

17 October 2011

MPs' EXPENSES SCHEME: IMPROVEMENTS TO SERVICE DELIVERY

It is 18 months since IPSA became operational. In that time we have made significant progress and are delivering independent regulation of MPs' expenses and costs for the first time.

Over this period, we have learned a great deal, listened to the feedback we have received from MPs and others and responded by making a number of changes to our Scheme and processes to make it easier for MPs to claim for what they need. The feedback we have received is that these changes have helped.

We are committed to continually improving how we administer the scheme. And today, I am writing to introduce to you a number of changes which should make it easier still for you to claim for costs and expenses, by speeding up and reducing some of the administrative processes. This is the latest step in our ongoing work to improve our operations.

These changes have come about following discussions with MPs. The changes fall into three main categories: how to claim, simplifying the administrative process, and IT improvements.

How to claim:

1. We have worked with the market leading website thetrainline.com to develop a system for you to buy train tickets for yourself, staff or dependants from thetrainline.com, with whom we will settle bills directly. This means you will not have to pay in advance for your ticket, or use and reconcile your payment card, or make any claims – you just book your tickets and travel. The information you provide to thetrainline.com when booking will be passed to us to process. The website will also help you to identify the best value tickets for your journey. In a few days time we will send a personalised login and password for you to use with thetrainline.com. Of course, if you'd rather buy your train tickets from another provider or at the station, you can.
2. We are also further extending use of the payment card, so you can use it to pay for insurance, TV licences and for office refuse collection.

3. We have improved the process through which proxies can submit claims directly to us on your behalf. If you would like your proxy to be able to do this, just fill out the registration form which you will find on the online expenses system.
4. For non-London area MPs, we are also making changes today to allow you to claim for 'diverted journeys' between Westminster and your constituency. To use an example as a means of explanation, if you are travelling from Westminster to your constituency but, en route, need to divert somewhere to complete a non-Parliamentary commitment, previously we would not have reimbursed the cost of the journey between Westminster and the constituency. Now, we will. These claims need to be pre-approved, so do call or email us in advance. While we will pay the equivalent costs for your journey between Westminster and your constituency, any additional costs associated with your diversion will not be claimable. Diverted journeys to complete party political activities are not eligible.

Simplifying the system

1. Following discussions with MPs we have introduced a 'favourites' function. This will allow you to record details of claims you make regularly, such as the mileage between your constituency and Westminster, or office supplies. Once created, you will select your 'favourite', which will automatically populate a claim line ready for submission.
2. Following a successful pilot, we are introducing the option for you to claim your mileage once a month. You will fill out a basic spreadsheet showing the miles you have covered each day in a month while conducting your Parliamentary duties and then submit it as a single claim.
3. As you know, we request that evidence submitted in support of a claim is the original receipt or bill. We still prefer to receive originals, and retain the right to require them before authorising a claim, but we will now accept good photocopies in reasonable circumstances.
4. Where you have submitted a claim to us with supporting evidence, and later need to submit a follow-up claim – either because we have returned the claim to you or because it is for a regular fixed payment, such as council tax - we will no longer ask you to re-send evidence we have already seen.
5. When we need additional information to process a claim, we now return just that individual line and process the remainder of the claim. The returned line will appear in your online expenses account under a new form number and the others will be processed under the original form number.

IT changes

1. We are refreshing the reports on the online system to make it easier for you to access your information. We are introducing three new reports which will show:
 - how much you have spent in each budget and how much you have left,

- all claims which have not been paid,
 - all the registrations you have made with us, such as your car, rented accommodation or office.
2. We are also introducing a number of small improvements to the layout and usability of the online system. These improvements will not change how you use the system, but should make it easier and faster to navigate.

Included within this letter is a short guide to show you how to take advantage of the following facilities: thetrainline.com, submitting a claim without resubmitting previously provided evidence, favourites, proxy submission, and the mileage spreadsheet. More in-depth advice is available on our website, if needed, at www.parliamentarystandards.org.uk.

As you get used to these changes, please feel free to call our info line for advice on 020 7811 6400. If you would find it helpful for a member of our team to meet you in person and show you the changes in more detail, please contact us and we will arrange a time to do so.

If you are not already using the payment card and direct payment facilities and wish to set them up, please contact us. By using the payment in advance, direct payment and payment card facilities, almost three-quarters of claims, by value, can be made without you having to pay up front and await reimbursement. And, of course, we also have the facility of a £4,000 advance, should you need it.

We have developed these changes following discussions with MPs. The feedback we have received is promising and I hope you find them useful. As I said at the start of this letter, we are committed to continual improvements and if you have suggestions as to how we may further improve the system, please email: system.improvement@parliamentarystandards.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Scott Woolveridge

Director of Operations

How to submit expenses for which you have already supplied evidence

You can now submit claims without evidence when the same expense is incurred each month and IPSA has the evidence on file, or when you are resubmitting a claim.

How does this work?

Let's say you start with a new electricity supplier and get your first bill.

1. Submit an expense claim and the supporting documents for the first time.
2. If this amount is the same in the next and subsequent months, you don't have to send IPSA the bill as proof – just click on the “Documentation already supplied” drop-down box and select “Yes”.

Tip: Use one form to submit claims that don't require new evidence and a *different* form to submit expenses that do.

How to set up and use your favourites

You can now set up expenses as favourites so you don't need to type in the same details every time you claim.

How does this work?

Set up

1. To set up a regular expense as a favourite for the first time, enter the information as normal on a claim form.
2. Enter and save the information.
3. Tick the expense row and then click on the “Add Fav” button at the bottom of the screen.
4. Name and save your favourite and then click “close”.

Use

- a. At the bottom of the screen click on “Favourites”.
- b. Select from the list by clicking the box on the left hand side of the favourite you wish to use.
- c. Click “Use” which will bring up the saved information. You can now fill in the blue boxes with new information such as the transaction date and expense value.
- d. Submit as normal.

Tip: You can set up favourites for all expense forms, including monthly mobile bills, mileage, constituency office supplies or regular train journeys.



Quick Reference Guide

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More detailed information and a video guide is available at www.parliamentarystandards.org.uk

How to set up your proxy to submit claims directly

Claims can now be submitted without having to be approved by the MP.

How does this work?

1. MPs should confirm they are giving their proxy authority to submit claims by completing the “Registration: Proxy Submission” form on the online expenses system.
2. After this registration form has been approved, the proxy can submit forms on behalf of their MP.
3. Complete the form as normal.
4. When submitting a form the proxy will be asked whether they wish to send forms “Straight to IPSA” or “Send to MP”.
5. Click “Straight to IPSA” and then follow the usual process to complete the submission.

How to buy tickets using thetrainline.com

You can now buy train tickets from thetrainline.com. This means you will not have to pay, complete a claim form, use your payment card or send us your tickets as evidence.

How does this work?

1. Log into:
www.business.thetrainline.com
2. Book your ticket.
3. Choose to have your tickets posted or collect them from a station ticket machine.
4. Travel.

Tip: You can also book tickets for dependants, carers, staff and interns/volunteers using thetrainline.com.

Tip: You don’t need to submit online claims for tickets booked using thetrainline.com.

How to submit mileage every month using a spreadsheet

You can now submit mileage claims once a month.

How does this work?

1. Save the mileage spreadsheet to your computer (the file is available on our website).
2. Complete the spreadsheet, detailing daily mileage.
3. When you are ready to submit the spreadsheet to IPSA, log in to the online expenses system.

In the online expenses system:

4. Select the “Monthly MP Mileage” form.
5. Fill in the information as normal, and attach the spreadsheet to this claim.
6. Submit as normal.

Tip: You don’t need to send a paper copy of this spreadsheet to IPSA.