



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme

## By correspondence

Reference: SPCB (2022) Paper 26

### Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to consider an approach by MSPs to further extend the agreed period in which they can find a suitable office before the Scheme requirement to reduce their Office Cost Provision by half; and to also extend the availability of the Start-up provision for that same period.

### Issues and options

2. The Reimbursement of Members Expenses Scheme requires that Members who do not choose to have an office have their office cost provision reduced by 50%. In putting the Scheme into practice, this is applied either immediately when the office advises they are not having an office; or in the first year of the new session within 6 months of the election. In considering previous issues experienced by Members when finding a suitable office [and the range of reasons for this, including the pandemic], the SPCB agreed to extend this period to the end of the 2021-22 financial year to allow Members who required more time to find an office to have that time without penalty.
3. As we are now at the end of the financial year in applying the agreed extension period limit, we would now be looking to reduce those Members provisions by 50% until such time as they found an office. We have been approached by some Members who have confirmed they do wish to have an office but have not yet secured one and therefore will be affected by this 50% reduction, to seek SPCB agreement to either further extend the provision already made to ensure the availability of the full OCP or indeed to change the Scheme to allow Members to have the full amount of OCP whether they choose to have an office or not.
4. We would not recommend that the SPCB agrees to remove the provision to half the office costs provision of those Members who choose not to have an office at this time as this could be seen as being unfair to those who have already chosen to have an office when this option was not available

to them and would provide those few Members who do not have an office with additional monies that others would not have access to.

5. We would recommend that the SPCB considers the request to extend the period before we would reduce this amount for a further 6 months (to end September 2022) to allow the Members to find a suitable office. If by this time an office has still not been found the SPCB could then reconsider the matter or build any review of this element of the Scheme into a wider sessional review.
6. At present the Scheme also provides for a start-up provision that is available for the first year after the election. This would mean that the start-up provision is currently only available until 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022. Again, given that some Members have faced difficulties we have been approached to seek the SPCB's consideration of whether this period could, as an exception, be extended.
7. If the SPCB is content with this proposal we would recommend that the SPCB extend this along the same timeframe as the extension of the office cost provision – to the end of September 2022.

## **Governance**

8. Section 1.22 of the Scheme provides for the administration of the Scheme and enables the SPCB to administer the Scheme, determine time limits and do anything else it considers necessary in connection with the administration of the Scheme.

## **Resource implications**

9. Those Members affected by any extension to the provision not to reduce OCP by 50% would then be entitled to their full allocation of OCP as determined within the Scheme until September 2022 where it might otherwise have been reduced. This will affect the 4 Members who have yet to find an office. If the cost was halved from 1 April to 30 September, their combined entitlement would be just over £10.6k and if they received their full entitlement the cost would be just over £21.3k. It should be noted that the full entitlement for the financial year has been included in the budget.
10. In terms of the Start-up provision there would be no additional costs as only any balances for Members entitled to the provision would be carried over and we would not propose increasing the entitlement only extending the time they can access that entitlement. This amount is still to be fully calculated once final costs for 2021-22 are calculated but the current balance is estimated at £133k.

## **Publication Scheme**

11. This paper can be published in line with the SPCB's Publication Scheme.

## **Next steps**

12. If approved by the SPCB, to inform the affected Members accordingly.

## **Decision**

13. The SPCB is invited to agree to extend the period by 6 months to end September 2022 before the office cost provision for those Members still seeking offices is halved and to extend the Start-up provision for the same period.

**Allowances Office**

7 April 2022