

Coronavirus FAQs

Staffing budget increase

How much additional staffing funding can I request?

The maximum amount of additional funding available via this process for 2020-21 is as follows:

- for London Area MPs, £18,270
- for non-London Area MPs, £16,480

You can make multiple requests during the year, as long as they do not add up to more than this maximum.

Is this the same as making a request for contingency funding?

No, the process is not the same as the normal contingency application process. The additional funding would be added to your staffing budget, rather than coming from the contingency budget. You will simply need to submit the relevant paperwork that you would normally submit to the IPSA payroll team, together with a statement that the additional funding is required due to the pandemic.

What can the funding be used for?

The additional funding can be used to cover staffing needs that have arisen as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. You have discretion to determine how best to do this. For example, you may decide to take on a new staff member on a fixed-term basis. Or, you could make a request for funding to pay additional overtime to your existing staff members, or to increase the contractual hours for one or more of your staff members who are working part time.

Remember that use of any additional funding requested is still subject to the normal rules set out in the Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses.

Can I take on a new permanent staff member?

We will not accept requests for increases to the staffing budget where a staffing change commits the MP to costs beyond the end of the 2020-21 financial year. This means that if you take on a new permanent staff member, you will need to be able to afford that within the normal staffing budget limits (£188,860 for London Area MPs and £177,550 for non-London Area MPs).

How do I make a request?

The documentation you will need to submit in order to make a request depends on what your request relates to:

For a new fixed-term staff member, a contract, job description and other required new starter documentation

For additional contractual hours, a completed salary and hours amendment form

For overtime claims, timesheets for the relevant period

You will also need to state that these staffing needs have arisen as a result of the pandemic. There is a space on the salary and hours amendment form and the timesheets on IPSA Online to add a statement to this effect. The new starter checklist form has also been amended to include a tick box to indicate that the new staff member is required as a result of coronavirus.

Please submit new starter forms by email to payroll@theipsa.org.uk, rather than by post. IPSA's offices are still closed in line with government guidance, and therefore if you send us the forms by post, your request is likely to be delayed.

Who is able to make a request?

Requests can only be submitted by the employing MP.

Can I make another request if I need more later in the year?

You can make multiple requests during the financial year, so long as cumulatively they do not exceed the maximum amount:

- For London Area MPs, £18,270
- For non-London Area MPs, £16,480

Will the increase in my staffing budget be published?

IPSA will continue to publish MPs' business costs in line with our Publication Policy. Information relating to staff members' salaries and other payments are for the most part published annually, as an aggregated figure for each MP.

In addition, we will publish the total amount made available to each MP's staff budget on an annual basis. If you have made a request for additional funding, this will be published as an uplift to your staffing budget.

What if I have other unexpected costs arising during the year (not related to coronavirus)?

If you have made a request via this new process, but encounter other exceptional and unforeseen costs during the year that are not related to the pandemic, you can make an application to the Contingency Panel. Further guidance is available [here](#).

Can I claim for overtime from the past couple of months, and will this be covered by the additional funding?

Yes, any the additional staffing funding can be used to cover any staffing costs since the start of the year which are due to coronavirus-related work, subject to the normal deadlines for submitting claims and timesheets. (Following changes to the Scheme, this has increased to 120 days from the normal 90 days.)

The MP wants to extend fixed-term contract of a staff member. Can this be paid from the additional funding?

Yes, contractual changes like this can be covered by the additional funding, so long as they do not extend beyond the end of the financial year. The MP should include a statement on the contractual changes form to say that the change was brought about due to coronavirus-related workload.

The MP took on a fixed-term staff member earlier in the year, before the changes to the Scheme came into effect. Can these costs be covered by the additional funding?

Yes, this can be covered by the additional funding if related to coronavirus work. We will require a statement in writing (by email) from the MP setting out the relevant costs in detail (e.g. who the staff member was, the relevant dates and salary costs). Please remember that the additional funding which can be applied during the 2020-21 financial year is capped at £18,270 for London Area MPs and £16,480 for non-London Area MPs.

Homeworking allowance for Staff

How much is the homeworking allowance?

The allowance is £26 per month. It will be processed through the payroll, with the cost put against the MP's office costs budget.

Who is eligible to receive the homeworking allowance?

All staff members are eligible to receive the homeworking allowance, as long as they are regularly working from home and have not made any reimbursement claims for homeworking expenses. Staff who are not working during the period, or are not working from home, are not eligible to receive it.

The homeworking allowance is payable on an opt-out basis; in other words, all staff members will receive it unless IPSA is notified otherwise by the MP.

Is the homeworking allowance taxable?

In line with general HMRC guidance, IPSA expects that for the vast majority of staff members, the homeworking allowance will be exempt from tax. However, it is possible that an individual's particular circumstances could have a bearing on the tax treatment of the allowance, and therefore you may wish to seek further advice from HMRC.

The key requirements to benefit from the tax exemption are the existence of a formal arrangement under which staff members work from home regularly, including where staff members have to work from home as a result of coronavirus. A formal arrangement includes staff working from home as a result of coronavirus.

What does working from home regularly mean?

In accordance with HMRC guidance, staff members will be regarded as working from home regularly if their homeworking is frequent and follows a pattern. For example, working from home two days a week and three days in the office each week would satisfy these requirements even if the actual days spent at home and in the office varied each week.

In contrast, working from home only occasionally, or on an ad hoc basis, would not satisfy these requirements.

How can I opt out of receiving the homeworking allowance?

If a staff member is not working from home, or if a staff member does not wish to receive the allowance, the employing MP or payroll proxy must notify IPSA by email to payroll@theipsa.org.uk, by the 15th of the month (i.e. the normal deadline for payroll changes).

If you wish to opt out a staff member for payment of the allowance covering April through July 2020, the MP or payroll proxy must send notification IPSA by 15th July. After July, staff may be opted out on a monthly basis, by 15th August, 15th September, and so on.

Staff members who opt out of receiving the allowance can still claim for homeworking expenses, by submitting a claim and supporting evidence as normal.

What allowance is payable to new starters and leavers?

Staff who start or end employment during a calendar month will receive a pro-rated allowance amount, based on their starting or leaving date.

I work part-time. Am I eligible to receive the homeworking allowance?

An individual staff member's contracted hours or work schedule does not affect their eligibility to receive the homeworking allowance, so long as they are working regularly from home. Part-time staff working from home would still receive £26 per month to cover their homeworking expenses.

I work partly at home and partly in the office. Am I eligible to receive the homeworking allowance?

Currently we do not expect that staff members will be spending any time working from the office, in line with Government guidance. However, this may change in the coming weeks and months as lockdown restrictions are lifted.

So long as a staff member works regularly from home (as set out above), the fact that some of their time is spent in the office does not affect their eligibility to receive the homeworking allowance of £26 per month.

Can staff who are ‘connected parties’ of the employing MP receive the homeworking allowance?

Staff members who are ‘connected parties’ (family members or close business partners) of the employing MP are in principle eligible to receive the homeworking allowance.

However, if the connected party lives with the MP, they must ensure that this does not lead to double-claiming of expenses. For instance, if the MP is already claiming for utilities and other related costs from the accommodation budget, the connected party cannot receive the allowance, as relevant costs are already being covered by IPSA.

Similarly, if the MP is not claiming for these costs as an accommodation expense, but has a registered home office and is claiming for related costs from the office costs budget, the connected party cannot receive the allowance.

If neither of the above apply, or if the connected party does not live with the MP, they can receive the allowance, as there is no risk of double claiming.

IPSA will carry out checks to ensure that connected parties who are receiving the homeworking allowance are doing so appropriately.

Can I choose not to receive the homeworking allowance and claim for my bills instead?

Yes, staff members can opt out of receiving the allowance if it does not suit their circumstances, and can claim for costs relating to homeworking instead. Claims need to be submitted on IPSA Online, accompanied by supporting evidence, as normal.

Does the homeworking allowance cover an increase in my home insurance if my premium goes up because I am now working at home all the time?

The homeworking allowance covers any costs incurred by staff members as a result of homeworking, which are in addition to the normal costs of living in the home. This includes an increase in home insurance.

What if my MP doesn’t have enough money to cover the home working allowance from their office costs budget?

IPSA provided an increase of £10,000 to the office costs budget to cover the cost of moving staff to homeworking. We expect that this amount will be sufficient to cover the allowance, as well as other necessary costs such as equipment. Where an MP overspends their budget, but this is due to an unforeseen or exceptional circumstance, they can choose to make an application for contingency funding using the normal process.

What if I have already made claims for homeworking expenses?

If you have already made claims for homeworking expenses, such as telephone, internet or utilities costs, you should opt out of the allowance and continue making claims if needed for the rest of the time you are working at home.

Why isn't my 2020-21 office costs budget updated yet? I need to know how much of the £10k I have left to spend this year.

In March 2020, IPSA made an immediate increase of £10,000 to each MP's office costs budget, in order to support additional costs as a result of staff members moving to remote working. Any unspent amounts from the 2019-20 financial year are being rolled over and will be made available in the current 2020-21 year. However, we cannot confirm the amounts for each individual until the 2019-20 budget has been closed. MPs have until 30 June to make any remaining claims against their 2019-20 budgets.

Can the homeworking allowance be backdated to mid-March, when my office started to work from home?

No, unfortunately the allowance is payable from the start of April. If staff have incurred home working expenses in the days leading up to 31 March, they can claim for reimbursement. Claims need to be submitted in July 2020 to meet the 120-day deadline.

I have already claimed for homeworking expenses. Can I receive the homeworking allowance now that it has been introduced?

Staff members cannot receive the homeworking allowance in the same period in which they are claiming or have claimed for homeworking expenses. If a staff member has already made claims for homeworking expenses but would prefer to receive the allowance, they could choose to repay the amounts they have received as reimbursement back to IPSA, covering any period since the start of April.

Can volunteers receive the homeworking allowance of £26 per month?

No, the homeworking allowance is payable to staff members who are working from home, not to volunteers. Volunteers may claim costs in line with their agreed volunteer arrangements as normal.

Can staff on casual contracts receive the homeworking allowance?

Yes, if they are working from home regularly during the relevant month. If work is irregular or sporadic, they should make claims for specific costs.

Can staff on long term paid leave (sick, maternity, adoption, reservist etc) receive the allowance?

Staff members must be working from home in order to be eligible. For staff on long-term leave where they are not working during the relevant month, they should not receive the allowance. If they are working for part of the month, they would be eligible.

Can interns (SPSS programme or otherwise) receive the allowance?

Yes, if they are working from home regularly.

Home working

What happens if MPs and all staff need to work from home?

IPSA will provide financial support to enable MPs and their staff to work from home. Costs related to home working are already claimable from the office costs budget, but you may need to purchase additional equipment, such as laptops and printers, for staff who normally work from an office.

To support this, IPSA will be adding £10,000 to each MP's office costs budget to cover additional equipment and other costs related to setting up home working. This will be available immediately and until the end of the 2020-21 financial year. This amount can be accessed by claiming from the office costs budget as normal; please enter 'coronavirus' in the free text field of the claim (this will help IPSA to monitor these costs, to ensure we are providing appropriate support). You can start purchasing what you need now and we will roll over any unspent amount to the next financial year.

Remember that you can also claim other costs which are additional to those that are part of the normal cost of living in the home – for example, additional electricity or heating costs or phone bills.

All claims will be published in the normal way.

Can staff members claim for mobile phone bills where they use their personal phone for work calls?

Staff members can claim for any additional costs they incur as a result of having to use their personal mobile phones for work. Where possible, they should submit an itemised bill with the claim to evidence the additional costs.

Can staff members claim for part of their electricity and gas bills as they're working at home and using more energy now?

Yes, both MPs and staff members can claim for part of their bills, where the costs are in addition to the normal costs of living in the home. A pro-rata amount can be calculated by working out the proportion of the house/flat that is being used as a home office (for example one room out of six rooms in a house = 1/6) and the number of hours per day when the room is used as an office (for example eight hours out of 24 = 1/3). In this example, 1/18 of the total household bill would be claimable.

Claims for utility costs must be made using the Reimbursement (MP) form, which MPs and expenses proxies have access to. If reimbursement should be paid to a staff member, select the staff member's name in the 'On behalf of' field.

If the address is not registered with IPSA, please select the constituency office address and enter your home address along with the word 'Coronavirus' into the 'Add comments' field.

Can we buy printers (or other IT equipment) from anywhere we like, in order to work from home?

Yes. The £10,000 added to the office costs budget has been provided to fund the purchase of equipment where this is necessary to enable MPs and staff to work from home. You can choose where to buy equipment and what types of equipment you need. MPs are responsible for using this amount in line with the guidance issued and the Scheme rules. This means that the additional money should be spent to support continued working in relation to parliamentary functions during the coronavirus pandemic. You can contact Parliamentary Digital Services (PDS) for advice on installing new devices.

Where not purchased on the payment card, claims for equipment purchase must be made using the Reimbursement (MP) form, which MPs and expenses proxies have access to. If reimbursement should be paid to a staff member, select the staff member's name in the 'On behalf of' section.

Can I order equipment or stationery if I don't have a registered home office?

Yes, IPSA has agreement from direct suppliers that they will deliver to any address which is specified in the order, so you do not need to have registered your home address as a home office. As always, MPs are responsible for expenditure from their budgets and should ensure that orders are being made appropriately and in line with the Scheme.

Can the office budget be used to purchase subscriptions to videoconferencing facilities (such as Zoom)?

All reasonable costs relating to setting up of home working are claimable, including videoconferencing. Before installing or using any applications, it is advisable to check with PDS to ensure they meet PDS cyber security requirements. Products such as Zoom conferencing are not supported at this time. Please remember to end subscriptions when they are no longer required.

Can we buy desks and chairs for staff?

Yes, any reasonable costs related to setting up staff for home working is claimable from the office costs budget using the additional funding. This includes work-related equipment and furniture.

Claims for office furniture purchase must be made using the Reimbursement (MP) form, which MPs and expenses proxies have access to. If reimbursement should be paid to a staff member, select the staff member's name in the 'On behalf of' section.

Can we use the additional funding to share information with our constituents relating to the pandemic?

Yes, the cost of single-issue communications with constituents can be claimed from the office costs budget. Please remember that newsletters are not an eligible cost (under rule 6.5c of the Scheme).

Can volunteers still claim as normal during this period?

In general, volunteer costs can be claimed in line with the volunteer agreement. However, Government advice is that all non-essential travel should cease, so please consider carefully whether it is absolutely essential that volunteers continue to incur costs relating to travel and subsistence.

Can we claim for taxis for our staff and ourselves to enable social distancing?

In May we announced that we would allow MPs returning to Parliament to claim for commuting costs between their London home and Westminster in order to avoid public transport during the height of the pandemic. Since then, the circumstances have changed significantly, with many parts of the economy reopening. And there have also been developments in the House, with more MPs able to request proxy voting since 10 June. As such, from 7 September, MPs will no longer be able to claim for commuting costs between their London home and Westminster. This is in line with changes made by the House of Commons for their staff and the rules in the Scheme.

Can we use the additional £10,000 in the office costs budget for improvements to our constituency office or other things not related to the coronavirus pandemic?

The additional funding has been added to the office costs budget to fund costs relating to the pandemic, including making sure all MPs and staff members can be set up for homeworking. It has not been ringfenced, but we expect it to be used to fund costs relating to the pandemic only. As part of our assurance work, we will be monitoring how the additional funding is spent, and all claims will be published as normal in line with IPSA's publication policy.

I am an MP and members of my family are infected or having to self-isolate. Can I claim to stay in a hotel away from my family members in order to stay healthy and continue to work?

You should follow Government guidance. If a member of your family whom you are currently living with shows symptoms, you should also self-isolate for the recommended 14 days. You should stay at home in this case so as not to risk spreading the virus further. If you have not been living with your family member and need additional accommodation in order to carry on with your parliamentary functions, then please contact us at contingencypayments@theipsa.org.uk.

The local authority has contacted us about receiving a small business grant of £10,000. What should we do?

Local authorities have written to companies and organisations who are eligible to receive a small business grant, as part of relief measures put in place by the Government to help businesses deal with the coronavirus pandemic. This scheme is being administered differently by each of the devolved nations.

We would advise MPs to decline the grant. IPSA is continuing to pay salaries to MPs and their staff, as well as reimbursing MPs and staff members for coronavirus-related costs and other staffing and office costs throughout this period. Therefore, MPs and their staff members are not facing any loss of income as a result of the coronavirus pandemic in the way that some businesses are.

If you have already claimed for your 2020-21 business rates bill and subsequently receive a partial refund from your local authority, this amount must be returned to IPSA.

Leases

I need to register a new office or accommodation. What if I don't have access to the final lease document?

We are continuing to process and are prioritising new property registrations and amendments to existing leases. Please use the Property Registration Form or Property Amendment Form on IPSA Online as normal.

As always, obtaining signed documentation from a supplier is important, but we understand you may find it more difficult during this period. If you have difficulty obtaining the final signed lease document for a new property you wish to register, we may, on a case-by-case basis, accept a draft (unsigned) lease. If you do not have access to a scanner, we can process a photo version of your lease or draft lease.

Draft/unsigned leases should be accompanied by an email trail showing:

- the agreement of the landlord to the terms of the lease, with their email address shown in the email trail
- the agreement of the MP to the terms of the lease, with their email address shown in the email trail

Please ensure you send us the signed lease as soon as possible.

When agreeing a new lease, remember that it is important to negotiate a break clause with a two-month notice period, in case of a change in circumstances.

Please contact us at info@theipsa.org.uk with any queries and put 'LEASE' (and if necessary, 'URGENT') in the subject line.

I cannot provide a RICS valuation due to the current circumstances. Can I still register the office in order to start claiming for rent? (This relates only to offices rented from a political party or constituency association.)

In the current circumstances, we will process new registrations without a RICS valuation, where that would normally be required. You will be asked to provide the valuation documentation later, so please retain this when you do receive it.

Please remember that under the Scheme, no rent over the market rate will be paid for an office that is rented from a political party or constituency association, where the rental amount exceeds the market rate as stated in a RICS

valuation. If you choose to register an office without having a valuation done first, you accept the liability for any rental amounts which may be above the market rate.

Making claims

How should we make claims for additional costs that arise as a result of the pandemic?

Claims should be made as normal using IPSA Online. We have relaxed some of the normal requirements in the Scheme relating to provision of evidence and the 90-day period (see below). For costs that have arisen specifically as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, please enter 'coronavirus' in the free text field. This will help IPSA to monitor these costs, to ensure we are providing appropriate support.

If you are unable to access IPSA Online, please contact us at info@theipsa.org.uk, putting 'ACCESS TO SYSTEM' in the subject line.

We cannot make claims within the normal 90-day period, due to staff sickness or other challenges. What should we do?

We recognise that during this period, you may be delayed in submitting claims on IPSA Online, or it may be more difficult to obtain invoices from suppliers and other evidence in order to support claims. Therefore, for any 2020-21 claims, we have extended the normal deadline for submission of claims to 120 days after the cost was incurred. In addition, claims may be submitted without supporting evidence, where that evidence is unavailable as a result of the pandemic.

Where we pay claims without supporting evidence, MPs must ensure that the evidence is submitted no later than 120 days after the submission of the claim. If this evidence is not submitted by the deadline, we will ask for the amount to be repaid.

Full guidance on these additional changes can be found [here](#).

What if I have already paid for something but don't have access to the receipt or invoice?

We understand that there may be circumstances as a result of the coronavirus that make it difficult to access the documents needed to make claims; this is why we are suspending the 90-day period for making claims, to allow for the delay in claiming you may face (see above). If you do not have a receipt or invoice due to the coronavirus and you cannot wait for reimbursement, you may submit your claim. Please include an explanation of why the evidence is unavailable, and we will pay the claim, asking you to submit the evidence later.

What if I don't have access to a scanner in order to upload evidence into the online system?

Remember that you can use your mobile phone to take a photo of a receipt or invoice. Please refer to the guidance on attaching evidence.

MP accommodation

Will IPSA continue to pay rent on my accommodation even if I am not using it for a period of time?

IPSA will continue to make rental payments and reimburse claims for associated costs for MPs' registered accommodation throughout this period. If you encounter any exceptional circumstances where additional support may be needed, please contact us at info@theipsa.org.uk.

Payment cards

Can I continue to use the IPSA payment card?

We have increased the monthly credit limit on all cards to £10,000 and the single transaction limit to £5,000, to enable bulk purchases of equipment where necessary.

Please remember that payment cards must not be used for any non-parliamentary or personal costs.

I am not able to reconcile the payment card due to unforeseen circumstances. What should I do?

You should make reasonable efforts to reconcile the payment card as normal, by the 8th of the month. However, we understand that this may be difficult in some cases, for example due to staff sickness. If you haven't reconciled by the deadline, we will contact you.

Payroll

Will I continue to be paid my salary?

IPSA's payroll function remains operational. All MPs and staff members will continue to be paid their salaries during this period. Remember that you can access your payslip on IPSA Online.

Can new staff be added to the payroll?

IPSA is able to add new staff to the payroll. We will do our best to process new starters as quickly as possible; however, please be aware that due to the IPSA office closure, there may be some delays.

Please note, due to the office closure we are unable to process paper forms which are sent in by post. Where possible, you should fill in the new starter documentation and send a scanned (or photographed) copy to payroll@theipsa.org.uk. If this is not possible, we will accept an email from the MP or payroll proxy containing the following information:

- MP name
- Personal details of the new staff member: Name, home address, date of birth
- Staff member's NI number
- Staff member's parliamentary email address
- Job title and location (i.e. based in London or the constituency)
- Job details: Start date, salary, hours including work schedule, annual leave entitlement, employment notice period
- Employment type: permanent or fixed term (if fixed term, the end date)
- HMRC starter checklist for tax code details or P45 attached
- Bank account details for salary payments
- If the new staff member is to be set up as a proxy, then what type

I have a season ticket but am no longer using it. Can I get a refund?

Season Tickets can be refunded depending on how long is left on them. Customers should get in touch with the train company or retailer they bought their ticket from to see what they might be entitled to.

I have a season ticket loan that I am repaying to IPSA via my monthly salary. Can IPSA stop taking this money?

IPSA will continue to deduct this until the loan is paid off. However, you can keep the money refunded from the train company.

I have had to cancel annual leave due to coronavirus. Can I carry this over into next year?

Yes, the government has announced that workers who have not taken all their statutory annual leave entitlement due to COVID-19 will now be able to carry it over into the next 2 leave years.

How do I keep a record of my annual leave?

MPs' staff can use the IPSA Online system to record any leave that they take.

Publication

Why did you delay the last publication in May and why are you publishing four months' worth of data when you normally publish two, in July?

We were due to publish business costs data for claims processed for December 2019 and January 2020 on 14 May but announced our decision to delay this on 23 April. We made this decision to ensure MPs and staff were not distracted from the essential work you have been carrying out to support your constituents through the coronavirus pandemic.

Now that IPSA and MPs' offices have had time to adapt to the current circumstances, we will be publishing the data originally delayed, as well February and March 2020's data which would be due for publication on 9 July as per our regular schedule.

Does the publication data contain any claims since the lockdown and for anything claimed as a result of coronavirus?

The period covers the beginning of the lockdown and we announced the new coronavirus measures on 19 March, therefore the data may contain some costs that were claimed in relation to the pandemic. Any information referencing coronavirus entered in the details field will be published.

Staff sickness

What happens if staff members are unwell or unable to work for other reasons?

Staff members who are ill or self-isolating and unable to work should take sick leave using normal procedures. If staff members are not unwell but are unable to work for other reasons (such as caring for dependants), the MP as employer can decide to grant other leave to cover the period, such as caring leave or annual leave. Please refer to IPSA's guidance on staff leave.

In these exceptional circumstances, MPs can also grant special leave at their discretion, which could be paid or unpaid. Where special leave is granted, it should be reviewed regularly by the MP and staff member.

Can I use the staff absence budget to pay for cover for staff who are unable to work?

If staff are absent for more than two weeks, their salaries will be paid from the staff absence budget, in order to allow the normal staffing budget to be used to pay for staff cover. If a medical note is available, please submit this to the payroll team as normal, and we will move the staff member's salary costs into the staff absence budget. If a medical note is not available, or if staff are unable to work for other reasons (such as caring for dependants), we will accept an email from the MP confirming the period of absence in order to move costs into the staff absence budget. Please contact us at payroll@theipsa.org.uk.

What if MP or staff sickness means that we can't submit claims?

We are reviewing how to support MPs and proxies who are unable to make and authorise claims in the usual way because of coronavirus. In urgent cases we will make CHAPS payments with reduced requirements for supporting evidence.

What if we need cover while the MP is unwell?

If the MP is unwell or unable to work for other reasons for an extended period, and additional staffing resource is needed as a result, we can approve additional funding through the contingency process. Please contact us at contingencypayments@theipsa.org.uk.

Travel to Westminster for MPs June – July 2020

I need to attend Westminster but do not want to use public transport. Can I claim to drive or take a taxi from my home?

IPSA does not normally pay for journeys between an MP's London home and Westminster; this is considered to be a regular commute and a personal expense. However, under the current circumstances, we understand that MPs who need to attend Parliament may incur additional costs beyond what would normally be expected, if they need to avoid using public transport – for example, congestion charges in order to drive into central London, parking (if none is available on the parliamentary estate) or taxi costs.

In recognition of the exceptional circumstances, IPSA will pay for such costs relating to journeys to Westminster from a London area home, between 2 June and the start of the summer recess in July. We will review the position after that date. Staff employed directly by MPs have been asked not to return to Westminster.

MPs are expected to have regard to value for money in their claims. Government guidance encourages all citizens to walk or cycle to make essential journeys, wherever possible. If you do claim for the cost of a commute, please be aware that reimbursement of such costs is likely to be considered under tax rules to be a benefit-in-kind and may be taxed as such.

As normal, non-London Area MPs are able to claim for the cost of travel from their constituency to Westminster. Where necessary, this can include the cost of congestion charges and taxi journeys. This is not considered a commute for tax purposes.

I need alternative accommodation in London because I share accommodation with someone who is having to self-isolate. Can I claim to stay in a hotel in order to stay health and continue to work?

You should follow Government guidance. If someone you are currently living with shows symptoms, you should also self-isolate for the recommended 14 days. You should stay at home and not attend Parliament in this case so as not to risk spreading the virus further.

If you have not been living with that individual already during the period and need additional accommodation in order to carry on with your parliamentary functions, then please contact us at contingencypayments@theipsa.org.uk.

My child isn't attending school. Will IPSA pay for childcare costs so that I can attend Westminster?

Childcare costs are not claimable under the Scheme; these are considered to be a personal cost.

As normal, MPs can claim costs for their dependants to travel between London and their constituency; as well as the travel costs of a carer to accompany their dependants on such journeys, if needed.

Unexpected costs – contingency funding

What if I incur other unexpected costs as a result of the pandemic?

Many of the costs you will encounter are claimable through normal processes. If you are unsure, please consult the Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses and other guidance. We can consider other unforeseen or exceptional costs not included in the Scheme or in this guidance through the contingency process, and we will streamline the process for coronavirus related applications. You should complete a contingency application form on IPSA Online (under 'Forms'); these will need to be approved by the MP before they are submitted. Please contact us at contingencypayments@theipsa.org.uk with any queries about this process.

We have provided immediate additional funding for any immediate changes you need to make. If you think you are likely to exceed any of your allocated budgets, please contact us as early as possible. We know that the disruption caused by the pandemic is an unforeseen and exceptional circumstance and understand that this may impact on your ability to budget effectively.

Year-end process

What if I am unable to submit my year-end paperwork by the deadline?

Given the exceptional circumstances, we are extending the deadline for submission of year-end paperwork until 30 June. For more information on the year-end process and what you need to do, please consult the year-end guidance.

What happens if I miss the deadline to submit a form, because I am really busy because of coronavirus, and my budget last year then becomes overspent and I appear to 'owe' IPSA money? Will you write off this money because of the exceptional circumstances?

The deadline has been extended until 23.59 on 30 June 2020 to give maximum time to complete the form.

If I miss the deadline by a few minutes, will you accept the form?

Unfortunately, we will not be able to accept the form if it is late. Any valid claims will however, be paid from the current financial year without any accruals from last year.

If I miss the deadline by a day, will you accept the form? Surely you won't have finished processing all the forms one day after the deadline so you can just add mine to the bottom of the pile.

The deadline has been extended until 23.59 on 30 June 2020 to give maximum time to complete the form.

How do I know if I need to accrue something?

If there is any spending relating to the 2019-20 financial year that was not paid during that year or where you have not been able to submit a claim with supporting evidence by the 30th June, you should complete the year-end form. This means that if the payment relates to the old year it will be moved back to the previous financial year and not reduce the budget available in this current year.

Where do I send my year end form? Is it by post or email?

Email the form to IPSA using this address YearEnd@theipsa.org.uk

What if I can't get a copy of a bill or receipt because of coronavirus? Will you still process the claim and move it back into last year for me?

You have until 31 July to submit any missing supporting documentation for claims included on the year end form.

I've been paying some of my March bills on my payment card, this month (April) – will you move those claims back into March for me, or do I need to put them on the year end form?

Please populate the expenses line with the date this cost relates to. Failing this, please include on the year end form.

How do I attach a bill to the forms? Or just an email attachment?

Submit claims in the usual way via IPSA Online. If you have completed a year-end form IPSA will make sure it is allocated to the correct financial year.

I have claimed for something that relates to March 2020, but I accidentally put an April date on the claim. Can I change the date on the claim so that you can move it? Or can I accrue for it and then you'll move it?

Include this on the year end form and it will be accrued for.

If I 'guesstimate' the amount I need to accrue for my electricity bill to end March 2020, and put that on my year end form, and then the amount is slightly different – will you still process it?

Yes.

If the amount of the bill is different to the amount on the year end form, how will I know that you'll correctly match the accrual with the claim I've made?

Please include the bill, which will cover the dates you have included on your year-end form, we will adjust to ensure the correct amount is captured.

What happens if IPSA makes a mistake and doesn't accrue the right claim for me? Or doesn't push forward a pre-payment? Will you write off any debt because of this? Or will you fix it after year end has finished?

In the event of an IPSA error we will make sure that the respective budget is not adversely impacted.

How do I treat the purchases made by direct suppliers? Or will IPSA deal with these?

IPSA will allocate the cost to the financial year in which you made the order.

I don't think I have any income to account for – how do I know if I have income to account for?

Check IPSA Online for the latest information.

When will the 2019-20 data be published and how much time will we have to repay any debt to IPSA or resolve any issues with claims, if the year-end deadline has been pushed back to June?

Details of 2019-20 expenditure will be published in November 2020 on the IPSA website. We will provide final details of spending to MPs and staff by September 2020.

When will IPSA tell me if I have overspent my budgets in 2019-20?

This information will be finalised by September 2020.

When will IPSA tell me how much of my start-up £6,000 will transfer to this year?

IPSA will look to provide an estimate of this by the end of May 2020. This can only be an estimate as we have extended the year end period to give you extra time to submit claims.

When will IPSA tell me how much of the additional £10,000 for coronavirus will transfer to this year?

IPSA will look to provide an estimate of this by the end of May 2020. This can only be an estimate as we have extended the year end period to give you extra time to submit claims.

If I have underspent in 2019-20 can this money be rolled into 2020-21 so that I have more money to spend this year?

No, with the exception of the start-up budget for new MPs and the additional £10,000 for the office costs budget.

What happens if I don't reconcile my 2019-20 payment card lines before the end of June 2020?

If you have reconciled a transaction on your payment card with a transaction dated of 31 March 2020 which relates partly to the next financial year (2020-21) you must notify IPSA by completing the year-end form, which must be received by IPSA by 23:59 Tuesday 30 June 2020. This will ensure that your claims are correctly apportioned to the financial years. These forms will be reviewed to ensure that the apportionment of the cost is reasonable, and that the expenditure does constitute a prepayment. IPSA may have follow up queries on your year-end form. You have until 14 August provide a response to these. If you do not meet these deadlines the costs will be paid from the current year budget.

If I bought something in March 2020, paid for it in April 2020 but forgot to accrue for it, and want to claim for it from my 2020-21 budget, can I do that?

You have until 30 June to complete the year-end form. However, if you miss this deadline and it is a valid claim it can still come from your 2020-21 budget.

If I claim for something before the end of June 2020 and it relates to last year, and the claim is paid before the end of June 2020, do I accrue for it or won't the system know it relates to last year because I put the date of the expense in the claim?

You do not need to include the details on the year-end form as long as you have ensured the expense line date is the 31 March or before.

Do departing MPs have to fill out an accruals or pre payments form?

In most cases no, as all claims should relate to 2019-20. However, if you do not get your claim in by 30 June it will not be paid from the 2019-20 budget.

Who is judging whether or not a cost is 'material'? What if my judgement is different to yours? Will you come back to me?

Please include any items on the year-end form that you think are relevant.

Why do we have to do this process every year? Can't you find a more efficient way of managing all our claims?

This process is in line with public sector accounting processes.

Can't you fill out the forms for us? It's obvious which claims move into which year because of the date on each receipt.

MPs are responsible for managing their budgets.

I sent my year end form in last week – by the original deadline. Can I send another form? How will I know that you'll process the new form and not the old form?

The option is to include an email to ignore the old form but process the new form. Alternatively, a request to ignore the form if you can submit an evidenced claim by the 30 June.

I sent my year end form in last week – why haven't you moved all my claims yet? I want to know where I stand with last year's budgets and I did my part on time – it's not my fault that you moved the deadline?

All forms will be looked at in July and claims moved then.