REIMBURSEMENT OF MEMBERS’ EXPENSES SCHEME – USE OF PARLIAMENTARY RESOURCES

Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to consider a complaint regarding the distribution outwith his Highland and Islands region of a 2018 parliamentary report by Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP.

Issues and Options

2. A complaint was received on 2 April 2018 which raised concerns that Mr Halcro Johnston had distributed his parliamentary report outwith his region by including it with the Banffshire Journal. The complainer highlighted that the Banffshire Journal’s circulation area is entirely within the Banffshire and Buchan Coast Constituency and the North East Scotland region and therefore outwith Mr Halcro Johnston’s Highland and Island region.

3. Under Section 7 of the Code of Conduct Members must abide by the Reimbursement of Members’ Expenses Scheme and the policies of the SPCB. Section 4.1.2 of the Scheme does allow Members to be reimbursed for the cost of the publication and distribution of newsletters, annual reports and surveys. The SPCB’s policy on Members’ publications states that a publication funded through parliamentary allowances must not be distributed outside a Member’s electoral area.

4. Having discussed the complaint with Mr Halcro Johnston he has advised that he made arrangements with the Scottish Provincial Press (SPP) Group in relation to issuing his parliamentary report with the SPP Group’s local papers covering the region and in particular the Moray constituency. Mr Halcro Johnston understood that the main paper for the area was the Banffshire Herald and that this was the paper to be used for distribution in Moray because whilst the Banffshire Journal did cover parts of Moray it also covered areas outwith the region.

5. The Allowances Office has looked into the matter and I can confirm that the majority of the areas advertised as being covered by the Banffshire Journal do fall outwith Mr Halcro Johnston’s region, however, the newspaper is also circulated within parts of the Moray constituency, in particular Keith, which does fall within Mr Halcro Johnston’s region. I can also confirm that the Banffshire Herald advertises its circulation area as Keith and the surrounding area which does form part of the Moray constituency.
6. Mr Johnston fully accepts that the mistake occurred as he did not pick up on this error when confirming the booking in writing thereby resulting in the parliamentary reports being issued with the wrong newspaper.

7. The SPCB will wish to note that Mr Halcro Johnston has repaid the full cost of the incorrect distribution through the Banffshire Journal at a total of £158.40 including VAT.

8. The SPCB is invited to determine whether they wish to take any further action on the matter.

**Resource Implications**

9. The costs in relation to distribution were £158.40 which has been fully repaid.

**Governance issues**

10. The SPCB’s policy on Members Publications specifically prohibits distribution of publications outside a Member’s electoral area.

**Publication Scheme**

11. This paper can be published in accordance with the SPCB’s publication Scheme.

**Next steps**

12. To inform the Member and the complainant of the decision.

**Decision**

13. The SPCB is invited to consider the complaint noting that repayment of the incorrect distribution costs has been made and decide whether it wishes to take any further action on the matter.

**Allowances Office**
May 2018