-effective or reasonable option when taken together with other factors.
- 2.1.9. If additional evidence is required, the Finance Office will contact the party.

2.2 The Role of the Finance Office

- 2.2.1. Under the Assembly Commission's direction, the Finance Office is responsible for the day to day administration of the FAPP Scheme and interpretation and application of this guidance. The Members' Financial Services team is split into two sections:
- (a) The Pay and Pensions team; and
 - (b) The Claims team.
- 2.2.2. The Pay and Pensions team provides a payroll bureau service for the payment of those support staff salaries engaged under the provisions of the FAPP Scheme. The team undertakes to account for the deductions of National Insurance, tax under the PAYE scheme and pension contributions, completing all statutory returns associated with payroll payments.
- 2.2.3. The Claims team provides advice and support on budgeting and matters of admissibility or compliance; dealing with all queries on how the FAPP Scheme and this guidance should be applied. The team is also responsible for validating submitted expenses, verifying if they are eligible for recovery. It is also the role of the Claims team to verify all the compliance declarations and to manage any audits.
- 2.2.4. In exercising its functions under the Scheme, the Finance Office may make such arrangements as is deemed appropriate for the administration of the FAPP Scheme. Under this authority the team may: -
- (a) On the submission of a claim by a party, reimburse expenses incurred by that party, or make a payment for support staff costs;
 - (b) Issue guidance or direction for the purposes of the Scheme;
 - (c) Set the form and manner in which claims and declarations must be submitted; and
 - (d) Set the time limits for the submission of the claims and ensure that the consequences of non-compliance, as detailed in Paragraph 9 of the FAPP Scheme, are applied in full.
- 2.2.5. In considering any matter under the FAPP Scheme, the Finance Office shall consider whether the political party has complied with that guidance or direction.

2.3 Submission rules

- 2.3.1. Claims for expenses must only be made for expenditure that has been wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred by the party for the purposes of supporting Members in carrying out their Assembly duties, as authorised by the FAPP Scheme.

- 2.3.2. While it is not explicitly stated in the scheme rules, it is assumed that claims should only be made for expenses that have not been reimbursed to the party by any other person.

Submission Methods

- 2.3.3. Documentation should be sent to the Finance Office electronically.
- 2.3.4. Digital copies must be clear, scanned copies of original documents. Photographs of documents will not be accepted. All submissions should be of a sufficiently high quality, so that all information and figures are clearly legible.
- 2.3.5. Parties should retain the original documentation and make readily available for review by internal or external audit, if requested.
- 2.3.6. In order to ensure that forms are not missed, Parties are asked not to send information or forms to individual email addresses. Rather, Parties are asked to use the established addresses for Payroll and Members Financial Services.
- Forms in relation to **Payroll**, should be submitted to payteam@niassembly.gov.uk.
 - Forms for **Claims** should be submitted to membersfinance@niassembly.gov.uk.
- 2.3.7. A party may choose to submit documentation in hard copy, either submitted by post or hand delivered to the Finance office. However, parties should not send additional copies via email to avoid duplicate administration.

Nominated Signatories

- 2.3.8. All claim forms must be signed by a party's nominated signatory. The nominated signatory will manage the submission and management of claims and/or payroll functions on behalf of the party leader. However, the party leader retains responsibility for the submission of claims, annual declarations and the management of budgets.
- 2.3.9. A nominated signatory is appointed by the party leader using form **FAPP3**. The form is available from the Finance Office pages on the Members' Portal. A new nominated signatory form should be returned at the start of every mandate or for every subsequent change in nomination.
- 2.3.10. In order to facilitate ease of processing, more than one nominated signatory can be appointed. This could either be to provide contingency arrangements in the absence of the main signatory, or because the party leader wishes to assign different roles to a number of signatories, i.e. to set up different approval roles.

2.3.11. Approval roles may carry different permissions (listed below) and consideration should be given to ensure the correct permission rights are given to each nominated signatory. When completing the **FAPP3 form**, the party leader should indicate the approval roles assigned to each nominated signatory. Multiple roles can be assigned to the same nominated signatory, it is not necessary to assign them to different signatories.

2.3.12. The approval roles are:

(a) Payroll Approval

- View and approve staff budget report
- View and approve monthly payroll expense
- Discuss payroll matters with Finance Office
- Create and submit payroll forms on behalf of the party leader as follows;
 - o Employment Change Form
 - o Additional Payment Form
 - o New Support Staff Form
 - o Absence – Family Leave Form
 - o Absence – Sick Leave Form
 - o Leaver / Redundancy Form

(b) Claims Approval

- Create and approve claims form
- Create and submit an appeal form
- Discuss claim and appeal matters with Finance Office
- View monthly expenditure report, which includes high level payroll costs

(c) Stationary Approval

- Create and approve stationery orders

2.3.13. A nominated signatory may be permanent or temporary. Temporary signatories should only be used in exceptional circumstances, for instance, when a permanent nominated signatory is off or unavailable for any period of time.

- 2.3.14. To make a temporary nomination, the **FAPP3** forms should be completed in the normal manner, marking the nominated signatory as temporary and providing an end date. The temporary nomination will lapse when the nominated signatory resumes their duties, or at the end date included on the form, whichever comes first. If the party wishes to extend the temporary nomination, the Finance Office must be notified by submitting a new **FAPP3** form.
- 2.3.15. Each nominated signatory will be asked to provide a specimen signature. The signature provided should be the most common one used by the signatory. Each claim will be verified against the specimen signature and if there is any doubt on the validity of a signature, the claim will be held and the nominated signatory will be asked to confirm that it is their original signature. This information will be retained for each mandate.
- 2.3.16. All submissions must contain an original signature. Copies or stamps of signatures will not be accepted. If submitting documents electronically, digital signatures must not be used. Forms **must be** scanned copies of original, hand-signed documents, not photographs, with the signature included.

Evidence

- 2.3.17. The nominated signatory must ensure that the relevant claim form is completed accurately and submitted to the relevant team in accordance with the time scales as directed by the Finance Office.
- 2.3.18. Evidence submitted in support of a claim must be scanned originals, or originals if submitted in hard copy. In exceptional circumstances where original documentation is not available for submission, a party should get prior approval from the Finance Office to submit alternatives.
- 2.3.19. The purchase of a single item costing £5,000 or more, or any contractual liability for services with a lifetime value of £5,000 or more, must be accompanied by at least three competitive quotations for the cost of such items. In exceptional circumstances, parties may seek prior approval from the Claims team if there is an issue in complying with this requirement.
- 2.3.20. To assist the party to fully comply with the FAPP Scheme, a set of forms has been developed. When these forms are fully completed, they will ensure that all necessary information is provided and all required certifications are completed. These are available electronically on the Finance Office section of the Members' Portal:
- <https://niassembly.sharepoint.com/sites/MembersIntranet-Finance/SitePages/Member-and-Party-Forms.aspx>
- 2.3.21. In order to maintain accuracy for administrative and legislative purposes these forms are subject to change. It is essential to use the most current version for all submissions.
- 2.3.22. Payments of expenses, and recovery of staff costs, will only be made on receipt of signed forms, with valid documents attached, as required.

- 2.3.23. Failure to provide the necessary documentation and/or receipts may result in a delay or refusal of reimbursement.

2.4 Declarations

- 2.4.1. There are a number of declarations which parties are required to submit throughout the financial year.
- 2.4.2. **While the declarations may be submitted by the nominated signatory, the party leader retains the responsibility for ensuring that the declarations are completed and returned in a timely manner.**

Declaration of salary approval

- 2.4.3. Each month the nominated signatory will be required to provide approval of the support staff salary costs in advance of payroll being finalised. This is to help avoid over or under payments to staff. In providing this declaration the nominated signatory is confirming that:
- (a) there are no outstanding notifications of contractual changes to support staff in respect of that payroll month;
 - (b) a regular review of job descriptions is taking place; and
 - (c) the job descriptions continue to accurately reflect the list of duties being undertaken by each member of staff.
- 2.4.4. The nominated signatory **must** provide the confirmation within the agreed timeline as directed by the Finance Office.

Annual Declaration

- 2.4.5. Under Paragraph 8.1 of the FAPP Scheme, parties are required to make an annual declaration that they have complied with all the requirements of the Scheme.
- 2.4.6. Therefore, at the end of the financial year, the monthly return will include an additional declaration, so that parties can certify to this effect. This process will ensure that the expenditure claimed under each element of the FAPP Scheme has been reviewed for accuracy and compliance.

Failure to Comply

- 2.4.7. The monthly payroll review and submission of an associated declaration have been introduced following a recommendation by an independent auditor. This control is designed to avoid untimely notifications of payroll changes. Failure to return these monthly declarations may impact on the ability to recover support staff costs under the Scheme.

- 2.4.8. Under Paragraph 8.2 of the FAPP Scheme, parties are not entitled to recover any expenses in a subsequent year until they make and send the annual declaration. The Scheme prohibits retrospective payments in respect of delays. Therefore, it is imperative that the annual declaration is returned as soon as practicable after it is issued to avoid any payment in respect of financial assistance being withheld.

2.5 Review of Decisions and Improper Claims

- 2.5.1. If a party has a concern regarding any decision in relation to the payment of a claim or the application of this guidance, the matter can be referred to the Head of Finance, by submitting a Declined Payment Appeal Form (stage one) **FAPP6 form**. The Head of Finance will consider the concerns raised and review the decision. In doing so they will seek to ensure that the FAPP Scheme and guidance have been correctly and consistently applied by the Finance Office. The outcome of an appeal will be notified to the party within 15 working days.
- 2.5.2. Following notification of the appeal decision, if a party still has a concern regarding the decision they may wish to refer the matter in writing to the Clerk/ Chief Executive for further consideration. A referral to the Clerk / Chief Executive must be made within one month of the appeal decision and should be done by completing a Further Appeal Form (stage two) **FAPP7 form**.
- 2.5.3. In referring the matter to the Clerk / Chief Executive, the party must outline the basis for seeking the appeal including detail on how the FAPP Scheme and/or guidance have not been applied correctly or consistently. The Clerk/Chief Executive's decision will be final. Neither the Head of Finance nor the Clerk/Chief Executive can authorise a claim for payment if the claims falls outside the provisions of the FAPP Scheme or this guidance.

2.6 Breaches and Sanctions

- 2.6.1. The Assembly Commission recognises the need to have an appropriate system of controls in place to verify the validity of and to ensure compliance with the Scheme rules and associated guidance.
- 2.6.2. The rules of the FAPP Scheme and the Assembly Commission's guidance will be used to scrutinise every claim for financial support. In applying the rules and guidance, the Finance Office may seek clarification of a claim. Any breaches of the rules, which may be highlighted as a result of the scrutiny by the Finance Office or from external and internal audit reviews, will be fully investigated by the Head of Finance.
- 2.6.3. Where any payment of financial assistance under the FAPP Scheme has been made to a party and it subsequently appears that the party was not entitled to the financial assistance (or part of it), then the Finance Office may apply the sanctions contained within the Paragraph 9 of the FAPP Scheme regarding recoupment of payments.

2.7 Annual Audit of the FAPP Scheme

- 2.7.1. All payments made under the FAPP Scheme will be the subject of an annual audit by or on behalf of the Assembly Commission as required under Paragraph 10 of the Scheme. This is to certify that all financial assistance received by the party under the FAPP Scheme, in the preceding year, was used wholly, exclusively and necessarily for the authorised purpose as defined.
- 2.7.2. The audit will take place as soon as practicable after the end of a financial year and the scope may include any or all of the following activities:
- (a) Visits to offices;
 - (b) Discussions with individual staff members regarding duties undertaken;
 - (c) Transactional and field testing;
 - (d) Review of internal controls and risk management.
- 2.7.3. The Finance Office will provide guidance at each year on the full scope and expected timetable of the audit.
- 2.7.4. It is expected that all working papers and supporting documents in respect of financial assistance MUST be available. Requests for any additional information, to visit offices, or to speak to support staff should be responded to in a timely manner.
- 2.7.5. If, on review, it is found that funding has been provided to parties that falls outside the scope of FAPP Scheme, further investigation will be undertaken. Any confirmed issues of non-compliance with the FAPP Scheme and this guidance will be referred to the Head of Finance for further consideration. Funding may be stopped, pending the final outcome of any investigation.

2.8 Publication of Expenditure

- 2.8.1. In the interests of being open and transparent about the use of public funds, claimed by each party under the FAPP Scheme will be published (in line with the schedule for the publication of Members' expenditure) on the Assembly's website.
- 2.8.2. The amount of funding provided to each party will also be notified to the Electoral Commission on a quarterly basis.

2.9 Elections

- 2.9.1. Once an election (Assembly or General) has been called, specific election guidance will be issued to all parties. As noted in paragraph 4.1.27, during contracted hours, members of party support staff, whose salary costs are recovered under the FAPP Scheme, must **not** take part in any activity which is not to assist Members carry out their Assembly duties. Activities related to an election, including canvassing or campaigning are expressly excluded from the provisions of the FAPP Scheme and as such, support staff costs will not be paid when a member of support staff is found to be undertaking inadmissible duties.
- 2.9.2. It is the responsibility of the nominated signatory to ensure that no party political activity is undertaken by a member of party support staff, at any time, including in the period immediately prior to an election. It is recommended that a work log be kept by each member of party support staff. This assists in demonstrating that all work undertaken is in accordance with the requirements of the FAPP Scheme

3 Funding under the provisions of the FAPP Scheme

3.1 Payments to parties

- 3.1.1. Paragraph 3.2 of the FAPP Scheme specifies the amount of financial assistance payable to an eligible political party from the 1 April 2024 will be $(N \times £10,000)$ where N is the number of Members connected with the party.
- 3.1.2. At the beginning of the financial year, the amount of financial assistance payable to each party will be subject to an indexation adjustment, as provided for under Paragraph 6 of the FAPP Scheme. The following process will be applied by the Finance Office:
- (a) The amount per Member in Paragraph 3.2 of the Scheme will be increased **or** decreased by the percentage increase or decrease in the published CPI for the 12 month period ending on the 31 January in that financial year. The amount will be rounded up to the nearest £1 before being multiplied by N . The indexation adjustment is cumulative year on year.
 - (b) Where the amount payable to a party under Paragraph 3 of the 2024 FAPP Scheme is lower than amount given in Table 1 below, then the party will receive the amount in Table 1. If it is higher than the amount in Table 1, then the amount calculated in Paragraph 3.2 of the Scheme will apply. The amounts in Table 1 are not subject to indexation.

Table 1 – Amounts payable to each party under Article 3 of the 2016 FAPP Scheme, immediately before it was revoked on 4 June 2024.

Party	Total from 1 April 2024 under Article 3 of the 2016 Scheme
UUP	£92,070.00
SDLP	£92,070.00
DUP	£153,290.00
SF	£156,830.00
ALLIANCE	£124,450.00
TUV	£27,360.00
PBPA	£27,360.00

- (c) The revised amount will be applied from the 1 April in the following financial year.
- 3.1.3. This process will continue until the end of the mandate, when the payments under the Scheme will be reviewed, in line with whatever Scheme is in effect at that time.

3.2 Additional payments to Opposition parties

- 3.2.1. The scheme provides for additional payments to be made to an Opposition party in order to support the effectiveness of the official Opposition. These payments are made in addition to the payments under Paragraph 3 of the FAPP Scheme. The additional amount is calculated as follows:
 - (a) a base payment of £25,000; **and**
 - (b) a scale payment of $N \times £7,500$, where N is the number of Members connected with the Opposition party
- 3.2.2. At the end of each financial year, the amount of financial assistance payable to each party in Opposition will be subject to an indexation adjustment, as provided for under Paragraph 6 of the FAPP Scheme. The following process will occur:
 - (a) The amounts in Paragraph 4.2 of the Scheme (i.e. the base payment and the amount per Member) will be increased or decreased by the percentage increase or decrease in the published CPI for the 12 month period ending on the 31 January in that financial year. The amount will be rounded up to the nearest £1 before being multiplied by N . The indexation adjustment is cumulative year on year.
- 3.2.3. The Finance Office will write each party to inform them of the revised payments due under the FAPP Scheme. The new amount will be applied from the 1 April in the following financial year

3.3 Supplementary payment

- 3.3.1. The FAPP Scheme makes provision under Paragraph 5 for supplementary payments to cover the costs associated with long-term sickness, maternity, adoption, shared parental or statutory redundancy payments.
- 3.3.2. Where qualifying conditions are met (as outlined below), eligible costs may be recovered under the supplementary payments. These will be paid by the Assembly Commission and will not be charged against the annual limit for the party for each year.

Statutory Redundancy

- 3.3.3. A party may claim under the provision for statutory redundancy payments to former support staff whose costs have been recovered under the FAPP Scheme.
- 3.3.4. These will be paid directly by the Assembly Commission on behalf of the party.

- 3.3.5. In order to claim the cost of statutory redundancy, parties must complete **FAPPSS8** form and return to the Pay and Pensions team along with a leaver form **FAPPSS4**.

Temporary Staff to Cover absences

- 3.3.6. A party may claim under the supplementary payment provision those costs incurred in temporarily employing party support staff to cover for a member of staff who is absent from work.
- 3.3.7. There are number of provisions in Paragraph 5.2 of the FAPP Scheme that define (a) the type of cost that can be claimed, and (b) the criteria that must be met for costs to be regarded as supplementary. The type and criteria are as follows:
- (a) Only those costs of temporarily employing a person, or the costs of payments to a temporary work agency in respect of the salary of an agency worker, may be recovered, where –
 - (b) the employee that is absent and whose role is being covered:
 - i is absent from work for a continuous period of at least four weeks by reason of illness, maternity leave, adoption leave or shared parental leave; **and**
 - ii continues to be employed by the party during the absence; **and**
 - iii continues to receive payments from the party (whether payments under contract or payments required under statutory provision) during the absence.
- 3.3.8. If at any time the qualifying conditions cease to be met, then the costs of the temporary employee will not be recoverable under the supplementary payments provision. However, these costs may continue to be recoverable under the main provision, subject to the limits of the funds available for that year.
- 3.3.9. While there is no cap on the amount of supplementary payments that can be paid each year, in the interest of adhering to the Ten Principles, it is strongly recommended that temporary members of staff are engaged at a salary equal to or less than that of the staff member they are covering for.
- 3.3.10. In order to claim the costs of temporary staff who are covering absences as described above, parties must complete and submit the same paperwork required for appointing a permanent member of staff, by using a **FAPPSS1**. On submitting it to the Pay and Pensions team, the section on temporary staff must be completed, stating whom it is covering for and providing an estimate of how long the arrangements are to remain in place.

3.4 Changes to Party Membership

- 3.4.1. Financial assistance provided for under the FAPP Scheme is calculated with reference to the number of connected Members that the party holds within in Assembly (*N*). Therefore, any changes to membership numbers must be communicated in a timely manner to ensure no *over* or *under* payments are made.
- 3.4.2. Where, during any financial year, there is a change to the number of Members connected to a party, then the payments to that party will be increased or decreased proportionately for the remainder of the year, from the date that the change in membership took place.
- 3.4.3. Where, during a financial year, a Member becomes connected with a party that was not previously represented in the Assembly, payments to that party will commence from the date the party is recognised as a party (under the definition in paragraph 1.3.3). The payments will be made in accordance with the Scheme for the remainder of the year.
- 3.4.4. During periods when the Assembly is dissolved, changes in membership will not be taken into account for the purposes of payments made. Membership numbers will remain unaltered until the date the Roll of Membership is signed. At that point, payments made to the party will be adjusted proportionately, to account for any changes in the number of Members connected to each party as a result of the election.
- 3.4.5. A party in Opposition should have regard for the impact of dissolution as detailed in paragraph 1.3.13.
- 3.4.6. A person who holds office as Presiding Officer (P) may give to the Assembly Commission notice in writing that P no longer wishes to be treated as connected with the party of which P is a member, and if P does so, P shall be disregarded as a Member connected with that party for the purposes of Paragraph 3 and Paragraph 4 of the Scheme.
- 3.4.7. The Finance Office will take direction from the Business office as to when there is a change in the numbers of Members and/or the recognition of a new party, and the date the change took place.

4 Party Support Staff Costs

- 4.1.1. This section provides more detail on the administrative processes for support staff costs.
- 4.1.2. Parties may claim the salary costs of party support staff who are engaged, either through a contract of employment, or through an agency, to assist Members in carrying out their Assembly duties.
- 4.1.3. For the avoidance of doubt, all party support staff whose salaries are recovered under the provisions of the FAPP Scheme are employees of the party. They are not employed by the Assembly Commission, nor are they employed by individual Members.
- 4.1.4. If a party wishes to engage staff in this capacity, all payments **must** be made through the payroll bureau service that is managed by the Pay and Pension team.
- 4.1.5. The Pay and Pension team undertakes to:
 - (a) Provide payroll bureau services for the party;
 - (b) Process any deductions of National Insurance and tax under the PAYE system, also completing all HMRC returns associated with payroll payments,
 - (c) Process payments of pension contributions to the relevant pension provider where necessary, provided the pension scheme is approved by the Pay and Pensions team.
- 4.1.6. The following staff costs are eligible for reimbursement subject to the annual FAPP Scheme limit of financial assistance payments:
 - (a) support staff costs (basic or overtime);
 - (b) employers' National Insurance Contributions;
 - (c) employers' pension contributions;
 - (d) contributions to employer related costs of HMRC approved salary sacrifice scheme, and associated administration costs of running such a scheme;
 - (e) contractual employment costs, including: contractual redundancy payments, contractual maternity pay, contractual sick pay, paid parental leave, paid annual leave or pay in lieu of notice and all other incidental or ancillary contractual costs, such as bonuses, or travel and subsistence costs; and
 - (f) statutory payments, such as statutory sick pay, or statutory maternity / paternity pay etc.

- 4.1.7. Statutory redundancy payments and the costs of temporarily employing someone to cover for an employee who is absent, due to long-term sickness, maternity, adoption or shared paternity will be met centrally by the Assembly Commission and will not be deducted from the annual FAPP Scheme limit, subject to the conditions being met as detailed in paragraph 3.3 of this guidance.

General Rules on submission

- 4.1.8. Notification of amendments to payroll should be:
- (a) submitted using the correct forms;
 - (b) submitted in line with the submission rules detailed in paragraph 2.3.
 - (c) forwarded to the Pay and Pension team by the agreed payroll cut-off dates, which are published as a monthly payroll calendar on the Finance Office pages of the Members' Portal.
 - (d) Reviewed in advance of submission to ensure that, if it is a financial change, it will not cause the party to exceed the annual limit of the financial assistance.
- 4.1.9. All current versions of the forms are available from the Finance Office pages on Members' Portal
- 4.1.10. Any amendments to payroll, which are to be reflected in an outgoing year, must be received by the Payroll and Pension team before 10 March each year. Amendments received after this date will be processed in the following financial year, affecting the following year's allowance.

New Starters

- 4.1.11. Where the cost of support staff salaries are to be met from the FAPP Scheme, the party must supply the Pay and Pension team with the following, prior to any payments being processed:
- (a) For each member of party support staff, a signed and dated copy of a party contract of employment. This is a requirement under the Employment Rights (NI) Order 1996. A "Statement of Particulars of Employment" template is available on the Finance Office pages of Members' portal, should a party wish to use it. The job title must be clearly defined and it must be accompanied by a detailed job description.
 - (b) **A completed and signed copy of a payment authorisation form, i.e. a Form FAPPSS1.** A separate form must be completed for each member of staff. These forms can be found on the Finance Office pages of the Members' Portal.

Variable payments and employment changes

- 4.1.12. Instructions for variations to the monthly salary payments e.g. overtime payments or contractual bonus payments, should be notified on form **FAPPSS3**. This form can be found on the Finance Office pages of the Members' Portal.
- 4.1.13. All permanent alterations to payroll should be notified to the Payroll and Pension team on the **FAPPSS2** form, which is also available on the Finance Office pages of the Members' Portal.

Managing Attendance and Absences

- 4.1.14. Managing attendance and recording annual leave etc. is a matter for each party in their role as employer. However, there are a number of payroll processes that need to be undertaken for sick absences and those absences associated with family leave.
- 4.1.15. Early engagement with the Pay and Pensions team is advised should any of these circumstances arise to ensure that support staff receive their full statutory or contractual entitlement.
- 4.1.16. Documentation in relation to sick absences or family leave should be checked and a copy retained by the party for audit purposes. However, notification of absences should be made to the Pay and Pensions teams by completing and submitting the appropriate form.
- 4.1.17. For sick related absences, the nominated signatory should submit a **FAPPSS6** form as soon as possible following notification, and for absences over 7 days, a copy of a 'fit note' should also be attached. Any contractual sick pay will continue to be paid in accordance with the contract until further notification is received from the party. Therefore, timely notification of a support staff's return to work is critical, to avoid any overpayments of sick pay. This should be undertaken by completing and submitting a Resumption of Duties form **FAPPSS7**.
- 4.1.18. For family related absences, the nominated signatory should complete and submit a **FAPPSS5** as soon as practicable, and no later than 4 weeks before the anticipated date of leave. To arrange payment of KIT/SPLIT days, the nominated signatory should complete and submit the **FAPPSS3** form.

Leavers & Redundancy

- 4.1.19. Notification of termination of an employment contract, including instructions to pay redundancy payments (statutory and/or contractual), un-used holidays or pay in lieu of notice, must be submitted using **FAPPSS4** (leaver) and **FAPPSS8** (redundancy). Only written confirmation of these adjustments will be accepted, no changes will be made as a result of verbal communication with the Payroll team.

Processing of Payments

- 4.1.20. Payroll payments will only be made once all appropriate documentation is received, authorised by the nominated signatory.
- 4.1.21. On receipt of instructions to add staff to the payroll or to process payroll amendments, such as the payment of overtime hours, to increase the hours of part-time workers or to effect an annual pay rise, the Payroll and Pensions team will assess the financial impact. Should the addition or change cause the party to exceed the annual FAPP Scheme limit, the paperwork will be returned without any change being made.
- 4.1.22. If there are funds available, the payroll change will be processed. There is no requirement to submit a monthly claim in respect of an individual's salary costs. Once they have been added to the payroll all payments will continue until instruction is received to the contrary. The costs associated with that member of party support staff will be allocated against the total annual limit of financial assistance.
- 4.1.23. If, for any reason, there are insufficient funds to process monthly payments, the party will be notified and payments will cease until funding becomes available. No further requests for payments or amendments to payroll will be processed once the monthly allocation of funding is utilised. Any requests received after this point will be returned to the party unprocessed.

Additional Governance Requirements

- 4.1.24. Each party will have to approve the monthly salary payments in advance of it being finalised for payment, as detailed in paragraph 2.4. This is to ensure the accuracy of the payroll costs in advance of the payroll processing for that month. Before submitting the approval, nominated signatories should ensure **all** payroll changes have been notified to payroll, including:
 - (a) New starters and leavers in the current month;
 - (b) Changes to contractual salary or hours in the month;
 - (c) Additional payments, e.g., Overtime worked.
- 4.1.25. The nominated signatory should be diligent in processing the return. Any delay in submitting the payroll paperwork may have a negative impact on the payroll schedule.
- 4.1.26. It is the responsibility of the nominated signatory to ensure that the job title and job description accurately reflects the duties of each member of party of support staff. The nominated signatory must notify the Pay and Pension team immediately of any changes to duties, or job titles, using **FAPPSS2**. The monthly declaration will include a confirmation that the job descriptions are accurate and no changes are required (see Declarations in paragraph 2.4).

Support Staff Duties

- 4.1.27. It is important to note that the payment of support staff salaries can only be made for staff who are working to assist Members in carrying out their duties. A member of party support staff, whose salary costs is recovered under any element of the FAPP Scheme, must not be involved in any other activity, particularly party political work, including election canvassing or campaigning.
- 4.1.28. If a member of party support staff, wishes to be involved in such activities they must do so outside of their contracted hours, or, alternatively, they may apply for unpaid leave. These activities include choosing to stand as a candidate in any election (including Local Government Elections) or canvassing on behalf of another candidate.
- 4.1.29. Party political work is also taken to include participation in party political talks. All claims for expenditure incurred as a result of involvement in such activities are inadmissible, including party support staff costs of those involved in such a process.

5 Other Expenditure

- 5.1.1. Claims for all other categories of expenditure incurred must be made in accordance with the Principles as detailed in paragraph 2.1 of this guidance.
- 5.1.2. Claims may be submitted on a monthly basis for reimbursement to the party accompanied by a **FAPP1** form, following the submission rules detailed in paragraph 2.3. All forms are available from the Finance Office pages on the Members' Portal.
- 5.1.3. All claim forms must be accompanied by original full invoices, to demonstrate actual expenditure has been incurred. In submitting the claim forms the nominated signatory is required to certify that:
 - (a) The claim has been submitted in accordance with the criteria laid down in the FAPP Scheme 2024 and current guidance (2.1.1);
 - (b) Due consideration has been given to the Ten Principles and these have been applied accordingly (2.1.3);
 - (c) The expenditure has been incurred within the relevant period;
 - (d) The expenditure claimed has been wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred by the party for the purposes of supporting Members in carrying out their Assembly duties as authorised by the Scheme;
 - (e) Work carried out, or items purchased and received, are of a satisfactory standard and represent value for money (2.1.5)
 - (f) The expenditure claimed does not represent a donation to an individual or a charitable organisation and does not represent a payment to a political party for funding or for any party political activities;

- (g) The invoices have already been paid by the party; and
 - (h) Where expenditure is over £5,000 on a single item, 3 quotes have been attached (2.1.7).
- 5.1.4. All claims will be reviewed by the Finance Office and any claim that does not have sufficient documentation attached or is inadmissible will be returned unpaid. Claims for an arbitrary amount, i.e. a “draw-down” of funding, will not be processed, as all claims should be for reimbursement of actual expenditure incurred only.
- 5.1.5. Claims with a value over £5,000 must have three quotes attached as detailed in paragraph 2.1.7.
- 5.1.6. Reimbursements will be paid into the bank account notified to the Finance Office on form **FAPP5**. This form is available from the Finance Office pages on the Members’ Portal.

6 Budgetary Control

- 6.1.1. The amount of funding available to parties under the FAPP Scheme is a maximum annual amount, which **cannot** be exceeded. The recovery of costs is not automatic; costs must be claimed.
- 6.1.2. The financial year runs from 1 April to 31 March. The annual level of funding available to each party through the FAPP Scheme will be calculated and notified to party leaders (copied to party Whips and nominated signatories) at the beginning of each year, or at any time there is a change to membership numbers.
- 6.1.3. The Finance Office will issue monthly reports to parties detailing all expenditure processed for the year to date. Transfer of unused funding to a subsequent financial year is not allowed.
- 6.1.4. The level of funding available to each party is calculated, in the first instance on an annual basis, however, as prescribed under Paragraph 11 of the Scheme, it will be adjusted accordingly for changes in party membership. Expenditure can only be paid for within the financial year in which it is incurred and invoiced.
- 6.1.5. Payments will only be made if all appropriate documentation is received, authorised by the nominated signatory and there are sufficient funds available from a party’s allocation.
- 6.1.6. At any point in a year, where a potential deficit in funding is identified, parties must ensure cleared funds are available prior to the final payroll being processed. Failure to submit funds to cover any deficit could result in non-payment of invoices or salaries. Action must also be taken to ensure future deficits do not arise, adjusting monthly payroll costs downwards. Future payroll payments will not be made until this is undertaken.

- 6.1.7. The Finance Office will continue to accept claims for expenditure for each outgoing year up to a specified date in April. This period is known as the 'accruals period'. However, this will only be to process invoices for expenditure incurred and invoiced up to and including the 31 March. Parties will be notified annually of this date. Claims received by the Finance Office after this date will be returned unpaid.

Appendix A Examples of Admissible and Inadmissible Expenditure

Admissible	Inadmissible
<p>Claims for salary costs (basic, overtime or toil or associated costs) for party support staff whose job description provides for assisting connected Members of a party in carrying out their Assembly duties.</p> <p>Associated employer's costs e.g. national insurance or pension contributions.</p> <p>Associated contractual allowances offered by the employer e.g. contribution to an approved childcare scheme. (Such a provision must be available to all staff).</p> <p>Contractual payroll costs such as redundancy, paid parental leave, paid annual leave or pay in lieu of notice. Also would include any contractual bonus payments or travel and subsistence costs.</p> <p>Payroll admin costs associated with salary sacrifice schemes e.g. childcare voucher schemes, travel schemes.</p> <p>Statutory payments such as sick pay or maternity pay and redundancy.</p>	<p>Claims for salaries for Members' support staff.</p> <p>Claims for party staff who do not work to assist Members in carrying out their Assembly duties.</p> <p>Claims for ANY element of work undertaken by a party employee on internal party matters including elections, campaigning, party organisation, or participation in party political talks.</p> <p>Claims for salary costs where the salary payments have not been processed by the Assembly's Finance Office.</p>
<p>Purchase of equipment solely to enable a party to assist connected Members of that party to carry out their Assembly duties.</p> <p><i>(It is recommended that a minimum of three quotes are obtained and retained for audit purposes; for items over £5,000, quotes need to be submitted to Finance Office.)</i></p>	<p>Claims for the purchase of equipment that may be used for internal party matters including elections, campaigning, party organisation, etc. If an item of equipment incurs or is likely to incur ANY usage that is not directly connected to the authorised purpose, then that is an inadmissible claim under the FAPP Scheme.</p>
<p>Purchase of stationery or consumables to enable a party to assist connected Members of that party to carry out their Assembly duties</p>	<p>Claims for the purchase of stationery or consumables that may be used for internal party matters including elections, campaigning, party</p>

	organisation, etc. If an item of stationery or consumables incurs or is likely to incur ANY usage that is not directly connected to the authorised purpose, then that is an inadmissible claim under the FAPP Scheme.
<p>Purchase of education / training services to enable a party to assist connected Members of that party to carry out their Assembly duties.</p> <p><i>(It is recommended that a minimum of three quotes are obtained and retained for audit purposes; for services over £5,000, quotes need to be submitted to Finance Office.)</i></p>	<p>Claims for costs for the provision of education / training services that may be used for internal party matters including elections, campaigning, party organisation, etc. If a training event incurs or is likely to incur ANY usage that is not directly connected to the authorised purpose, then that is an inadmissible claim under the FAPP Scheme.</p> <p>Expenditure on training by a party for electoral or party spokesperson purposes will always be inadmissible.</p>
<p>Claims for mobile telephone bills for party staff to enable a party to assist connected Members of that party to carry out their Assembly duties. The request for payment must be accompanied by the full invoice showing a breakdown of costs.</p>	<p>Claims for personal calls made by party staff or claims for calls made in respect of internal party matters including elections, campaigning, party organisation, etc.</p>
<p>Claims for the provision of central engagement / media support services to enable the party to connected Members of that party to carry out their Assembly duties.</p> <p>For example meeting the cost of Press or PR work that a party incurs to assist the Members connected with that party to communicate their activities when carrying out their Assembly duties.</p> <p><i>(It is recommended that a minimum of three quotes are obtained and retained for audit purposes; for services over £5,000, quotes need to be submitted to Finance Office.)</i></p>	<p>Claims for the provision of central engagement / media support services in respect of internal party matters including elections, campaigning, party organisation, etc.</p>
<p>Claims for the provision of research and associated support materials to enable a party to assist connected Members of that party to carry out their Assembly duties.</p>	<p>Claims for the provision of research and associated support materials in respect of internal party matters including elections, campaigning, party organisation, etc.</p>

<i>(It is recommended that a minimum of three quotes are obtained and retained for audit purposes; for services over £5,000, quotes need to be submitted to Finance Office.)</i>	
Claims for quarterly bank charges and fees for the operation of a separate business bank account.	Claims for penalty bank charges incurred due to overdraft or mismanagement of the business bank account.

Identified by the Nolan Committee in their First Report on Standards in Public Life May 1995

Principle 1: Selflessness

Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

Principle 2: Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Principle 3: Objectivity

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts or recommending individuals for awards or benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Principle 4: Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Principle 5: Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Principle 6: Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Principle 7: Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

Appendix C Standing Order 45A. The Opposition

- 1) A party may choose to be recognised as the opposition, or part of the opposition, if no member of that party holds a Ministerial office and it satisfies any of the following conditions—
 - a) the party was entitled to nominate a person to hold Ministerial office under section 18(2) to (6) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and declined to do so;
 - b) during the relevant period, the party was entitled to nominate a person to hold a Ministerial office under section 18(10) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and declined to do so; or
 - c) the party's members comprise 8% or more of the total number of members of the Assembly at the end of the day on which the Assembly first meets.
- 2) Where only one party is recognised as the opposition in accordance with paragraph 1, the nominating officer of that party must nominate a person who is a member of the Assembly and that party to be the Leader of the Opposition.
- 3) Where two or more parties form the opposition, then—
 - a) the nominating officer of the largest party must nominate a person who is a member of the Assembly and that party to be the Leader of the Opposition.
 - b) the nominating officer of the second largest party must nominate a person who is a member of the Assembly and that party to be the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.
- 4) The opposition is dissolved if either of the following conditions are met –
 - a) The Assembly is dissolved; or
 - b) all Ministers cease to hold office in accordance with section 18(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
- 5) In this order "relevant period" means the period of two years beginning with the date on which the Ministerial offices are filled under section 16A(3)(b) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.