

Disability assistance funding for reasonable adjustments

Purpose

1. At IPSA, we enable MPs to focus on what really matters by providing an exemplary and seamless regulatory service. We also support the differing needs of a diverse Parliament by supporting MPs to meet their obligations under the Equality Act by providing funding for reasonable adjustments for their staff and constituents. IPSA also provides funding to support MPs who have disabilities or long-term sickness, so that they can continue to perform their role.
2. MPs have a unique role and there are some aspects of the role which cannot be performed by anyone else. IPSA will take this into account when it assesses what is a reasonable adjustment.
3. This guidance explains, and seeks to increase awareness of, the support IPSA can provide to support reasonable adjustments for MPs, their staff, and constituents.
4. To discuss reasonable adjustments on the parliamentary estate, MPs can seek advice from the Workplace Adjustments Manager at the House of Commons WPA@parliament.uk or from Members' HR Service (0207 219 2080 or membershr@parliament.uk). MPs' staff should first discuss any adjustments with their MP, who may then seek advice from the House of Commons or IPSA.
5. To discuss reasonable adjustments in the constituency or outside the parliamentary estate, MPs should discuss your, your staff or constituents' requirements with your IPSA Account Manager. You can contact us on 020 7811 6400 or send us an email at adjustments@theipsa.org.uk. If you would like to discuss your requirements in person, please contact us and we will arrange to meet you.

The Equality Act 2010

6. [The Equality Act 2010](#) ("The Act") provides a legislative framework to protect the rights of individuals and to advance equality of opportunity for all.
7. Section 6 (1) of The Act defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Section 20 of The Act establishes a duty to make reasonable adjustments for people with a disability and explains the circumstances in which this duty arises.
8. MPs have obligations under the Equality Act as the employer of their staff, and as providers of services to the public. This guidance explains the support IPSA can provide to MPs to help them comply with this duty.
9. As independent officeholders, MPs are not employees, and the Equality Act does not apply to them in law in the same way as it does to other employees. However, as part of our commitment to supporting a diverse Parliament, IPSA uses the same framework and approach to support reasonable adjustments for MPs.

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10. As a service provider, IPSA also has obligations under the Equality Act to consider reasonable adjustments to the way we deliver our service, for example, by making amendments to how we meet or communicate to ensure it is accessible and inclusive.

The Scheme of MPs' Staffing and Business Costs

11. [The Scheme of MPs' Staffing & Business Costs](#) ("The Scheme") sets out the budgets and rules relating to the costs of running an MP's office. Chapter 10 of The Scheme explains that disability assistance funding, to support reasonable adjustments, may be claimed by any MP for additional parliamentary costs incurred in fulfilling their obligations under the Equality Act 2010, by providing reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities including staff members, volunteers, job applicants or constituents visiting the MP's office or a surgery. The Scheme also states that disability assistance is available to fund reasonable adjustments for MPs who have a disability.
12. IPSA can exercise its discretion to provide funding for adjustments for MPs who have a short-term medical condition which means they need additional, but temporary, support to fulfil their parliamentary role.
13. IPSA may also exercise its discretion and fund a cognitive diagnostic assessment to seek recommendations on effective reasonable adjustments to support MPs and MPs' staff with undiagnosed mental health or neurodiverse conditions that have a long-term effect on the individual's day-to-day activity.
14. The Scheme explains that normally IPSA provides funding for reasonable adjustments outside the parliamentary estate, with the House of Commons responsible for funding reasonable adjustments within the parliamentary estate. However, sometimes the distinction is not clear cut, and IPSA will take a pragmatic approach and work with the House of Commons to ensure reasonable adjustments are funded.
15. IPSA provides a separate Disability Assistance Budget for this purpose. All costs to be claimed from this budget must be pre-approved by IPSA before an MP incurs the cost.

What is a reasonable adjustment?

16. The Equality Act does not define what is "reasonable", but guidance from the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#) explains that the most relevant factors to consider in determining reasonability are:
 - **Effectiveness** – how well does the adjustment in question remove or minimise the disadvantage?
 - **Practicability** – how practical is the adjustment? How long will it take to implement and does any other party (e.g., a landlord) have to support it?

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- **Cost** – how much will the adjustment cost? Are there more cost effective – but equally effective – adjustments that could be implemented?
 - **The organisation’s size and resources**
17. There is no prescribed list of reasonable adjustments, because the adjustment will depend on the person’s needs. The person may have a clear idea of the adjustments that will work best for them and should discuss this with their employer. In some instances, a professional workplace assessment may be appropriate to seek recommendations about the most effective adjustments to eliminate or significantly reduce any barrier. IPSA will pay for workplace assessments to help the employer decide what adjustments are reasonable.
18. Some adjustments will not need funding. For example, the employer could adjust working hours, working patterns, allow home-working and alter tasks and/or timelines. Other adjustments may need additional funding, for example:
- Staff and associated costs
 - IT and other specialist equipment
 - Office furniture
 - Reasonable adjustments to office space and accommodation
 - Costs of securing larger office premises or accommodation
 - Additional travel costs (including for carers or support staff where necessary)

Reasonable adjustments for MPs’ staff and volunteers

19. MPs, as the employer, have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to make sure that, as far as is reasonable, a disabled worker has the same access to everything that is involved in doing and keeping a job as a non-disabled person. More information can be found on [the EHRC website](#) and on [the ACAS website](#).
20. ACAS recommend that if someone needs support with a disability at work or when they’re applying for a job it’s best for them to talk to the employer as soon as possible about what they need. Nobody has to tell their employer – or potential employer – they’re disabled. But when they do, the employer has a legal responsibility to support them.
21. The MP as the employer is responsible for making the decision about what adjustments are reasonable. They can and should seek the view of the employee themselves, who will often be best placed to explain the adjustments they need. MPs can also take advice from Members’ HR Service. MPs may also commission a workplace assessment to seek recommendations about what reasonable adjustments may be appropriate, and IPSA will meet the cost of the assessment.
22. Where adjustments are relatively low cost and their effectiveness in supporting the individual can be ascertained with relative ease, IPSA will fund the necessary costs providing:

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- The MP as the employer has satisfied themselves that adjustments are required to reduce or remove a substantial disadvantage for the individual.
- The MP as employer has decided that the adjustments are reasonable.
- The MP as employer has carried out proportionate due diligence to ensure value for money, for example, by seeking and comparing quotes from different suppliers.
- Examples might include modest adjustments to the office environment, such as lighting, portable wheelchair ramps, software, and ergonomic equipment.

23. Where adjustments are of a high and/or ongoing cost additional supporting documentation may be required to evidence the need for funding:

- Documentation such as a medical report identifying or confirming the adverse effect or substantial disadvantages that reasonable adjustments will address.
- A workplace assessment by a medical or occupational health professional recommending the adjustments under consideration.
- Examples might include the need for high-cost equipment or additional support staff.

24. Please contact us if you are unsure whether Sections 22 or 23 apply to the adjustment requested. Our team will be happy to help and can be contacted on 020 7811 6400 or at adjustments@theipsa.org.uk.

25. It is good practice for the employer to make a record of the adjustments put in place and to review it with their staff member on a regular basis. Similarly, if there are any changes to the workplace environment or the individual's experience of their condition, then a review can determine if the any adjustments are still appropriate or need altering.

Reasonable adjustments for MPs

26. Although MPs are not employees and the Equality Act does not apply in the same way, IPSA will apply best practice and work collaboratively with the MP to understand any barrier or disadvantage the MP experiences in their role and provide funding for any reasonable adjustments to support them in their role. MPs can seek advice from Member Services HR, or they can contact IPSA for support and guidance.

27. Where adjustments are relatively low cost and their effectiveness in supporting the MP can be ascertained with relative ease, IPSA will fund the necessary costs providing:

- The MP self-certifies their need for the adjustment and/or provides medical evidence to support it.
- The MP has carried out proportionate due diligence to ensure value for money, for example, by seeking and comparing quotes from different suppliers.
- Examples might include modest adjustments to the office environment, such as lighting, portable wheelchair ramps, software, and ergonomic equipment.

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28. Where adjustments are of a high and/or ongoing cost, additional supporting documentation may be required to evidence the need for funding:
- A medical report to evidence the MP's disability.
 - A workplace assessment by a medical or occupational health professional.
 - Examples might include the need for additional staff or an ongoing budget uplift.
29. Please contact us if you are unsure whether Sections 27 or 28 apply to the adjustment requested. Our team will be happy to help and can be contacted on 020 7811 6400 or at adjustments@theipsa.org.uk.
30. IPSA will work collaboratively with the MP to regularly review the effectiveness of any adjustments (at least annually), agree any changes and if necessary, commission an updated workplace assessment.

Reasonable adjustments for constituents

31. MPs provide services to the public and are required by the Equality Act to consider reasonable adjustments to support people with disabilities to access their services. The [EHRC](#) explain that the duty under equality law is “anticipatory” meaning MPs should think in advance (and on an ongoing basis) about what people with disabilities with a wide range of impairments might reasonably need, such as people with a visual, hearing or mobility impairment or a learning disability.
32. MPs can claim funding from the Disability Assistance Budget, where additional costs are incurred because of reasonable adjustments in the performance of their parliamentary functions. All costs to be claimed must be pre-approved by IPSA before an MP incurs the cost, and once approved can be claimed from the Disability Assistance Budget.

Reasonable adjustments for job applicants

33. MPs have a duty to consider reasonable adjustments for job applicants. It is best practice to ask applicants if they need reasonable adjustments at application stage, and again at the interview stage. Members' HR Service have published a [Best Practice Guide – Recruitment and Selection](#) which provides more information, and examples of reasonable adjustments for job applicants. IPSA will fund reasonable adjustments for job applicants, providing the MP seeks pre-approval from IPSA before incurring any cost.

Access to Work

34. Access to Work is a publicly funded employment support programme that aims to help individuals get or stay in work if they have a physical or mental health condition or disability. More information on Access to Work can be found by visiting www.gov.uk/access-to-work. Through Access to Work, individuals can apply for:

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- A grant to help pay for practical support with their work.
- Support with managing mental health at work.
- Money to pay for communication support at job interviews.

35. Where an MP or MP's staff member is in receipt of an "Award Letter" from Access to Work, they can send this to IPSA and IPSA will provide the funding required to enable the adjustments to be implemented.

Decision making and funding

36. IPSA aims to work collaboratively with MPs to assess the need for and fund reasonable adjustments as promptly as possible. Where adjustments are relatively low cost and their effectiveness in supporting the person can be assessed with relative ease, we aim to make funding decisions within 5 working days of receiving the request.

37. Where adjustments are of a high and/or ongoing cost and a workplace assessment is needed, we will work with the MP to arrange and provide funding for the assessment. When complete, the assessment report will be shared with the MP (as the employer) who will share the document with their staff member. Where the MP needs adjustments, IPSA will share the report with the MP themselves. Any personal information held by IPSA is handled sensitively and retained securely with access limited to only those people involved in supporting funding decisions.

38. Where adjustments are of a high and/or ongoing nature, approval for funding may be required from an IPSA senior manager, director, or panel. We will keep the MP and staff member updated on progress and fully explain any decisions.

39. Once pre-approval for funding has been agreed by IPSA, one (or more) Disability Assistance budgets will be opened, from which the cost of reasonable adjustments can be claimed in the normal way. Where the cost of the reasonable adjustment(s) is known, IPSA will open a capped budget for that amount. Where the cost is unknown or ongoing, IPSA will open an uncapped budget. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to open both. Budgets and expenditure will show on the MP's IPSA Online dashboard. IPSA will explain any calculations underpinning how budgets have been set.

40. Claims can be paid directly and then reclaimed from IPSA (reimbursement claims) or the IPSA payment card be used and then reconciled in accordance with the IPSA payment card policy. If adjustments are costly, IPSA can temporarily increase the monthly card limit to enable the adjustments to be funded without requiring any initial outlay by the MP.

41. Claims will be validated by IPSA in the normal way to ensure they are permitted under the Scheme and in accordance with this guidance, and that the necessary documentation has been submitted to evidence the expenditure.

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Complaints and feedback

42. We strive to provide an exemplary, seamless regulatory service and to get it right first time, every time. If you have feedback you would like to share with us, positive or otherwise, or if you wish to complain about our service or decisions, our [Feedback and Complaints Policy](#) explains how you can do this and what you can expect from us in response to feedback and complaints.

Implications for publication and FOI

43. Section B (9) of IPSA's [Publication Policy](#) explains that costs incurred providing disability assistance are **not published against individual** MPs. Instead, they are included in the single aggregate figure that IPSA publishes for disability assistance costs each year. Costs claimed from other budgets are published in the normal way.
44. IPSA also receives requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act. As required by the legislation, IPSA considers FOI requests on a case-by-case basis and whether there are [ICO exemptions](#) that apply which mean information should not be disclosed. For example, we take privacy very seriously and consider the Section 40 "personal information" exemption which applies where disclosing information would constitute a personal data breach.