

PROTOCOL ON USE OF ASSEMBLY-FUNDED RESOURCES DURING 2003 ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Members remain Members of the Assembly until the end of the day before the Poll – thus probably until midnight on 30 April 2003. There is no period of dissolution as there is in the Westminster and Scottish Parliaments. This means that Members will continue to have access to the building and other facilities until the end of the day before the election.

The Assembly's Determination on salaries and allowances makes it clear that office costs allowances, funds to employ staff and other allowances should only be used in connection with a Member's duties as a Member. Party political activity outside the Assembly and electoral campaigning are not part of these duties, and Assembly funds and resources must never be used for these purposes. It is of the utmost importance that this rule should be complied with rigorously during the period leading up to the 2003 election. Members should be scrupulous in satisfying themselves that they and their staff are only incurring expenditure or using facilities in connection with the Member's representational, legislative and similar duties.

Failure to comply with this requirement would have serious consequences. Not only would the Assembly's reputation be tarnished, but individual Members found to have used facilities improperly may find the value of that use counted against their election expenses and, since the Assembly is not a permissible donor under electoral law, be obliged to refund the cost of those facilities. Moreover, any allegations that a Member who is re-elected has used facilities improperly will be subject to investigation by the Committee on Standards of Conduct.

Notes on the use to which Assembly-provided facilities may not be put were circulated before the 2001 General Election. The notes can be found at - <http://assembly/presidingoffice/fees-office/guidance/allowances/index.htm>.

The principal points are as follows:

- civil service staff support, IT services, telephony, stationery, photocopying, postage and office accommodation provided or funded by the Assembly may not be used for party or campaigning purposes
- the Assembly Library may similarly not be so used
- support staff employed by Members with Assembly-provided funding may not be used for campaigning or party purposes, unless they undertake such activity while on annual leave or unpaid special leave
- no claims in respect of travel expenditure or overnight expenses can be met if the expenditure is incurred on campaigning purposes

The Electoral Commission has signified its approval of these arrangements, but it has requested that Presiding Office staff audit carefully the use of

facilities, especially in the immediate pre-election period. The Presiding Officer has agreed that this should happen so far as is lawfully possible.

Members should raise any queries they have on this Protocol with Wayne Cowley in the Fees Office in the first instance.