



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme- Travel Application By Correspondence Reference: SPCB (2023) Paper 24

Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to consider an application submitted by Liam McArthur MSP and Beatrice Wishart MSP to have the travel and overnight costs associated with a proposed visit to the Faroe Islands at the end of June 2023 met under the provisions made at paragraphs 2.2.3 and 6.1.5 of the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme.

Issues and options

2. The Reimbursement of 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.
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 considers the Parliament should be paying for;
 - d. Provides value for money.
4. Mr McArthur and Ms. Wishart's application relates to invitations over the years by both the Head of the Faroese Representation and more recently the Faroese Minister of Foreign Affairs to visit Faroe Islands to meet with the Faroese Government and others to see first-hand projects in the Faroes in relation to their shared interests. The purpose

of the visit is for the Members to explore the shared interests between Shetland, Orkney and the Faroes particularly around fishing, transport infrastructure, digital connectivity, energy, and tourism. From an island constituency perspective, they are especially interested to learn how this relates to these issues within their respective constituencies and how they can learn from the Faroese in these areas.

5. During the visit the Members wish to explore a number of areas but in particular transport infrastructure given the Faroese are trailblazers in inter island tunnels and the visit would give the Members the opportunity to see these sites and talk to the developers of the tunnels and bridges as well as the first undersea roundabout and find out more about how such infrastructure could improve the connectivity and resilience in their own constituencies.
6. The Members also want to explore digital connectivity as Faroese Telecom have previously expressed interest in bringing 5G infrastructure to Orkney and Shetland as the island communities are already connected by their SHEFA subsea fibre optic cable. The rollout of superfast broadband and improved mobile coverage remains a key challenge for rural and island communities in Scotland and the Members believe a visit to the Faroe Islands would allow for a better understanding of possible solutions.
7. The Members are proposing to travel between Thursday 29 June and Monday 3 July should costs be approved to be met from the Scheme by the SPCB. The Members are applying for the cost of flights from their respective constituencies to Edinburgh and then onward flights from Edinburgh to Faroe as well as the cost of overnight accommodation, transport costs and evening meals whilst in Faroe.
8. The estimated cost of flights is £1,740 for both Members. This splits as approx. £1,100 for the Shetland/Orkney to Edinburgh return flights and £640 for the Edinburgh to Faroe return flights. The estimated travel costs whilst in Faroe will relate to travel from Vargar airport to the capital Torshavn and return by taxi would be approximately £120. This would be a total of approx. £1,860 for travel related costs.
9. Overnight accommodation would be required for 4 nights. The Members have looked at options for accommodation in the capital Torshavn where they propose to stay during the visit as this will be convenient for meetings at the Løgting with members of government and central for other parts of the visit. The overnight limit for travel abroad for 2023-34 is £250 per night covering dinner, bed and breakfast. The Members have found availability for the dates but options are limited, and they have indicated that following research the approx. costs per night for overnight accommodation would be £285 per night per person and this would not include evening meal.

10. The Members are seeking SPCB agreement to meet the higher overnight cost up to £285 and to set a limit on food allowance for the visit in addition to the overnight costs. If the SPCB agrees the overnight accommodation costs and sets a limit of £30 for example per Member per night/day for food this would equate to £2,520 in total (£1260 per Member).
11. Total costs for flights, other transport, accommodation and meals based on the indicative costs above would be £4,380.

Governance

12. 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

13. 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 2023-24.

Publication Scheme

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

Next steps

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

Decision

16. The SPCB is invited to consider an application from Mr McArthur and Ms Wishart for the cost of travel and overnight accommodation to be met from the Members' Expenses Scheme for a proposed visit to Faroe Islands as detailed above.