



Northern Ireland Assembly Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme 2024

(NIA 32/22-27)

Laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly under the Financial Assistance for
Political Parties Act (Northern Ireland) 2000

Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme 2016

In exercise of the powers conferred on it by section 1 of the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Act (Northern Ireland) 2000, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission makes the following Scheme—

1. Interpretation

- 1.1. 'The Scheme' means the Northern Ireland Assembly Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme 2024.
- 1.2. The Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954 applies to the Scheme as it applies to an Act of the Assembly.
- 1.3. In the Scheme -
 - 'the 2000 Act' means the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Act (Northern Ireland) 2000;
 - 'the 2016 Scheme' means the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme 2016;
 - 'Assembly duties' has the meaning given by paragraph 12;
 - 'authorised purpose' has the meaning given by paragraph 2.3;
 - 'the Commission' means the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission;
 - 'CPI' means Consumer Price Index;
 - 'Member' means a member of the Assembly;
 - 'Opposition party' has the meaning given by paragraph 4.3;
 - 'party' means a political party registered under Part II of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

2. Financial Assistance

- 2.1. For the financial year commencing 1 April 2024, and in the following financial years, payments will be made by the Commission in accordance with the Scheme.
- 2.2. Payments under the Scheme must be used by parties only for the authorised purpose.
- 2.3. The authorised purpose is assisting a Member who is connected with a party to perform that Member's Assembly duties.

- 2.4. A Member is connected with a party if that person is a member of the party.
- 2.5. Payments under the Scheme calculated in accordance with paragraphs 3 and 4 will be made to parties.
- 2.6. Supplementary payments will be made to parties in accordance with paragraph 5.

3. Payments

- 3.1. In a financial year an amount calculated in accordance with paragraph 3.2 will be paid to a party.
- 3.2. The amount is $N \times £10,000$, where N is the number of Members connected with the party.
- 3.3. Where the amount payable to a party under Article 3 of the 2016 Scheme immediately before that Scheme was revoked (see paragraph 13) exceeds the amount payable to the party calculated in accordance with paragraph 3.2, the party will receive the amount payable under the 2016 Scheme.
- 3.4. A person who holds office as Presiding Officer (P) may give to the 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 this paragraph and paragraph 4.

4. Additional payments to Opposition parties

- 4.1. In each financial year, in addition to the amount payable under paragraph 3, an additional amount calculated in accordance with this paragraph will be paid to an Opposition party.
- 4.2. The additional amount which will be paid to an Opposition party 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.
- 4.3. An Opposition party is—
 - (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.

5. Supplementary payments

- 5.1. A party may claim supplementary payments in each financial year in accordance with this paragraph.
- 5.2. Supplementary payments are:
 - (a) statutory redundancy payments to former employees by the party; and
 - (b) the costs to a party of temporarily employing a person, or the costs of payments to a temporary work agency in respect of the salary of an agency worker, where –
 - (i) an employee of the party is absent from work for a continuous period of at least four weeks;
 - (ii) the reason for that employee's absence is illness, maternity leave, adoption leave or shared parental leave; and
 - (iii) during the absence, the employee continues to be employed by the party and to receive payments from the party (whether payments under contract or payments required under any statutory provision).

6. Indexation

- 6.1 At the end of each financial year, the figures given in paragraph 3.2 and paragraph 4.2 must be increased or decreased by the percentage increase or decrease in the published CPI figure for the 12-month period ending on the 31 January in that financial year.
- 6.2 Where the published CPI figure referred to in paragraph 6.1 is stated to be a provisional figure or is subsequently amended, that figure shall apply as ultimately confirmed or amended.

7. Guidance

- 7.1. The Commission may from time to time publish guidance or directions for the purposes of the Scheme.
- 7.2. In exercising its functions under the Scheme, the Commission will have regard to any guidance or direction which it has issued, and the extent to which a party has complied with that guidance or direction.

8. Declaration of compliance

- 8.1. Each year when it is required to do so, a party must make, and send to the Commission, a declaration that the party has complied with all the requirements of the Scheme.
- 8.2. A party which has not made and sent a declaration of compliance to the Commission in a financial year ('year 1') is not entitled to any payments under the Scheme in a subsequent financial year ('year 2') until that party has made and sent a declaration in respect of year 1. No retrospective payments will be made in respect of year 2.
- 8.3. This paragraph is without prejudice to the powers conferred on the Commission by paragraph 9.

9. Recoupment

- 9.1. This paragraph applies to payments under the Scheme made by the Assembly Commission to a party if –
 - (a) the payment was made in error;
 - (b) the payment was not de minimis;
 - (c) the request for payment was inaccurate; or
 - (d) the party has failed to comply with any requirement imposed by or under the Scheme in respect of the payment.
- 9.2. Where this paragraph applies –
 - (a) the Commission will require the party to reimburse the payment;
 - (b) the party must comply with such a requirement within three months of it being requested by the Commission, unless the Commission agrees to a longer period within which the party must comply with the requirement; and
 - (c) in default of repayment within three months of the requirement, or within such other longer period as the Commission may agree, the Commission will deduct an amount equal to the payment described at paragraph 9.1 from any other amount to be paid to the party under the Scheme or any subsequent Scheme made under the 2000 Act.

10. Audit

- 10.1. As soon as practicable after the end of a financial year, the records of all financial assistance received by a party under the Scheme in the preceding financial year will be audited by or on behalf of the Commission to ensure that the financial assistance was used for the authorised purpose.

11.Changes in party membership

- 11.1. Where during a financial year the number of Members connected with a party decreases, payments to that party under the Scheme for the remainder of the year will be reduced proportionately.
- 11.2. Where during a financial year the number of Members connected to a party increases, payments to that party under the Scheme for the remainder of the year will increase proportionately.
- 11.3. Where during a financial year a Member becomes connected with a party not previously represented in the Assembly payments to that party under the Scheme for the remainder of the year will be made in accordance with the Scheme.
- 11.4. Periods in which the Assembly is dissolved will not be taken into account for the purposes of this paragraph.

12.Assembly duties

- 12.1. 'Assembly duties', in relation to any Member, means the undertaking of any task or function which he or she may reasonably be expected to carry out in his or her capacity as a Member 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 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 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.

13. Revocation

- 13.1. The 2016 Scheme is revoked.