



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme – Resolution for new Scheme 18 February 2021 Reference: SPCB(2021)Paper 08

Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to agree the draft resolution attached at Annex A and that it be laid before Parliament. We understand this will be sometime between 22nd February and 5th March 2021. The resolution seeks to introduce the new Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme following the recent reviews instructed by the SPCB, the first on the wider Expenses Scheme undertaken in 2019 and the second in relation to the Staff Cost Provision in 2020.
2. The new Scheme, if approved by Parliament, will take effect from the start of session 6, in early May.

Issues and options

3. The attached resolution seeks Parliament's agreement to the new Members' Expenses Scheme which has been changed in line with the recommendations from both reviews. The recommendations and subsequent changes to the Scheme are summarised below.

Wider Expenses Scheme Review:

- A new start-up provision has been added to the Scheme to cover all one-off office start-up costs following a Scottish Parliament election or by-election. Subsequently the Office Cost Provision will now be pro-rated for the first year from when a Member moves into a new office.
- The four current provisions; Office Cost Provision, Surgery Advertising Provision, Telecommunications Provision and Members' Stationery and Postage Provision have been merged and simplified to create two new provisions: An Office Cost Provision and an Engagement Provision.
- Members are able to flex their limit in each of the two new provisions noted above within a maximum of £5,000 each financial year to suit

their costs and ways of working at a time and frequency agreed by the SPCB.

- The additional allowance available on application to Members who can evidence that they cannot find an office within the limits of the office cost provision has been changed from a 10% maximum to a monetary maximum of £2,500 per annum.
- The 74-journey limit on staff travel has been removed from the Scheme and there is now one travel provision created for all parliamentary travel for both Members and their staff.
- The ability to travel to Brussels and Strasbourg without prior approval and have the costs met from the Scheme has been removed following Brexit. The existing requirement whereby any costs associated with travel abroad needs to be approved by the SPCB in advance will now also cover Brussels and Strasbourg.
- The Edinburgh Accommodation Provision has been amended to take account of the needs of disabled Members and those with caring responsibilities for dependents who would normally fall into Group 2. Such Members can now apply to the SPCB to be considered, on an exceptional basis, as falling into Group 3 and therefore have the choice of using a flat or hotel when in Edinburgh on parliamentary business.
- Members can now apply under the Exceptional Expenses provision for additional temporary resources to be made available to support the office in circumstances where a Member is on a long-term absence.
- The Temporary Staff Cover Provision is now available to cover both permanent and fixed term staff absences.
- The need for all Members' offices to be accessible has been clarified in the Scheme to now say that they must be accessible or be able to be made accessible rather than simply have regard to accessibility and the delegation to the Allowance Office for approval of reasonable adjustments has been increased.
- The Winding Up provision has been amended to provide support to Members who need to close a local office when the Member's status changes following an election or where they leave a party, and this requires them to close their current local office and get a new local office.
- The need for Members to carry out a survey for dilapidation costs of over £5000 has been added to the Scheme.

- Corporate payment cards will be offered to Members and their staff to help meet low cost items and reduce the number of claims for Members. A pilot is currently underway and the roll out of cards to all Members will be considered following the pilot.

Staff Cost Provision Review:

- The Staff Cost Provision has been increased by the cost equivalent of one full time staff member to £133,200 per Member from the start of session 6 for a full year. This will be pro-rated from 6 May for the 2021-22 financial year.
 - A central training budget has been agreed which will provide training to Members' staff on supporting a Member in carrying out their parliamentary duties. The Scheme and guidance have been amended to reflect this new central provision as well as the reduction in delegated authority to the HR Office for the remaining training provision within the Scheme.
 - The recruitment advertising delegated authority of the HR Office has been reduced to reflect practice and costs over the session as well as the new recruitment services and tools available to Members.
4. The Members' Expenses' Scheme associated guidance document which provides more detail on the provisions and rules of the Scheme has also been updated to reflect the points above and to provide clarity where it was felt there was some ambiguity, or simply more detail needed. For example, additional information was added on ensuring value for money and the need to get quotes for expenditure over £2k in relation to office repairs and lease obligations as well as laying out the need to follow the Scheme rules when using a corporate payment card.

Governance

5. The Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme was established by resolution of the Scottish Parliament under Section 81(2) of the Scotland Act 1998, and the proposed changes to the Scheme require Parliamentary approval.

Resource implications

6. The proposed increase in the Staff Cost Provision and realignment of other provisions have been costed and accounted for in the SPCB's budget proposals for 2021/22.

Publication Scheme

7. The paper should be published once the resolution has been laid before Parliament.

Next steps

8. Subject to SPCB agreement of the resolution and Scheme, the next step will be for the SPCB to lay the resolution before Parliament for consideration.
9. Subject to agreement of the resolution by Parliament, parliamentary officials will engage with Members to discuss the new arrangements as necessary in session 6.

Decision

10. The SPCB is invited to:

- agree the draft resolution and new Scheme; and
- agree the resolution including the Scheme is laid before Parliament for consideration.

Allowances Office

January 2021