

REIMBURSEMENT OF EXPENSES SCHEME – EXCEPTIONAL EXPENSES

Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to consider an application for exceptional expenses under paragraph 7.2 of the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme to meet office relocation costs.

Issues and Options

2. Under the expenses scheme, provision is made for a Member to apply for the reimbursement of any exceptional expenses incurred by the Member in connection with the performance of parliamentary duties. An application has been received from Rhoda Grant MSP and David Stewart MSP for exceptional expenses to meet the additional costs associated with relocating their parliamentary office.

3. Ms Grant and Mr Stewart have advised that the building, in which their regional office is currently located, is the subject of a change of use and works are currently underway to convert the building into a B&B. The Members have now given notice to quit the office on 4 April and this has been accepted by their landlord.

4. The Members have secured new office premises with the lease commencing 1 February. While a 3 month rent-free period has been negotiated, a number of expenses associated with the move have been identified which cannot, in total, be met from the Office Cost Provision available to them in the remainder of the current financial year.

5. The relocation costs identified total £5,170 and are as follows:-

- Signage for new office – £732 including fitting;
- Window blinds – £480;
- Carpets tiles – £1,300;
- Internal decoration – £800;
- Transfer of panic alarm equipment and fitting plus transfer and refitting of burglar alarm - £550;
- Transfer and fitting of phone lines – £238;
- Locks for windows and doors - £100;

- Health and Safety Lighting upgrade - £550; and
- Legal Fees - £420

6. It is estimated that the Members have combined committed costs of £12,712.44 up to the end of the current financial year. These commitments include the current office running costs, rent and virements to meet staff costs. The Members currently have a combined balance of £14,803.48 available in their Office Cost Provision (OCP), leaving a combined balance of £2,091.04 for the current financial year potentially available to meet the relocation costs. On that basis, there is a short fall of £3,078.96 in respect of the identified moving costs. The Members have advised that they would use any balance in their OCP to meet the moving costs before utilising any additional funds awarded by the SPCB.

7. The lease on the new office commenced on 1 February and the Members have now taken possession of the keys. It is proposed that all the works be undertaken before moving into the office which is scheduled for early in April. It should be noted that, while there is no legal requirement to re-carpet and decorate the office, the current state of decoration and carpets is very poor.

8. The current lighting is considered to be inadequate and not to comply with Health and Safety regulations in respect of PC monitor use. It is proposed that 4 Cat2 Louvre strip lights be installed in the staff room and 6 wall mounted lamps in the MSP room. As listed above, this will be at a cost of £550. The light fittings will be provided by Ms Grant's husband at cost price and will be fitted by him free of all labour charges.

9. Applications for exceptional expenses are normally made to cover the costs of unforeseen circumstances. In this case, the application is to cover costs associated with moving to a new office due to the change of use of the existing office. The SPCB is invited to consider this application for the relocation costs to met from the exceptional expenses provision of the Members' Expenses Scheme.

Resource Implications

10. Should the SPCB decide the circumstances are exceptional and the costs should be met it is confirmed that there are funds available within the overall expenses budget.

Governance issues

11. There are no governance issues.

Publication Scheme

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

Next steps

13. To inform the Members of the decision.

Decision

14. The SPCB is invited to consider the application for exceptional expenses to cover the costs associated with moving into a new regional office.

Allowances Office
March 2014