

Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme – Travel Application

03 April 2025

Reference: SPCB (2025) Paper 20

Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to consider an application submitted by Ash Regan MSP to have the travel and overnight costs, for her and a member of her staff, associated with a visit to Oslo, Norway from 27th to 30th April 2025. The travel application relates to the Member's proposed Prostitution (Offence and Support) (Scotland) Bill, to be met under the provisions made at paragraphs 2.2.3 and 6.1.5 of the Reimbursement of the Members' Expenses Scheme.

Issues and options

2. The Reimbursement of the Members' Expenses Scheme makes provision to meet travel and overnight costs associated with a member undertaking their parliamentary duties. However, in relation to travel outwith the UK, Members are required to make an application to the SPCB to have such costs met from the Scheme.
3. The criteria previously applied when determining such applications included where the reason for the journey was:
 - a. Directly related to a specific constituency matter, where the visit is necessary in order to address the issue;
 - b. Directly related to Parliamentary business;
 - c. Something the SPCB considered the Parliament should be paying for;
 - d. Provides value for money.
4. The purpose of Ms Regan's visit is to meet with politicians, frontline services and researchers in advance of formally introducing her proposed Prostitution (Offence and Support) (Scotland) Bill in May 2025. The visit

will include meeting with politicians involved in the passing of Norway's prostitution law upon which Ms Regan's Members Bill is modelled, and meeting with survivors, frontline services who deliver exit programs, and with researchers involved in formally evaluating the impact of the law. Face-to-face meetings are proposed to allow Ms Regan and her staff member, who is responsible for research and writing of related documents, to gain a detailed understanding of the challenges, successes and impact Norway's law on prostitution has had. This approach aims to ensure Ms Regan's campaign for her Bill is evidence-based, taking into account real-world lived experiences. Ms Regan and her staff member were originally invited by survivors at a conference in October 2023, but the visit was postponed until the Member won the right to introduce her bill to Parliament.

5. Ms. Regan proposes to travel, with her staff member, between 27th and 30th April 2025. The estimated cost of flights from Edinburgh to Oslo, Norway and return total £536 (£268 per person). Taxi costs to/from Oslo Airport and to/from meetings, are estimated at £350 in total. Ms. Regan and her staff member intend to use public transport in place of taxis where flight and meeting times allow, which will be a cheaper alternative. Therefore, travel costs in Norway are based upon a maximum estimation.
6. Ms Regan and her staff member would require overnight accommodation for three nights which is estimated between £600 and £900, excluding meals. This estimation is based on the current minimum and maximum costs for overnight accommodation within 0.5 miles of the city centre. Overall costs for meals are estimated at £240 (£120 per person) and fall within the Allowances overnight rates for outside the UK, when combined with accommodation costs.
7. The estimated rail travel costs to and from Edinburgh Airport for Ms. Regan's staff member are £28 and the estimated mileage and parking costs for Ms. Regan's travel to and from Edinburgh Airport are approximately £103.
8. The total cost for travel, accommodation and meals based on the maximum costs detailed above would be approximately £2,157 for the visit to and from Oslo, Norway.

Governance

9. There are no governance issues as the Scheme provides for Members travelling abroad and applying to the SPCB for the costs to be met from the Scheme prior to travelling.

Resource implications

10. Should the SPCB determine that the costs should be met, it is confirmed that there are sufficient funds available within the overall Members budget for 2025-26.

Publication Scheme

11. This paper can be published in accordance with the SPCB's publication scheme.

Next steps

12. Advise the Member of the SPCB's decision and if the SPCB agree the travel and overnight costs can be met from the Scheme, then the Member will be advised to move forward with the proposed visit.

Decision

13. The SPCB is invited to consider an application from Ms Regan for the costs of travel and overnight accommodation for her and her staff member to be met from the Members' Expenses Scheme for a proposed visit to Oslo, Norway as detailed above.

Allowances Office

26 March 2025