



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme – Overnight Accommodation

27 October 2022

Reference: SPCB (2022) Paper 66

Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to consider reimbursement claims submitted by Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP and Edward Mountain MSP to have overnight accommodation costs that exceed the Allowances Rate of £189 per night met under the provisions made at paragraphs 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 of the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme.

Issues and options

2. The Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme makes provision to meet the cost of overnight accommodation outside Edinburgh (but within the UK) for each night when the performance of parliamentary duties prevents the member from using the members' main residence or any other residence. Members have a set limit of £189 and are required to make an application to the SPCB for costs that are above the limit.

Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP

3. Mr Halcro Johnson recently submitted a reimbursement claim on MyExpenses for accommodation costs and evening meal on Friday 5 August totalling £254.20, £65.20 over the Allowances overnight limit. The accommodation cost was £230, and the evening meal cost was £24.20. Mr Halcro Johnson has provided the following explanation and is applying to the SPCB for approval for the additional costs above the agreed limit.
4. As part of his summer surgery tour, Mr Halcro Johnson had an engagement in Dornie and booked a hotel in Balmacara through Booking.com. On the morning of 5 August, the same day as his booking, he received an email from Booking.com cancelling the booking due to no availability at the hotel and an offer of an alternative hotel in Strathpeffer

for the same price. The hotel in Strathpeffer was 61 miles away from his location in Dornie on the Friday evening, the original hotel booking in Balmacara was 19 miles from his location in Dornie.

5. Mr Halcro Johnson considered the hotel in Strathpeffer but decided it was too far away to travel to that evening and to travel back to his engagement on the Saturday morning in Portree so he decided to look for a hotel closer to his location and booked a hotel in Glenmoriston.
6. The hotel in Glenmoriston was 60 miles from his engagement on the Saturday in Portree and the hotel in Balmacara would have been a distance of 97 miles to Portree.

Edward Mountain MSP

7. Mr Mountain was also taking part in a summer surgery tour of the Highlands and Islands Region, on the evening of 12 July 2022 he planned to stay in Scourie as he thought this was the best place considering safe driving limits and a good location for the next day of surgeries. He stayed at the Scourie House Hotel at a cost of £185 for the accommodation and had an evening meal costing £39.50, this meant he was £35.50 over the Allowances overnight limit.
8. Mr Mountain explored other accommodation options in Scourie for that evening and confirmed that one hotel had no availability and the other two had a minimum 2-night stay. The other options would have meant higher combined overnight costs over the 2 nights.
9. The SPCB will wish to note that both Members have highlighted that they are finding overnight accommodation costs increasing in the region. However, at present these are the only two incidences that the Allowances Office are aware of where costs have been above the rate. We will monitor the situation and come back to the SPCB if there does appear to be an ongoing issue. We will also ensure that this is reviewed when the SPCB is next considering the uprating of allowances in February 2023.

Governance

10. There are no governance issues as the Scheme provides for Members staying overnight within the UK and applying to the SPCB for the costs to be met from the Scheme where above agreed limits.
11. The Allowances Office believe both applications to be reasonable under the circumstances.

Resource implications

12. 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 2022-23.

Publication Scheme

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

Next steps

14. Advise the Members of the SPCB's decision and if the SPCB agree the overnight costs can be met from the Scheme then the reimbursement will be processed on MyExpenses.

Decision

15. The SPCB is invited to consider the applications from Mr Halcro Johnston and Mr Mountain to meet the additional cost for the overnight stay to be met from the Overnight Accommodation Provision.

Allowances Office

October 2022