

**REIMBURSEMENT OF MEMBERS' EXPENSES SCHEME –
EXCEPTIONAL EXPENSES**

Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to consider an application from Bill Walker MSP for exceptional expenses under paragraph 7.2 of the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme to meet water rates charges of £585.10 that relate to the financial year 2011-12.

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 Bill Walker for exceptional expenses to meet the cost of the water rates for his local office.

3. Mr Walker has advised he was unaware water rates were payable and was of the view these were included in his business rates. He also advised that there had been an on-going problem with Business Stream and as a result the water rates bill of £1,013.76 was not presented until recently. This bill covers the financial years 2011-12 and 2012- 13 (to date) with £585.10 of the charge relating to 2011-12. We cannot charge this to last year as the accounts have now been finalised. Mr Walker had a balance of £12.58 in his Office Cost Provision at the end of the financial year. Mr Walker advises that he will also have insufficient funds from his office costs provision for this year to meet this sum. Mr Walker has therefore made an application for exceptional expenses to meet the costs of £585.10 attributable to the financial year 2011-12.

4. The SPCB may recall that Mr Walker made an application for exceptional expenses of £800.00 in the financial year 2011-12 to meet the projected shortfall in his office cost provision to cover part of his business rates bill for his local office. The application was rejected on the basis that the SPCB determined that the circumstances were not exceptional and could have been foreseen by the Member.

5. When considering Mr Walker's previous application the SPCB noted concerns about the sustainability of the Member's lease and the difficulty of all costs continuing to be met from the capped provision.

6. Based on the previous decision the SPCB will wish to consider whether this application is exceptional. It is the norm for offices to have to meet water charges and provision should be made for this.

Resource Implications

7. Mr Walker currently has a balance of £1,639.76 in his office costs provision for 2012-13. He has confirmed that he projects to spend £1,591.66 over the next 6 months details of which are as follows:-

- Water Rates for the Period 18/09/12 to 31/03/13 - £428.66;
- Electricity charges to the end of financial year - £923; and
- Other office running costs - £240

8. 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

9. The application has been made under the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme.

Publication Scheme

10. This paper will be published in accordance with the SPCB's publication scheme.

Next steps

11. To inform the Member of the decision.

Decision

12. The SPCB is invited to consider the application for exceptional expenses to meet the water rates charges of £585.10 which relate to the financial year 2011-12.

Allowances Office
October 2012