

Consultation: Funding for MP parental leave cover and staff reservists leave

February 2021

IPSA

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Summary

1. IPSA has launched a consultation on proposed changes to the Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses ('the Scheme').
2. The Scheme sets out the rules, eligibility and budgets governing MPs' use of taxpayers' money to support their parliamentary work. This covers business costs such as travel, accommodation and renting and supplying a constituency office; as well as a regulatory framework for the employment of staff. IPSA publishes an updated Scheme for each financial year.
3. This consultation proposes changes to the Scheme of MPs' Business Costs for 2021-22 in two areas: providing funding for cover where MPs choose to take a period of parental leave; and supporting the leave for MPs' staff members who are armed forces reservists. We believe these proposals will enable us to better respond to the needs of MPs and their staff in these areas.

How to respond

4. Please send us your views on these proposals by **Monday, 1st March 2021** to consultation@theipsa.org.uk.
5. We are grateful to everyone who takes the time to read, consider and comment on these proposals. We will take all responses into account and announce our decisions before the start of the 2021-22 financial year.
6. We will summarise the responses we receive when we publish our decisions. In doing so, we may refer to individual respondents and the content of their responses. We may also publish a list of who responded. If you would like your response to be treated as confidential, please say so clearly in your response. We will not quote from confidential responses or attribute the views in them to any particular respondent. Whether your response is confidential or not, we will not publish your email address or any other contact details, in line with our compliance with data

protection law and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). For more information about what we do with personal data, please see our [privacy notice](#).

Proposals for consultation

7. We have set out our proposals below for changes in two areas: providing funding for cover where MPs choose to take a period of parental leave; and supporting the leave for MPs' staff members who are armed forces reservists.

Cover for MP Parental leave

8. IPSA is committed to supporting a more family-friendly Parliament, and we are working to enhance our current provisions, so that MPs who take parental leave can hire additional staff to cover constituency work during their absence. We are proposing to create a specific MP Parental Leave Cover Fund and a new policy which will clearly set out MPs' eligibility for funding and how we will provide it.
9. The proposed policy would state:
 - That funding for cover will normally be provided for a maximum period of seven months for the biological mother or primary adopter (with a maximum of six months after the birth), and two weeks for the biological father, partner or second adopter – although longer periods may be agreed on a case-by-case basis.
 - That the use of IPSA funding for cover is otherwise subject to the normal rules on staffing costs, including in respect of the requirement for staff to be employed on a standard contract, job description and salary range.
 - That MPs who request funding for cover during a period of parental leave should either provide IPSA with a MatB1 or an adoption matching certificate or have an agreed proxy voting arrangement in place.
10. This would formalise the provisions already in place for MPs who take a period of leave after the birth or adoption of a child and would make clear that MPs are entitled to this funding.

11. In addition to this change, we are undertaking a further phase of work to improve the practical support IPSA provides to MPs and their offices during a period of leave, such as tailored training and 'keeping in touch' days. We also want to explore whether changes to the online system could make it easier for designated proxies to continue to manage the office's business costs while the MP is absent. We will be seeking views as we do this over the coming months.

Consultation questions:

- **Do you agree that a new MP Parental Leave Cover Fund should be created?**
- **Do you have any comments about the proposed rules of eligibility for this funding?**
- **Is there anything else IPSA should take into account when deciding on its policy in this area?**

MP Staff: Armed Forces Reservists Training Leave

12. We have received representations from some MPs and their staff about how leave for reservists is supported. In 2018, we made changes to guidance to provide the flexibility for MPs to decide how to accommodate this period of leave for their staff members. Currently, the mandatory 10 - 15 days training for reservists can be taken either as unpaid leave, as annual leave or as paid leave, with salary costs to come out of an MP's staffing budget as normal.
13. We are proposing that the cost of this mandatory training leave taken by MP staff armed forces reservists should be allocated to the staff absence budget, a centrally provided fund, which means that an MP's ordinary staffing budget would not be impacted. The MP may then cover their reservist's absence through overtime or temporary cover, without additional call on their staffing budget. We believe that this would reduce the inconvenience to the running of MP offices and at the same time not require MP staff reservists to lose out financially by taking unpaid leave or miss out on non-committed annual leave.

Consultation questions:

- **Do you agree that mandatory training leave for staff reservists should be funded from the centrally held staff absence budget?**
- **Is there anything else IPSA should take into account when deciding on its policy in this area?**