

14 September 2011

REIMBURSEMENT OF MEMBERS' EXPENSES SCHEME – REVIEW OF REGIONAL OFFICES

Executive summary

1. The SPCB agreed at its meeting on 15 June 2011 that a desk based review of regional office arrangements should be carried out. Specifically, the review should look at whether or not the parliamentary regions of Central Scotland, Glasgow, Lothian and West Scotland should be added to those regions where Members were entitled to make application to the SPCB for an additional regional office where more than one Member is returned from a political party's regional list for that region.
2. The review has now been undertaken and a copy of the report is attached at Annex A for the SPCB's consideration.

Issues and Options

3. At present, under the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme (expenses scheme) the regions of Highlands & Islands, Mid Scotland & Fife, North East Scotland and South Scotland are entitled to apply to the SPCB for an additional regional office where more than one Member is returned from a political party's regional list for that region.
4. A desk based review has been undertaken to look at whether any of the remaining parliamentary regions should be added to this list. The SPCB will note from the report's conclusion that a case may possibly be made for the West Scotland parliamentary region given that, as a result of the most recent boundary review, the region has increased in geographical size.
5. It should also be noted, however, that while the West Scotland parliamentary region is geographically greater in size than the combined size of Central Scotland, Glasgow and Lothian, it is still only a quarter of the size of North East Scotland (the geographically smallest of the regions currently entitled to apply for an additional office). However, due to the geographic nature of the region straddling the River Clyde, most public transport journeys north – south of the river involve travelling through the city of Glasgow which adds to the travel time.
6. Both the Central Scotland and Lothian parliamentary regions have reduced in size geographically as a result of the most recent boundary review. Given this, it is difficult to conclude that there is a case for these regions to be added to the list. Members representing these regions in previous parliamentary sessions have conducted their parliamentary duties with only

the one regional office shared between the regional Members of the same party.

7. In respect of the Glasgow parliamentary region, again the report finds it difficult to conclude that the size of the region merits an additional office.

8. The SPCB is therefore invited to consider whether or not any of the Central Scotland, Glasgow, Lothian and West Scotland parliamentary regions should be added to the list of those regions where regional Members of the same party could apply to the SPCB for an additional regional office.

Resource Implications

9. The costs of adding a region to the list of those regions that can currently make application to the SPCB for an additional office are as follows:

West of Scotland – possible 3 additional offices (£ 42,217)

Central Scotland – possible 2 additional offices (£ 32,274)

Glasgow – possible 2 additional offices (£ 29,177)

Lothian – possible 2 additional offices (£29,177)

10. These costs are based on the May 2011 election results. The total additional costs, if all 4 regions were permitted additional offices could be up to £132,900.

Governance issues

11. Any changes to the current arrangements would have to be taken forward by means of a resolution of the Parliament amending the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme.

Publication Scheme

12. This paper can be published as part of the SPCB's publication scheme once agreement has been reached on whether or not an amendment should be made to the expenses scheme.

Next steps

13. Should the SPCB decide that an amendment should be made to the expenses scheme, the SPCB might wish to discuss with their respective party groups.

Decision

14. The SPCB is invited to consider whether or not any of the Central Scotland, Glasgow, Lothian and West Scotland parliamentary regions should be added to the list of those regions where regional Members of the same party could apply to the SPCB for an additional regional office?

Allowances Policy
September 2011