



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# **Update on the replacement of Members Publication System**

## **23 March 2023**

### **Reference: SPCB (2023) Paper 19**

#### **Executive summary**

1. This paper provides the SPCB with an update on the progress made to date on the replacement of the current system for publishing Members' travel and expenses and invites the SPCB to agree the additional access options and testing proposed for the new system.

#### **Issues and options**

2. The Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme principles commit us to publishing Members' travel and expenses claimed through the Scheme on a quarterly basis to ensure ongoing transparency in relation to the Scheme. The contract for our current system for publishing Members' Expenses is due to come to an end at the end of April 2023.
3. In order to continue to meet our commitments to transparency a replacement system must be procured. This presents an opportunity to move to a modern system for publishing Members' Expenses. A specification was developed with subject matter experts' input from Allowances, BIT, Parliament Communications Office and Procurement Services and a procurement, following public procurement regulations, was undertaken.
4. The new MSP Travel and Expenses Publication Solution Development Services Contract was awarded to Horisk Leslie, on 13 October 2022.
5. The main users of the system are members of the public and journalists. However, we are aware that Members and their staff will also on occasion use the system to view published expenses
6. The aims of the project are to make the new system more user-friendly; improve accessibility; and modernise the system by utilising the

progressive technology that is available. The work on the new system is currently progressing well and is in the final development stages.

7. The new system will be rolled out at the end of April 2023 and the old system will be decommissioned.
8. We are seeking agreement from the SPCB on both the functionality and the Member communication approach as detailed below.
9. To ensure the new publication system is more open and accessible it is proposed to enhance the functionalities, as follows:
  - a. the new system should have the ability to allow users to download data content from the system. This operation will improve user experience as they will be able to view the data how they choose. The SPCB will wish to note that all data uploaded onto the Publication system is also already available on OpenData where it can be downloaded but that this option requires more technical knowledge and is therefore not easy to access for all users.
  - b. the new system should have a public API (application programming interface), permitting anyone, but more commonly technically advanced users, universal access to specific features and data. A public API allows external users to access the data in a common format that is more readily usable by other systems. For example, if we allow users to download data, they have to do it manually each time, and upload it to another system to work with it. An API would allow them to programmatically extract the data on a regular schedule. An example usage would be a newspaper data team using the API to automatically update charts on expenses over time, or allowing their readers to view data for their local MSPs.
  - c. we undertake user testing on the functionality of the system for feedback. This will include members of the public through Access by Design, Members, Members staff and some journalists. Given these users are the most regular users of the current system and will be users of the new system, this will give us a better idea of what is and is not working for our users before final roll out.
10. To strengthen the roll-out to Members we will communicate the planned changes to all Members and provide an opportunity to see the new system before roll-out. We will be running drop-in sessions in April as well as inviting some Members or their staff to take part in user testing. Having learnt from our experience of rolling out the Travel & Expenses system, we recognise that Members would like more information and an opportunity to see any new system prior to any roll-out and therefore, will be providing drop-in sessions. It should be noted that the new Publication System will be

used by Members simply to search for published expenses and will not have the same impact on Members as the new Travel and Expenses System.

## **Governance**

11. Under the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme, we have a commitment to publish Members' travel and expenses on a quarterly basis. In order for us to meet this commitment we need a system that fulfils this function and as the current contract was coming to an end, we were required to go out to the market to secure a new contract for the service.
12. To ensure the new system is accessible we will be working to meet level AA of the current Web Content and Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1). To achieve this the project is working with Access by Design who specialise in accessibility testing and will be providing advice to our contractors on making the new search tool accessible to all.
13. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been completed.
14. A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) has been completed.

## **Resource implications**

15. The costs of developing and implementing a new system and staffing resources to support the project formed part of the 2022/23 budget process and were agreed through the Digital Strategy Board (DSB).

## **Publication Scheme**

16. This paper can be published under the publication policy.

## **Next steps**

17. If the SPCB agrees the new functionality the Allowances Office will confirm with our contractor that the functionality is to be included in the system development and instruct them to progress with implementation.
18. The Allowances Office will communicate with Members at the end of March to advise of the move to a new system and provide information on the planned drop-in sessions to see the new system in April and seek volunteers for user testing.

## **Decision**

19. The SPCB is invited to:

- a. Approve the download data content function on the new publication system.
- b. Approve a public API (application programming interface) on the system, permitting anyone but more commonly technically advanced users, universal access to specific features and data.
- c. Agree to external testing on the functionality of the system, including journalists in that phase as they are the main users. Members and Members' staff will also be invited to test the system and provide feedback.
- d. Agree the proposed approach to communicate the changes to Members.

**Allowances Office**

15 March 2023