

Consultation Questions on Constituency Office Expenses

Following the information provided on pages 5 to 16, we are now seeking your views in relation to each of our proposals. Please tick the relevant box in the columns to the right and use the space provided at the end of the questions to add any further comments.

Q		Yes	No	No Opinion
1	Do you agree that the current system of Office Cost Expenditure should be replaced with a Constituency Office Expense of no more than £13,500 per Member per annum? (page 7 refers)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Do you agree that an overall limit of not more than £8,000 per annum should be set for all premises rented by Members as a constituency office? (<i>para 4.3 refers</i>)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Do you agree that where a Member shares premises with another Assembly Member the allowable rental limit should be set at not more than £6,000 for each Member in the premises? (<i>para 5.3 refers</i>)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Do you agree that where a Member shares premises with an MP, MEP or Councillor (including a councillor who works for them as an employee) the allowable rental limit would be set at not more than £4,000 per annum for each Member in the premises? (para 5.4 refers)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Do you agree that where any benefit from the payment of rent on a Member's constituency office accrues to a connected or associated person, the allowable rental limit would be set at not more than £4,000 per annum? (para 5.5 refers)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Do you agree that each Member may only claim rent expenses in respect of one set of premises in their constituency? (<i>para 6.1 refers</i>)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Do you agree that where Members voluntarily use their home as their office they should be able to claim a personal allowance of not more than £2,000 in lieu of rent expenses and to defray the costs they incur? (<i>para 7.1 refers</i>)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Do you agree that all leases signed by Members must be non-repairing leases (i.e. leases under which the landlord is obliged to maintain the premises)? (<i>para 8.3 refers</i>)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Do you agree with the Panel's proposals on <i>page 11</i> relating to constituency office opening hours?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Do you agree with the Panel's proposals on <i>page 11/12</i> relating to constituency office signage?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11	Do you agree with the Panel's proposals on page 12 to change the rules on the use of constituency offices for electoral purposes?		x	
12	Do you agree that Constituency Reports should be produced in line with the guidelines on page 13 and in electronic format only?		x	
13	Do you agree that a range of electronic office equipment and mobile phones should be provided centrally by the Commission to each Member to assist the operation of their constituency office? (page 13 refers)	x		
14	Do you agree that all equipment would remain the property of the Commission and would be returnable upon a Member leaving office? (page 14 refers)	x		
15	Do you agree with the Panel's proposal that all expenses claimed by Members under COE would be subject to an annual audit by External Auditors, through a 20% random sample chosen by the appointed auditors on an annual basis? (page 15 refers)	x		

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Please use the space below to include any further comments you have relating to the Panel's proposals on Members' Constituency Office Expenditure:

The Assembly Logo must be prominent on all signage.

Mobile Phones and charges should administered with a capping.

The Annual Constituency Report is merely an electioneering exercise and not money efficient.

MLAs need to be accountable and thereby responsible for their own costs and can robustly account for any claims made and signed for.

Consultation Questions on Travel Expenditure

Following the information provided on pages 19 to 24, can we now seek your views below in relation to each of our proposals? Please tick the relevant box in the columns to the right and use the additional space provided at the end of the questions to add any further comments.

Q		Yes	No	No Opinion
16	Do you agree that the payment of home to office mileage for all Members should cease with effect from the start of the New Mandate? (para 15.10 refers)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	Do you agree that individual mileage and subsistence claims should be replaced by a flat rate Travel and Subsistence payment, based on criteria set out at paragraph 16.1 for each Member?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	If you answered yes to question 17, do you consider the rates detailed in Table 3 on page 23 appropriate?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	Do you agree that to qualify for the full amount of TSE, a total of 99 days attendance (i.e. 90% of 110 days) in Parliament Buildings must be registered by the Member in each calendar year? (<i>page 16 refers</i>)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	Do you agree that where attendance falls below 99 days, the Member must repay 1% of the allowance in respect of each day below this number within two months of the end of the year? (<i>page 16 refers</i>)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Please use the space below to include any further comments you have relating to Members' Travel and Subsistence Expenditure:

Current claim system appears to be open to abuse and checks not robust enough. MLAs need to be accountable.

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Consultation Question on Childcare Expenses

Q		Yes	No	No Opinion
21	Do you believe the Panel should continue to provide a childcare allowance to Members based on the rates stated above?	x		

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Please use the space below to include any further comments you have relating to Members' Childcare Expenses:

MLAs and NI Assembly Secretariat should both be in receipt of childcare allowance. IFRP will be aware that the scheme MLAs currently receive has been removed for secretariat staff. TUS, Equality Commission and the Committee for Administration of Justice are currently pressing the Assembly Commission to complete a Full Robust EQIA on the removal of the scheme. They believe the removal of the scheme has caused a major impact to the equality of opportunity to secretariat staff, this needs identified.

The IFRP will understand that the purpose of screening is to identify policies that are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations. This is equal in impact to MLAs and Secretariat Staff as both are / were in receipt of the same scheme. The screening should provide tangible evidence as to how 'due regard' has been given to the promotion of equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.

Assembly secretariat are perturbed that the Commission removed the childcare allowance without 'due regard' to individuals and without any consideration of alternatives to saving monies.

In light of encouraging more females, single persons and all categories of S75 into the Political arena, a fit for purpose childcare scheme is vital. This should be top of the IFRP's Agenda.

Also IFRP should be considering the introduction of new incentives, including addressing the 'late hour culture' of the Assembly sittings to encourage more females and all of the S75 categories to join the Political Arena. The IFRP should give this serious consideration and actively work towards having our elected Assembly that it will reflect the makeup of our population – all categories of S75 are represented.

Should you wish to respond electronically, please download the consultation proposals by typing or pasting the following link into your internet browser:
<http://ifrp.org.uk/consultation/>

Alternatively you may send your response to:

Independent Financial Review Panel
Room 241, Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX
E-mail: info@ifrp.org.uk

You may wish to note that the names of respondees and, in some cases, the full response, will be published unless you indicate when you submit your response that you do not wish this to happen.

Are you content that your information is published?

YES NO
yes

NAME: Gillian Kirk Lyness, Seconded Officer for NIPSA

ORGANISATION (IF APPLICABLE):

ADDRESS:

NI Assembly, Parliament Buildings, Room 377

Belfast BT4 3XX

Please note that it is not essential to include your details. You may respond anonymously if you prefer to do so.