



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme – Use of parliamentary resources

18 May 2023

Reference: SPCB (2023) Paper 36

Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to consider a matter relating to the SPCB's policy on Members' publications and use of parliamentary resources whereby a survey issued by Ms Rachael Hamilton MSP has been distributed outwith her electoral area.

Issues and options

2. Under the SPCB's policy on Members' publications Members can only issue parliamentary funded publications within the electoral area for which they were returned.
3. Ms Hamilton raised with the Presiding Officer, and the constituency Member concerned, that some copies of a survey she was issuing had been issued outwith her electoral area in March 2023. The Presiding Officer instructed the Member and Head of Allowances to liaise on the matter in order that the matter could be raised with the SPCB for consideration as necessary.
4. Having now looked into the matter we can advise that, as with the majority of Members, Ms Hamilton used Royal Mail's door to door service to issue her survey to constituents. However, as the SPCB may be aware Royal Mail do not deliver using constituency or regional boundaries but by postcode and on occasion this can mean that Members publications do sometimes stray beyond their boundaries into another Members' electoral area.
5. In this case the Member was aware there was a risk and accepted that risk due to the small number of publications potentially going outwith their electoral area versus the significant additional costs to not using Royal Mail for delivery to the particular post code affected or seeking alternative delivery methods for those surveys. The costs involved relate to an estimated 97 copies of the survey being delivered outwith

the constituency at a total cost of £12.19, which is made up of £6.27 in printing costs and £5.92 in delivery costs.

6. The SPCB will wish to note that previous SPCBs have taken a pragmatic approach to such cases given that, whilst not wholly outwith the Members control, those Members affected can realistically only avoid such circumstance by:
 - a. not issuing publications to the whole of their electoral area to avoid the post codes that cross over; or
 - b. using alternative delivery methods at a much higher cost which are not necessarily practical or realistic; or
 - c. accepting the risk and potentially having to reimburse the SPCB the cost of any publication that is issued outwith the electoral area.
7. The SPCB may also wish to note that the Members' Office have also been in touch with Royal Mail about what can be done to improve accuracy in future without increasing the costs beyond what is generally affordable for MSP offices. This conversation resulted in a commitment from the 'Door to Door' team and public affairs team at Royal Mail to come into Parliament to talk MSPs and MSP staff through the process of ordering these types of deliveries from Royal Mail and how to do so as accurately as possible. Whilst this may prove helpful it should be noted that it will not necessarily resolve the issue.
8. The SPCB is invited to consider whether they wish to seek reimbursement of the costs detailed in the paper from the Member and whether they wish to take any further action.
9. Given the circumstances are a long standing situation and the potential is that other occurrences will happen over the remainder of the session the SPCB may wish to consider an in principle position in relation to such matters. If SPCB are so inclined, we would recommend that where any costs are below £50 this is not pursued due to the cost required to do so outweighing the cost recouped. This would be only in circumstances where the deliver is reasonably outwith the Members control unless they use other delivery methods at significant increased costs to the public purse. Any such matters could be delegated to the Head of Allowances to manage with anything above this being brought to the SPCB for consideration.

Governance

10. The SPCB 's policy on Members' publications requires Members to only issue parliamentary funded publications within the electoral area for which they are returned and for any breach of the policy to be considered by the SPCB.

Resource implications

11. The costs for the surveys going outside of the electoral area are minimal at £12.19 and have been met from the Members' Engagement Provision for 2022/23. Should the SPCB decide to seek reimbursement of these costs from the Member they will be refunded to this provision against 2022/23.

Publication Scheme

12. This paper can be published in line the SPCB's publication policy.

Next steps

13. To inform the Member of the SPCB's decision and if reimbursement is sought to work with the Member to make the necessary arrangements.

Decision

14. The SPCB is invited to consider the circumstances of the publication issuing and decide

- whether it wishes to seek reimbursement in these circumstances;
- whether it wishes to agree an in-principle position as detailed in the paper.

Allowances Office

9 May 2023