



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme - Travel Application

18 May 2023

Reference: SPCB (2023) Paper 38

Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to consider an application submitted by 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. 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.
5. The SPCB will wish to note that Member had made an application in July 2022 to visit following an invitation by the Head of the Faroese

Representation on the back of a visit by her to the Scottish Parliament in June 2022. At the time the SPCB agreed the visit but due to the proposed timing the visit fell through and Ms Wishart is now looking to re-arrange the visit and is reapplying to the SPCB.

6. The purpose of the visit is for the Member to explore the shared interests between Shetland and the Faroes particularly around transport infrastructure, and digital connectivity. From an island constituency perspective, she is especially interested to learn from the Faroese experience in these areas.
7. Ms Wishart has taken forward a series of public consultation events over the past year in Shetland focusing on the feasibility of fixed links through tunnels and bridges to improve the connectivity and resilience of Shetland's island communities. Ms Wishart has been working with local tunnel action groups on Shetland to look at transport.
8. Fixed links, or tunnels, have been trailblazed by the Faroese who currently have completed 20 inter-island tunnels, including the world's first undersea roundabout, with 14 further projects under consideration. The Member believes the opportunity to visit these sites and talk to the developers first-hand would be invaluable for advancing discussions in Shetland on behalf of her constituents who have demonstrated an interest in fixed links. Ms Wishart advises that this would enable exploration of the options the tunnel action groups could then present to both the UK and Scottish Governments for consideration.
9. The Member also wants to explore digital connectivity as Faroese Telecom have previously expressed interest in bringing 5G infrastructure to Shetland and the island communities are already connected by their SHEFA subsea fibre optic cable. There have recently been issues with the resilience of the fibre optic cable and Ms Wishart would like to discuss this with the providers and look to see how better resilience can be achieved.
10. The rollout of superfast broadband and improved mobile coverage also remains a key challenge for rural and island communities in Scotland and the Member believes a visit to the Faroe Islands would allow for a better understanding of possible solutions for her constituency.
11. The Member proposes to travel between Thursday 29 June and Monday 3 July should costs be approved to be met from the Scheme by the SPCB. The Member is applying for the cost of flights from her constituency 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.
12. The estimated cost for Edinburgh to Faroe return flights is £320. 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 £60. This would be a total of approx. £380 for travel related costs. The

Member will already be in Edinburgh so any travel costs from Shetland to Edinburgh have not been included in this application as they would form part of her normal weekly parliamentary travel.

13. Overnight accommodation would be required for 4 nights. The Member has looked at options for accommodation in the capital Torshavn where she proposes 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 Member has found availability for the dates, but options are limited, and she has 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.
14. The Member is 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 night/day for food this would equate to £1260.
15. Total costs for flights, other transport, accommodation and meals based on the indicative costs above would be £1,640.

Governance

16. 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

17. 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

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

Next steps

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

Decision

20. The SPCB is invited to consider an application from 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.

Allowances Office

12 May 2023