

# **Review of the Members' Staff Cost Provision Report**

Office of the Deputy Chief Executive  
November 2020

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# **1 INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Purpose and Remit**

- 1.1.1 The SPCB has a duty to provide the resources needed to allow Members to undertake their role. One way in which it does this is by oversight of the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme. A significant element of that involves providing the right level of staff support for Members to ensure that they can effectively run their local and parliamentary offices, represent their constituents and undertake their parliamentary duties.
- 1.1.2 In doing so, the SPCB recognises that each individual Member is the direct employer of his or her staff and that the arrangements for the Staff Cost Provision (SCP) must therefore be sufficiently flexible to enable individual Members to operate in the way which best suits their circumstances (subject, of course, to continuing to pay the living wage).
- 1.1.3 The SPCB last reviewed the SCP in 2014-15 with a new increased SCP provision, the introduction of salary bands, high level job descriptions and job titles alongside frameworks of employment for each parliamentary group.
- 1.1.4 The review increased the SCP with effect from May 2016 to enable Members to employ the equivalent of 3 full time staff. The increase was implemented to take account of the potential for additional levels of work anticipated for Members with changes to The Scotland Act 2016. The current arrangements provide Members flexibility in employing staff in a range of ways to suit their needs whilst maintaining equality within the Scheme for all Members.
- 1.1.5 Feedback received from the recent Review of Members' Expenses Scheme highlighted that some Members consider that, with changes in the level and nature of casework being brought forward and parliamentary business requirements, the current level is insufficient. Members feel the current level impedes their ability to employ and retain suitably qualified staff in the marketplace or to employ sufficient staff to support them in their role.
- 1.1.6 In March 2020, the SPCB instructed an internal operational review of the SCP to ensure the Scheme remained effective and efficient in supporting Members to carry out their role.
- 1.1.7 The aim of the Review is to provide a Scheme which is straightforward for Members to understand and use, and, is fit for purpose whilst ensuring that all options appraisals are supported by due diligence and costings.

1.1.8 The SPCB endorsed the following remit for the Review:

- The scope of the Review will include identification of the new pressures on Members in terms of legislative powers and on constituency work and how this translates in the appropriate number and categories of support staff.
- Review of salary bands, high level job descriptions and job titles to ensure fit for purpose.
- Consideration of the merits/demerits of a funding mechanism for support staff costs and incidental expenses funding options for parliamentary group party pools.
- Consideration of how effectively HR support for Members on staffing matters (e.g. recruitment, training) is operating and bring forward any recommendations, if required, ahead of Session 6.
- Consideration of the merits/demerits of introducing pay progression within pay scales.

1.1.9 The Review has ensured any recommendations continue to comply with the Principles of the Scheme – Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Integrity, Selflessness, Honesty and Leadership.

## 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 This section of the report sets out our recommendations. More detailed commentary about each recommendation can be found in the report. The recommendations to the SPCB are as follows.

**Recommendation 1:** Analysis suggests that Members would benefit from additional support, with the Caseworker role being deemed to be the best basis for calculating any increase in SCP. We recommend this should be equivalent to one FTE member of staff.

**Recommendation 2:** The SPCB should review the Office Cost Provision as part of the budget process for 2022-23 to see if the increase in SCP impacts on this provision.

**Recommendation 3:** A more flexible structure is proposed that consolidates the existing pay ranges into fewer levels with wider salary ranges. This will ensure the ranges are competitive in the market and in line with other legislature comparators. Note, this will be supported by Recommendation 4.

**Recommendation 4:** The HR Office will assist Members to put in place job descriptions commensurable with the rate of pay for the role. This will ensure Members are paying their staff consistently and fairly for the work they do in a given role while reducing the risk of an equal pay issue. The Scheme will be amended to make it clear that staff paid through the Scheme must be employed within the pay ranges and job families.

**Recommendation 5:** The HR Office will provide further support with recruitment and publish online adverts on behalf of Members backed up by the Work4MSPs twitter feed. This is a more effective and efficient approach as greater reach for vacancies can be achieved using the Parliament's social media channels.

Accordingly, the HR Office's delegated authority to approve recruitment advertising should be set at £500 per Member per annum (including VAT) which reflects the current reality of spend.

**Recommendation 6:** It is recommended that a centrally managed budget, out with the Members' Expenses Scheme, is established at each budgeting round to design and deliver training for Members' staff.

HR will retain delegated authority at a set limit of £500 per Member per annum to support Members' staff in meeting any job specific training needs, for example, attending seminars and conferences.

**Recommendation 7:** The existing arrangements for Group Pools provide a flexibility in terms of funding for each of the parties, which best supports their needs and at this time is the most cost-effective approach. As such it is recommended that there is no change to the Group Pool arrangements.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Approach

3.1.1 The research and analysis phase of the Review was undertaken internally by officials between June and September 2020. As the research was of an exploratory nature, both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were adopted. To fully inform the Review a variety of data collection tools, methods and techniques were utilised to gather data and other forms of evidence.

3.1.2 To further understand and explore both Members' and their staff's needs and requirements; and the increasing and evolving demands, pressures and challenges associated with delivering their constituency/regional and parliamentary work a number of activities were carried out:

- Over the summer recess period, all Members' staff were invited to participate in an online questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide a high-level assessment of job roles, tasks, career development and changing workload. A total of 163 responses were completed providing a representative group of staff (1/3) including length of service, geographical work location (2/3 local office and 1/3 Holyrood), regional/constituency and party.
- Findings from the online questionnaire were supplemented with a number of interviews. This enabled further insights and understanding, particularly in relation to assessing the extent to which Members support requirements and demands have changed in recent years. Semi-structured one-to-one interviews with 10 Members' staff and 13 Members were conducted. SPICe aimed to ensure a representative sample of Members and staff were interviewed.
- The MSP Staff Forum was consulted during the design stage of the research project, with representatives offering their insights on the best way to gather the views of Members' staff. The Forum also provided feedback on the draft questionnaire, with their suggestions informing the final version.

3.1.3 A broad range of desk research was carried out including:

- Statistical Analysis:
  - Analysis showing how Members time in committees and Chamber has changed between Session 4 and Session 5.<sup>1</sup>
  - Volume and complexity of SPICe inquiries as an indicator of Members' workload.

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth remembering that [changes to chamber and committee sitting times](#), introduced in September 2012, mean that Sessions 4 and 5 may not be directly comparable.

- Analysis of SCP and the Incidental and Ancillary Employment Cost Provision annual limits, actual expenditure and trends relating to recruitment and training costs, and Group Pool contributions.
- Analysis of current salary profiles based on payroll data.
- Benchmarking and comparative research with other legislatures and other public and charity sector organisations:
  - Pay structure review:
    - Data was collated for similar roles in other organisations to establish the 'market rate'.
    - Salaries have been benchmarked against the median salary point for the minima and maxima of the comparator jobs' salary ranges.
    - To allow for benchmarking, we created high level job descriptions. In addition, an internal benchmark was conducted to ensure pay was equivalent between job families of equal internal value.
  - Information and data were collected and analysed on recruitment and training arrangements, budgets and actual expenditure at other legislatures including the House of Commons and Welsh Parliament.
  - Information and data was collected and analysed on the governance, funding arrangements for Group Pools at other legislatures including the House of Commons and Welsh Parliament.

3.1.4 The breadth of research has provided strong data to allow us to consider the viability of emerging themes and possible changes to the Scheme. Please refer to the Analysis, Findings and Recommendations for outcomes of research undertaken.

## 4 ANALYSIS, FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Establishing Capacity Pressures

#### Casework

4.1.1 Over summer 2020, Members' staff were encouraged to complete an online questionnaire intended to inform the SPCB about staff roles and workloads, and how these may have changed over the past parliamentary session. SPICe designed the questionnaire in consultation with the MSP Staff Forum. With 163 members of staff responding, key findings show:

- Around 60% of respondents who started before May 2016 feel their workloads have “increased significantly” over the past few years. A similar number say their tasks have also changed significantly.
- 45% of all respondents “frequently” or “always” have to work outside their contracted working hours to complete workloads.
- The majority of respondents spend more than ten hours a week working on constituent cases, with 31% spending more than 20 hours a week.
- The most common issues raised by constituents relate to housing, health, benefits, transport and various local authority services.
- Over 60% of respondents feel constituent enquiries have become more complex; many mentioned benefits and mental health related cases as being particularly challenging.
- 40% of respondents feel unhappy with current training arrangements.
- 50% of respondents feel they do not have time to take part in professional development activities.

4.1.2 The impact of increased casework was raised by a number of respondents. Some feel too much of their time is now spent on casework meaning they can't devote adequate time to the jobs they were actually recruited to do, e.g. parliamentary research, communications work or office management. Others told us that the dramatic increase in casework after March 2020 means they can't possibly complete their tasks within their contracted hours.

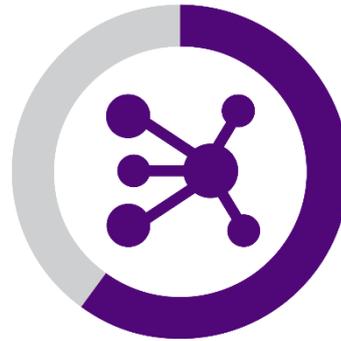
4.1.3 SPICe conducted interviews with 10 Members' staff and 13 Members during August and September 2020. Most of those interviewed felt that constituency case numbers had been rising steadily between 2016 and the beginning of 2020 (so even before Covid-19). All staff members mentioned an increase in the number of cases involving constituents with complex

mental health issues, whilst a number spoke about the trauma of dealing with aggressive constituents or those threatening self-harm.

- 4.1.4 Some offices are currently seeing between 15 and 20 new cases coming in every day. This has resulted in staff in some constituency offices often working 10- or 12-hour days.



**45%** of all respondents “**frequently**” or “**always**” have to work outside their contracted working hours to complete workloads.



Over **60%** of respondents feel constituent enquiries have become more complex since they started in post.

- 4.1.5 It is worth noting that not all of those Members interviewed agreed with the assertion that casework had risen over the parliamentary session. Four of the 13 Members interviewed stated that their case numbers were roughly the same as they had always been and were manageable for their staff members. One Member, a regional list MSP who had previously been a constituency MSP, has experienced very low numbers of cases since being elected in 2016. Another felt that some Members were all too ready to take on cases which should be dealt with by other representatives, namely councillors.

- 4.1.6 However, these views were not shared by the majority of Members interviewed. Instead, most had seen an increase in caseload over the past few years – described by one as an “explosion”. Many felt that it was only through the loyalty, hard-work and sense of duty of their staff that they managed to deal with this significant increase in workload. One interviewee stated that his office “depended on the team loving their jobs; however, in doing so individuals can put in 18 hours a day, 7 days a week. But this is not right”.

### **Holyrood-focussed business**

- 4.1.7 SPICe were also keen to explore whether changes in Parliamentary business have had an impact on the workloads of Holyrood-focussed staff. We know that Members are spending more time in the debating chamber and in committees this session, as demonstrated in the following tables:



	Sept 2012 - Feb 2015	Sept 2017 - Feb 2020	Change
<b>Total time in Chamber</b>	1,091 hours 34 minutes	1,140 hours 27 minutes	+48 hours 53 minutes

	Sept 2012 - Feb 2015	Sept 2017 - Feb 2020	Change
<b>Total time in Committee</b>	2,199 hours 3 minutes	2,486 hours 29 minutes	+287 hours 26 minutes

- 4.1.8 Analysis of SPICe inquiry numbers, an indirect indicator of Member workload, also shows an increase in activity, with a striking increase in the number of complex enquiries being submitted:

	Sept 2012 - Feb 2015	Sept 2017 - Feb 2020	Change	Change (%)
<b>Total SPICe Enquiries</b>	11,578	11,991	413	+3.6%
<b>Complex Enquiries</b>	1,547	1,961	414	+26.8%

- 4.1.9 This increase in parliamentary business appears to be having some impact on Members' staff, as reflected in various responses to the online questionnaire. Of those staff members working primarily in Holyrood, and therefore focussed more on Parliamentary business, almost 45% have to "frequently" or "always" work outside their contracted working hours to complete their tasks. In addition, 40% of Holyrood based staff who started pre-2016 (albeit a relatively small sample group) have seen significant increases in their workloads over recent years, with almost all saying the transfer of powers resulting from the Scotland Act 2016 has had an impact on their workloads.

### **Impact of Further Devolved Powers**

- 4.1.10 The trend in devolution over the past 12 years has been towards more powers coming to the Scottish Parliament. The Calman Commission of 2008-09 led to the further devolution of powers in the areas of road safety, landfill and stamp duty land taxes, as well as some limited ability to set a Scottish rate of income tax. The Smith Commission of 2014-15, and subsequent Scotland Act 2016, went much further, transferring a range of powers to the Scottish Parliament including major areas of taxation and welfare. Therefore, Members are now legislating, scrutinising and debating a wider range of policy areas than they were in Sessions one to three.

- 4.1.11 Looking to the future, Brexit will have significant implications for the Scottish Parliament and its Members. Although the UK has left the EU, there are still a range of negotiations and processes which will require parliamentary time, be it in the form of legislative scrutiny or committee inquiries. For example, new agreements relating to Scotland's position within the UK (the legislative and non-legislative common frameworks), the UK's new relationship with the EU, Scotland's own developing relationship with the EU, as well as the hundreds of international agreements the UK will enter into will all require the time, effort and concentration of our Members (see, for example, US trade deals and food policy). Although much of this is currently unclear, Brexit-related developments will be challenging and generally time-consuming, with increased demands on Members and their staff.
- 4.1.12 The current pandemic is impacting Members' casework and it is anticipated that this will continue to be the case into Session 6 as Members' constituents experience potentially wider health, societal and economic impacts.

### **Proposals**

- 4.1.13 Analysis therefore indicates pressure on existing staffing support to Members. There has been an increase in the number/complexity of casework over recent years, as well as more time spent on parliamentary business. Casework is the most pressing requirement, however, and that consideration is used as the basis to calculate any potential increase in provision. The majority of Members interviewed feel there should be an increase in the SCP allowance, or more freedom to move budget from other allowances to pay for additional staffing costs. For some Members, this would allow them to pay their existing staff more. For others, the priority would be employing an additional member of staff in order to ease the workload pressures in their constituency/regional offices.
- 4.1.14 Given the range of experiences, it is not easy to determine scientifically what the additional resources should be. However, we have received considerable feedback for this Review and it is evident that workload has increased considerably for Members, with the impact for staff of having to work outside their contracted hours. It is also clear that the complexity of cases has increased. Taking all of this into account we would recommend that the increase should be one FTE member of staff. This would mean a revised SCP limit of £129,700 per Member.

**Recommendation 1:** This analysis suggests that Members would benefit from additional support, with the Caseworker role being deemed to be the best basis for calculating any increase in SCP. We recommend this should be equivalent to one FTE member of staff.

- 4.1.15 The analysis shows that support will most likely be required primarily in relation to Members' casework. If the SCP limit is increased, and a Member chooses to employ more staff in this area, these staff are likely to be based at the Members' local office. There is therefore a potential issue that by increasing the number of staff to be employed in the local office there could be a knock-on effect for the Office Cost Provision.
- 4.1.16 Whilst the wider Review of Members' Expenses provides some flexibility for Members between the Office Cost Provision and the Engagement Provision the possibility that larger office accommodation may be needed to accommodate additional staff did not form part of the original considerations.
- 4.1.17 Members can currently apply to the SPCB under paragraph 4.2.8 of the Scheme for an additional 10% per annum to help with the cost of securing an office. This will change to a limit of £2.5k in the new Scheme. This provision is to enable Members to establish a reasonable local office where otherwise they would be unable to secure one due to local market variations, it is therefore possible that this will be sufficient to cover any requirement for additional space and will allow the SPCB to consider each case based on its merits.
- 4.1.18 The full impact of such changes on the Office Cost Provision cannot be quantified at present and it will not be until Members employ their staff after the election and look for a suitable office that any possible budgetary impact will be felt. In addition, it is difficult to ascertain the medium to longer term impact of the pandemic on home/office working. We would propose therefore the SPCB review the situation as part of the budget process and considerations for the 2022-23 budget when more information on the circumstances at that point will be available.

**Recommendation 2:** The SPCB should review the Office Cost Provision as part of the budget process for 2022-23 to see if the increase in SCP impacts on this provision.

## 4.2 Pay Ranges and Market Comparisons

- 4.2.1. The SPCB sets appropriate pay ranges for Members' staff under the Expenses' Scheme. The current arrangements, established in 2016, adopted a market pricing approach and "job families". A job family is a group of roles that is similar in nature, where the role holders are engaged in broadly similar work (i.e. administrative, casework, communications, research and management). It also describes a group of roles at different levels (e.g. Communications Officer and Communications Manager).
- 4.2.2. This is an important component of effective compensation and ensures pay levels for groups of jobs are competitive externally and fair and equitable

internally. Members employ staff in any combination of ranges so long as the actual cost of salaries payable in the year does not exceed their capped allowance. The full-time equivalent salary ranges for these job families are set out below.

#### Current Salary Ranges Financial Year 2020-21

Job Families and Salary Ranges	Minimum	Maximum
Admin Level 1	£18,519	£22,762
Admin Level 2	£23,866	£27,228
Casework Level 1	£22,266	£27,228
Casework Level 2	£28,550	£35,384
Communications Level 1	£22,266	£27,228
Communications Level 2	£28,550	£35,384
Research Level 1	£24,472	£31,637
Research Level 2	£33,180	£39,132
Management Level 1	£28,550	£36,266
Management Level 2	£38,078	£44,643

- 4.2.3. When deciding on the placement of a post on the pay structure, Members consider whether it fits within the range of work covered by a job family. Generally, Members' staff are paid at a spot rate with no pay progression based on time served or experience gained. Members are responsible for ensuring they have clear and transparent processes for setting rates of pay in accordance with relevant legal obligations, including equalities legislation regarding age, gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, belief and disability. Men and women in the same employment performing equal work must receive equal pay. Full-time and part-time staff who do the same work should also be paid at the same pro rata rate.

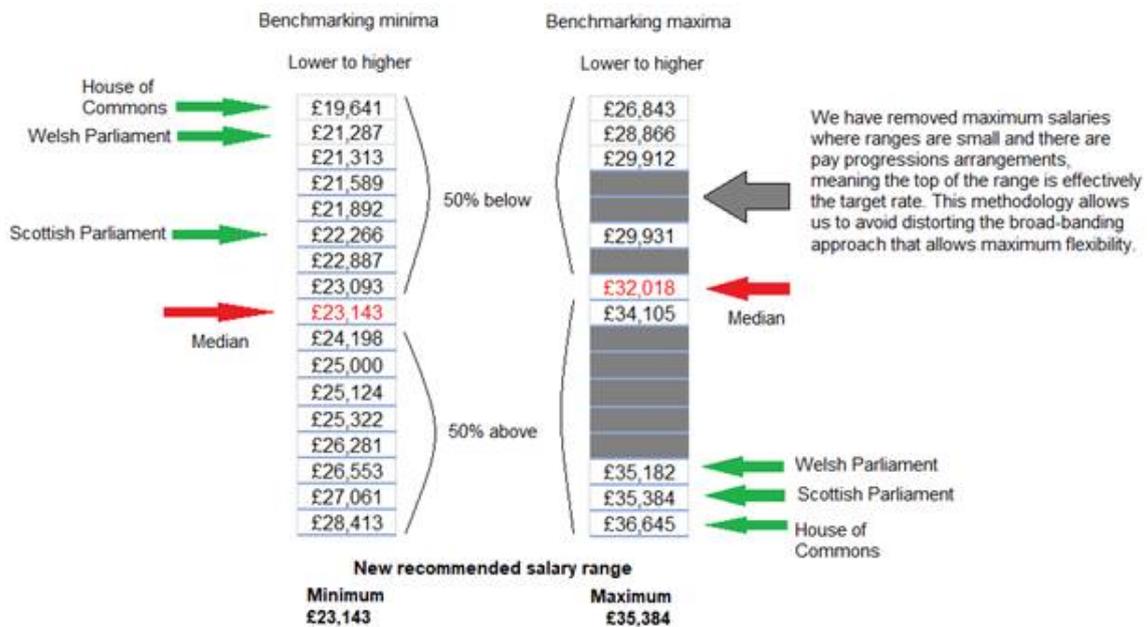
#### **Pay Benchmarking**

- 4.2.4. The HR Office has undertaken a comprehensive review of the pay structure by collecting data for similar roles in other organisations to establish their 'market rate'. We drew information from IPSA and the Welsh Parliament and compared with other public and charity sector organisations, including the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament, local authorities and

universities. This also involved using the median salary point for the minima and maxima of the comparator jobs' salary ranges.

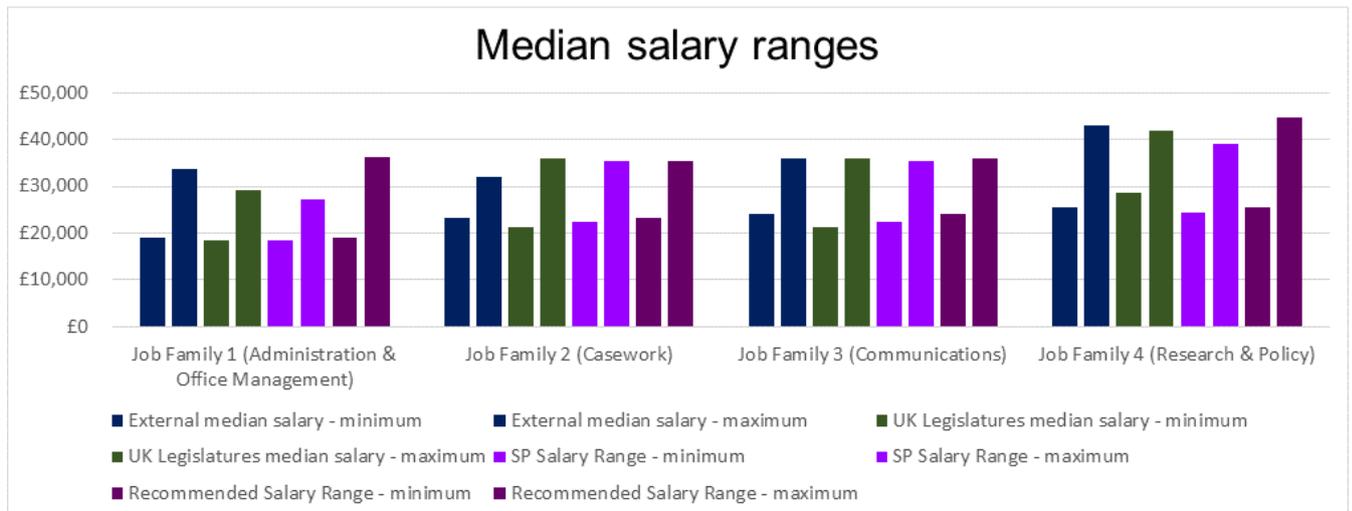
- 4.2.5. To calculate the median, the pay rates for roles are arranged in order from lowest to highest. The median is the pay which appears exactly in the middle. This is considered more neutral and accurately represents actual earnings in an occupation than using other methods such as mean or average salaries. The example of the Job Family 2 Caseworker, below, illustrates this. This shows that the median maximum of the range calculated falls below the Parliament's current range maximum.

Example: Job Family 2 – Casework



- 4.2.6. The benchmarking exercise also involved comparing jobs against the most closely matched job profiles rather than relying on job titles. To allow for benchmarking, HR created high level job descriptions. Finally, it also involved conducting an internal benchmark to ensure pay was equivalent between job families of equal internal value. This will ensure the pay structure remains both internally equitable and externally competitive.

- 4.2.7. The process described above has provided us with a wealth of evidence both about job families and the pay ranges. In summary, the data shows that the existing Members' staff pay ranges are mainly in line with market comparators.



\*Recommended salary ranges taken from the median (50% above and below) of benchmarking salaries from UK Legislatures and external market for each level.

4.2.8. However, some changes are recommended to ensure the pay structure remains competitive in the market.

### Proposals

4.2.9. We propose a more flexible structure that consolidates the pay ranges into fewer levels, with wider salary ranges to support Members making decisions around pay based on experience, local salary rates and affordability. To retain the essential element of flexibility, Members can appoint staff to the pay range they think is appropriate, in consultation with HR, allocating job titles at their discretion. We hope that this will retain the flexibility for Members whilst helping to increase the attractiveness of the roles to good quality candidates.

4.2.10. We also propose maintaining our current range maximums where the benchmarked maximums are lower, on the basis that the current maximums are in line with those of the other legislatures and therefore the most directly relevant comparators. This approach will prevent any detriment to staff at the upper end of the current ranges.

## Proposed Salary Ranges Financial Year 2021-2022

Job Family	Recommended Minimum	Recommended Maximum	Increase at bottom End	Increase at Top End
<p><b>Administration &amp; Office Management:</b></p> <p>This family comprises the following activities: acting as the first point of contact, using initiative and responding to and/or directing queries, managing diaries, including resolving conflicting demands, providing support for meetings and surgeries, collating and analysing information and producing documents. Moving up the range, individuals may also oversee the running of the office, including ensuring work is commissioned out effectively, collating papers and briefings, compiling reports, developing systems and managing staff in accordance with the Member's office structure.</p>	<p><b>£18,898</b></p> <p>(£18,519 is the current range minimum which is lower than the benchmark range minimum above)</p>	<p><b>£36,266</b></p> <p>(£33,706 is the benchmark range maximum which is lower than the current range maximum above)</p>	<p><b>£379</b></p>	<p><b>£0</b></p>
<p><b>Casework:</b></p> <p>This family comprises the following activities: managing and progressing portfolio of casework, gathering relevant information to resolve or progress cases appropriately, drafting responses, arranging and attending surgeries, liaising with Government agencies, voluntary sector and others to resolve constituency matters. Moving up the range, individuals may also maintain in-depth knowledge of the constituency/regional matters, develop knowledge in specialist areas, oversee the running of the office, including ensuring work is commissioned out effectively and managing staff in accordance with the Member's office structure.</p>	<p><b>£23,143</b></p> <p>(£22,266 is the current range minimum which is lower than the benchmark range minimum above)</p>	<p><b>£35,384</b></p> <p>(£32,018 is the benchmark range maximum which is lower than the current range maximum above)</p>	<p><b>£877</b></p>	<p><b>£0</b></p>

<p><b>Communications:</b></p> <p>This family comprises the following activities: promoting the Member’s parliamentary work, including via broadcast, print and social media, building relations with journalists, drafting press materials and organising campaign activities. Moving up the range, individuals will also carry out research into local, regional, national and international issues as required, brief the Member on relevant issues and produce high quality written materials, manage provision of communications/press advice, oversee the running of the office, including ensuring work is commissioned out effectively and managing staff in accordance with the Member’s office structure.</p>	<p><b>£24,211</b></p> <p>(£22,266 is the current range minimum which is lower than the benchmark range minimum above)</p>	<p><b>£35,992</b></p> <p>(£35,384 is the current range maximum which is lower than the benchmark range maximum above)</p>	<p><b>£1,945</b></p>	<p><b>£608</b></p>
<p><b>Research &amp; Policy:</b></p> <p>This family comprises the following activities: researching and interpreting complex information, searching and extracting evidence from published reports, presenting data in different formats, drafting speeches, providing advice and recommendations on policy matters, proactively engaging with internal and external expertise as appropriate and presenting complex issues clearly and persuasively with excellent written and verbal communication. Moving up the range, individuals will also develop new areas of research and sources of information, take lead on specialist areas, oversee the running of the office, including ensuring work is commissioned out effectively and managing staff in accordance with the Member’s office structure.</p>	<p><b>£25,438</b></p> <p>(£24,472 is the current range minimum which is lower than the benchmark range minimum above)</p>	<p><b>£44,643</b></p> <p>(£43,031 is the benchmark range maximum which is lower than the current range maximum above)</p>	<p><b>£966</b></p>	<p><b>£0</b></p>



**Recommendation 3:** A more flexible structure is proposed that consolidates the existing pay ranges into fewer levels with wider salary ranges. This will ensure the ranges are competitive in the market and in line with other legislature comparators. Note, this will be supported by Recommendation 4.

- 4.2.11. The implementation of this recommendation will rest with Members. It will be for Members, as employers, to determine their own pay arrangements in accordance with equalities legislation. To support this, HR will assist Members to put in place job descriptions commensurable with the rate of pay for the role. Along with promoting internal equity, this gives Members the ability to offer salaries in line with comparable organisations and support career progression within and between job families.
- 4.2.12. The Members' Expenses Scheme currently states in paragraph 3.1.7 that a Member may only submit a claim under this section in respect of staff who are engaged in accordance with such policies and under such terms and conditions as are approved by the SPCB from time to time. We would propose that this paragraph be amended to make it clear that all staff paid through the Scheme must be employed within the new wider pay ranges and job families.

**Recommendation 4:** The HR Office will assist Members to put in place job descriptions commensurable with the rate of pay for the role. This will ensure Members are paying their staff consistently and fairly for the work they do in a given role while reducing the risk of an equal pay issue. The Scheme will be amended to make it clear that staff paid through the Scheme must be employed within the pay ranges and job families.

### 4.3 Promoting Good Employment Practices

- 4.3.1. We have made other observations on matters such as the importance of supporting staff training and development and using effective recruitment practices to attract good quality candidates. We also believe it is essential that sufficient SPCB resource is dedicated to this work. Our analysis and recommendations are summarised below.

#### **Recruitment Support**

- 4.3.2. Currently HR has delegated authority to approve up to £1,200 per Member annually for recruitment advertising through the centrally held Incidental and Ancillary Employment Costs provision. This was set in 2008 and has not been revised since. Uptake is relatively low, with funding accessed on average seven times a year (approx. £430 per Member using it). Online advertising, the use of social media and the facility to post vacancies without cost via the HR Office explain the low cost.
- 4.3.3. We propose that HR provide further support with recruitment by assisting Members to create job descriptions and adverts and continuing to publish online adverts on behalf of Members. Adverts will be published on the Parliament's new recruitment candidate management system which offers the opportunity for applications to be managed using the system, including communicating with candidates and issuing contracts.
- 4.3.4. If SPCB accepts this recommendation, this new approach offers the potential for Members to more easily manage the process of recruiting staff. To reflect this more effective and efficient approach, and to balance any wider investment, we propose that delegated authority is set at £500 per Member per annum (including VAT) which reflects the current reality.

**Recommendation 5:** The HR Office will provide further support with recruitment and publish online adverts on behalf of Members backed up by the Work4MSPs twitter feed. This is a more effective and efficient approach as greater reach for vacancies can be achieved using the Parliament's social media channels.

Accordingly, the HR Office's delegated authority to approve recruitment advertising should be set at £500 per Member per annum (including VAT) which reflects the current reality of spend.

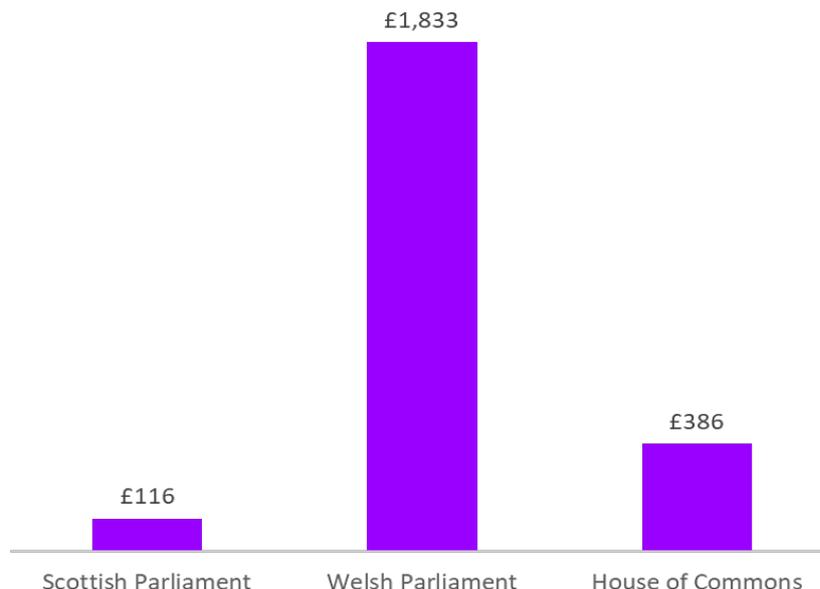
#### **Training arrangements**

- 4.3.5. Similarly, HR has delegated authority to approve up to £1,200 per Member annually, through the Incidental and Ancillary Employment Cost Provision. This was set in 2008 and has not been revised since. Feedback

from Members and staff shows that the existing arrangement under the Expenses Scheme is not adequate. It limits Members to booking their staff on 'off the shelf' training courses delivered by external providers either directly or through a coordinated arrangement by HR. This arrangement does not enable HR to develop bespoke courses to suit Members' staff.

- 4.3.6. Actual expenditure on training is low. It has increased this session because SPCB has approved HR to deliver a co-ordinated programme under the Scheme. For example, last year 180 claims were made, mainly for courses that are relevant to the majority of staff (i.e. managing casework, understanding benefits, first aid, mental health awareness). A very small number were more specific such as conferences and seminars (12 requests, ranging between £25-£525 but averaging £139).
- 4.3.7. Training for MPs and their staff is delivered centrally by the House of Commons (£251k pa) and the Welsh Parliament (£110k pa). As indicated training spend in the Scottish Parliament is significantly lower (£15k pa). The graph below shows the total reimbursement of claims against budgets held in other UK Parliaments.

Training budget spend per elected member



- 4.3.8. To support a more effective training approach, we propose that HR establish a centralised training budget, out-with the Members' Expenses Scheme, to enable HR to design and deliver programmes for Members' staff. HR would also retain delegated authority within the Scheme at a set limit of £500 per Member per annum to support Members' staff in fulfilling any job specific training needs for example, attending seminars and conferences from the Incidental and Ancillary Employment Provision of the Scheme.

- 4.3.9. The SPCB will wish to note that at present any spend under the Incidental and Ancillary Employment Provision is published in line with other Members Expenses Scheme expenditure. We would propose to continue this for any spend in relation to specific job training met from the provision, and we will aim to publish information met from the centralised training budget as well.

**Recommendation 6:** It is recommended that a centrally managed budget out-with the Members' Expenses Scheme is established at each budgeting round to design and deliver training for Members' staff.

HR will retain delegated authority at a set limit of £500 per Member per annum to support Members' staff in meeting any job specific training needs, for example, attending seminars and conferences.

#### 4.4 Group Pools

- 4.4.1. As part of the remit we have undertaken a desk based high level look at the funding of Group Pools to see if any changes could be helpful and affordable.
- 4.4.2. In terms of governance, Group Pools are covered by the provisions in the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme. Section 3.1.2 of the scheme provides that a member of staff may be engaged either by a single member or jointly by two or more members through a pool. A framework agreement is also in place for each Group Pool setting out the employment relationship between the Members and staff.
- 4.4.3. The costs of the Group Pool are met by Members transferring an amount from their individual SCPs. This funding arrangement has been in place since Session 1 of the Parliament. This amount varies for each Group Pool depending on the support required. This year the total provision for the combined Group Pools is £1.18m.
- 4.4.4. We have looked at how other Parliaments fund Group Pools and there is a variance across the different legislatures. Separate provision could therefore be made within the Members' Expenses Scheme for the Group Pools, but it would not be straightforward and would fluctuate outside the control of the parties at each election.
- 4.4.5. Some, like the Scottish Parliament, leave the calculation to the respective Groups using budgets for staff costs. To follow others, one option would be to make a separate provision for Group Pools with a set amount for each regardless of the size of the Groups. Based on the current funding arrangements, this would mean some Groups could receive less than they do at present.

- 4.4.6. Another option would be to provide an amount based on the number of Members within the Group. This would be similar to the arrangements for financial assistance for political parties (short money). However, the difficulty again with this approach is that a funding baseline for each Group is already in place. To ensure there is no detriment to any of the Groups the amount per Member would need to be set to ensure that this was achievable. The only way to do this would be to set the amount per Member at the level set by the Group that seeks the highest amount of transfer from their Members. Based on the current arrangements, this could potentially cost an additional £1.5m over and above the current costs of Group Pools.
- 4.4.7. It is accepted that separating out the Group Pool costs would increase the available SCP for each Member, as they would no longer be required to make transfers to the Group Pools. However, it is clear that the existing arrangements provide a flexibility in terms of funding for each of the parties. Parties know what model of support best suits their Groups: they consider the funding required and agree the level of donations provided by Members. Importantly, the additional costs to the overall scheme would be significant given the funding necessary to ensure no detriment to the existing arrangements.

**Recommendation 7:** The existing arrangements for Group Pools provide a flexibility in terms of funding for each of the parties, which best supports their needs and at this time is the most cost-effective approach. As such it is recommended that there is no change to the Group Pool arrangements.

## 5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. The budget bid process for the first year of Session 6 will need to reflect any recommendations arising from this Review and wider costs for other SPCB support budgets. Recommendations where there is a cost impact are set out below:

Recommendation	Cost Basis	Estimated cost
<a href="#">1</a> - Increase in 1 FTE	Based on one FTE member of staff (additional one headcount) per Member. This would mean a revised SCP of £129,700 per Member	£5,400,000 for full year additional SCP Up to £500,000 on costs in year 1 to the Parliamentary Service to support any additional staff and provide kit and licences
<a href="#">3</a> – Increase in scale minimum	Cost impact for increasing the scale minimum. Estimated to impact 88 staff currently employed by Members	£48,000 for full year
<a href="#">6</a> – Establishing a centrally managed training budget	Costs will be met from a transfer within the wider Members Expenses' Scheme budget so cost neutral on budget.	£40,000 for full year

- 5.2. The SCP based on 2020-21 rates would equate to a rate of @£129.7k per Member if the scale minimum is adopted along with funding for an additional 1 FTE.
- 5.3. The current amounts in 2020-21 for House of Commons, based on non-London area is £177,550 but this includes employer's pension and national insurance costs and £104,835 for the Welsh Parliament. The latter, like the SPCB's provision, exclude employer's pension and national insurance costs which are centrally met on costs within their scheme.
- 5.4. We would expect to index the current SCP limit for the period of session 5 falling within the new financial year. The revised SCP level of £129.7k, which again will be indexed, will apply from the start of Session 6. This is consistent with treatment after the last SCP review at end of Session 4.