

IPSA Bulletin

Issue 1: 25 May 2010

This is the first of a series of regular email bulletins for MPs from IPSA. Our aim is to provide you with the information and support you need to claim the expenses you incur in the course of your parliamentary duties.

We welcome feedback on the Bulletin. Please email comments and suggestions to info@parliamentarystandards.org.uk.

MPs' Expenses Scheme

The following is a summary of IPSA's letter dated 25 May to the parties. The full letter accompanies this Bulletin.

New: advisory services to MPs

In response to a suggestion by some, we have said that we are willing to take questions in batches from the parties. We welcome ideas on how this may work for smaller parties.

We are also happy to exchange views on the operation of the scheme through regular dialogue with party representatives, and welcome views on how this might best work.

New: assistance with cashflow

IPSA will offer an interest-free advance of up to £4,000, to be repaid later this financial year. The advance is to help MPs to cover any expenses they incur that are allowed under the new rules. MPs wishing to request such advances should download the application form on the IPSA website (go to Information for MPs and Staff > Help with cashflow > Application for an Advance).

In addition to this new assistance, IPSA is also continuing to offer advances and loans on a number of other 'big ticket' items – please see page 2 for more information.

New: telephone bills

We will allow you to decide what proportion of any phone bills you wish to claim for calls made on parliamentary business – this could be 100% or less. IPSA may choose to audit MPs' assessments. This will be implemented shortly.

Staffing Budgets and Constituency Office Rentals

- As described in our letter of 10 May to the parties, MPs with existing staff contracts should monitor the situation over the course of the year and contact IPSA by November 2010 if they can demonstrate that they have taken all reasonable steps to attempt to reduce costs, and they believe that expenditure in excess of the budget for the 2010/11 financial year is still likely. If it should transpire that it is necessary, we will set out a course of action to support the MPs and the staff who may be affected.
- Likewise, we intend to apply a similar principle to constituency office rentals. MPs should contact IPSA by November 2010 if they consider that their office rental costs are unavoidably higher than the budgets which have been set, and there are no viable alternatives.

Consultations

IPSA will be consulting next month on the publication scheme for expenses and the functions of the Compliance Officer. The recent Constitutional Reform and Governance Act requires some technical changes to the scheme and IPSA will also need to consult on them. This provides the opportunity to tackle a few minor issues that have arisen in a short consultation in June. Thereafter we plan to review the rules just once each year.

Financial support for MPs in the early weeks and months: a reminder

Mindful that some MPs may face early cash-flow difficulties, IPSA has put in place a number of ways to help. In summary these are:

Advances

In some cases we will provide you with funds in advance of your needing to settle a large invoice or bill - for example for your rent on residential or office accommodation, or for the purchase of high cost items (see page 12 of the 'Information for MPs' leaflet for full details). These advances need to be claimed in the normal way through the online expenses system.

Loans

Loans are available for any deposits you have to pay on rented accommodation or constituency offices. Full details are in the rental property deposit loan agreement form available on the IPSA website.

Temporary arrangements in May and June

IPSA has identified four particular types of expense which are potentially costly and may need to be settled by MPs early on, and for which early reimbursement will help avoid undue stress on their personal finances. These are:

- Hotel stays in London or the MP's constituency (section 5 of the expenses rules)
- Payments of rent on residential or office accommodation (sections 5 and 9)

- Purchase of computer hardware and software, printers, photocopiers, scanners, shredders and fax machines (section 10)
- Payments to pooled staffing resources (section 8.12)

As soon as you have received log-in details for the new online expenses system, you can start to make claims for expenses, with valid receipts, including those covered by these temporary arrangements. Once submitted, IPSA will identify and automatically prioritise those expenses in the four categories of expense listed above. You do not have to ask IPSA for qualifying expenses to be prioritised.

Our aim is to approve and pay these expenses - or tell you that they have been refused and why - within two weeks of the date of submission.

More details of these temporary arrangements are in your NMRA IPSA induction pack and on the IPSA website (go to Information for MPs and Staff > Help with cashflow > Temporary arrangements in May & June).

MP Induction sessions

More than 550 MPs have completed an IPSA induction session, and have their log-in details and password. Many have already begun to claim expenses.

If you haven't yet had an induction, IPSA will be running further sessions. To book, contact the IPSA Information Line on 020 7811 6400.

IPSA Document Team

Before you can claim certain expenses, such as rented accommodation, constituency office expenses and travel for family members, IPSA needs to validate relevant documentary evidence. Full details are in the 'Information for MPs' leaflet (given to all MPs at their NMRA induction and also on the IPSA website).

The Document Team will be in Conference Room C in 1 Parliament Street, from 24 May until 30 July, 9am to 4pm. Please note the change of venue from that given in the 'Information for MPs' leaflet. You will need to bring in the required documentation to the team, who will take copies and return the originals to you.

IPSA Drop Box

IPSA makes daily visits to the Member's Centre to collect MPs' receipts and other relevant documentation such as staff contracts from the IPSA Drop Box. Collections take place twice daily at 9.30 and 4pm every afternoon (Fridays at 3pm).

Please note that the drop-box is not appropriate for documentary evidence that requires validation by the IPSA Documentation Team.

Travelcard

If you haven't yet applied for a Travelcard, enabling you to charge certain travel and hotel expenses, then contact the IPSA Information Line. All MPs, including London Area MPs, can apply for a Travelcard.

Expenses incurred via the card still need to be submitted on the online expenses system, and receipts sent to IPSA with a claim report in the normal way.

IPSA Training for MPs' Staff

We have arranged a programme of training for MPs' staff, beginning in early June until mid-July. You will find full details, including dates, venues and how to book, in a note accompanying this Bulletin.

MPs' Staff Contracts

Under the new rules on Staffing Expenditure, MPs' staff can be paid by IPSA only when a number of conditions have been met. These conditions relate to the employee's job description, contract of employment and salary range. IPSA's approval has to be obtained before a proper payment of salary can be made.

In many cases, we have received a request to put an MP's member of staff on IPSA's payroll, but have not been able to approve that particular case. As far as possible, IPSA will help by making an advance to that staff member. To do so, IPSA must also be in receipt of relevant bank details.

IPSA will shortly be contacting all MPs from whom we have received relevant documents to review individual cases and seek to resolve any approval issues.

Full details of these arrangements are in a letter accompanying this Bulletin.

Contacting IPSA

Phone: IPSA Information Line: 020 7811 6400

Opening hours: 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Email: info@parliamentarystandards.org.uk

Post: IPSA, 7th floor, Portland House, Bressenden Place, London, SW1E 5BH

Web: www.parliamentarystandards.org.uk