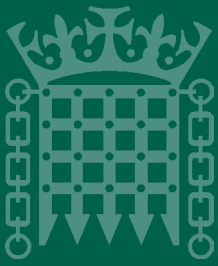


This guidance was effective from  
April 2007 to 6th May 2010



Issued by the Department  
of Finance and Administration  
and the Serjeant at Arms Department  
April 2007

## The Communications Allowance and the use of House stationery



## Foreword by the Director of Finance and Administration and the Serjeant at Arms

Dear Member

We are pleased to introduce this new booklet that gives you information about the new Communications Allowance and the revised rules relating to the House's provided stationery, including pre paid envelopes, and publications and websites funded from your Parliamentary allowances.

The booklet also includes a new section of the Green Book. The Green Book itself will be re-published later in the year, once the triennial review of Members' pay and allowances has been completed by the Senior Salaries Review Body.

This booklet has been approved by the Members Estimate Committee. It aims to bring together in one place all the rules and guidance about using Parliamentary resources for communicating with constituents. We hope you find it useful.

Please remember it is your responsibility to ensure that your use of these resources is for Parliamentary purposes only and is above reproach. We encourage you to read this booklet carefully. If you need any advice or you have any questions on the operation of the new allowance and the revised rules, please contact our staff via the relevant contact numbers given in this booklet.

Andrew Walker  
**Director of Finance and Administration**

Peter Grant Peterkin  
**Serjeant at Arms**

## The Communications Allowance and the use of House stationery

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#### Further information

Department of Finance and Administration  
Enquiry and Advice Team 020 7219 1340

#### Serjeant at Arms

General enquiries and advice 020 7219 3070



## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This booklet introduces arrangements for the new Communications Allowance agreed by the House on 1 November 2006 and 28 March 2007, and some of the other changes that arise as a consequence of the new allowance. The allowance will be available to you from 1st April 2007. It also covers changes to the arrangements for use of House stationery including pre-paid envelopes.
- 1.2. The Communications Allowance provides funds to allow you, as a Member of Parliament, to communicate proactively with your constituents and inform them about your Parliamentary duties. You may claim up to £10,000 per year from this allowance.
- 1.3. **Scope of this booklet.** This booklet covers:
  - the Communications Allowance and how to claim it
  - guidance on the general rules that apply to the allowance in the form of a new Section six of the Green Book
  - guidance on specific types of expenditure, such as newsletters and websites
  - details of the revised cash-limited arrangement for House stationery including pre-paid envelopes and how this will work alongside the Communications Allowance.
- 1.4. **Purpose of the allowance and provision of House of Commons stationery and pre-paid envelopes.** The Communications Allowance is designed to help you to improve proactive communication with your constituents. The 'House stationery' and pre paid envelopes to which Members have had unlimited free access is now available within an annual limit of £7,000 per Member. The rules on the use of this stationery have been redrafted for clarity and to sit alongside the Parliamentary allowances. Neither the Communications Allowance nor House stationery, including pre-paid envelopes, can be used for personal benefit or for party political activities or campaigning.



- 1.5. **Administration.** The allowance will be subject to a similar administrative regime as the other Parliamentary allowances and will be operated by the Department of Finance & Administration. The House of Commons stationery and pre-paid envelopes provision will be administered as now by the Serjeant at Arms. A revised version of the Green Book will be published later in the year; a new Section of the Green Book relating to the Communications Allowance is included at Appendix One.
- 1.6. The allowance has been set at £10,000 for the 2007/2008 financial year and will increase each April by the annual rise in the RPI as at 31 December of the previous year. Also from 1 April 2007, you may order up to £7,000 of House stationery including pre-paid envelopes each year for appropriate correspondence. Once you have reached the £7,000 ceiling, no further pre-paid envelopes will be made available through the Serjeant at Arms or from the allowances administered by the Department of Finance and Administration. But you will be able to buy further House stationery including official unfranked envelopes and stamps for this purpose through the Incidental Expenses Provision.
- 1.7. **Your responsibility.** It is your responsibility to ensure that all expenditure funded under the Communications Allowance and the provision of House stationery and pre paid envelopes is wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred on your Parliamentary duties. Parliamentary resources may not be used for communicating information about your political activities or those of the party to which you belong. You are responsible for ensuring that your use of this new allowance and of provided House stationery and pre-paid envelopes is above reproach and you must ensure you follow the rules outlined in this booklet correctly.



## 2. Scope of the Allowance

- 2.1. The Communications Allowance may be used to meet expenses for:
- Regular reports and constituency newsletters
  - Questionnaires and surveys
  - Petitions
  - Targeted communications
  - Contact cards
  - Distribution costs including direct mailing and postage
  - Websites
  - Some capital purchases

*(Full details can be found at Appendix One).*

## 3. Interaction with other allowances

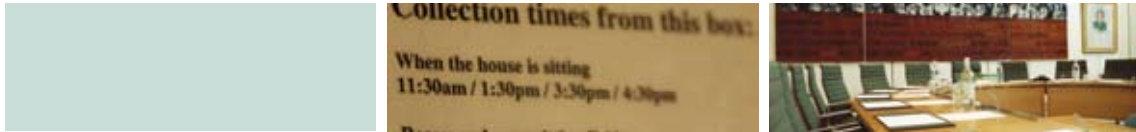
- 3.1. The Communications Allowance is for the specific purpose of communicating proactively with your constituents, some of the costs of which you may have formerly been allowed to claim from the IEP or the Staffing Allowance. The House has decided that relevant costs should, wherever possible, be designated to the Communications Allowance, as is generally the case now with the existing allowances, but that there should be some transferability of funds from one allowance to another. This means, for example, that:
- the direct costs of the production and distribution of proactive communications can only fall to the Communications Allowance;
  - general office related costs will fall solely to IEP (e.g. photocopier costs); and
  - staff costs will remain within the Staffing Allowance, irrespective of whether staff time has been used on developing or designing communications material.



#### 4. Stationery

- 4.1. The cash limited provision of House stationery and pre-paid envelopes is made available as a service for Members to facilitate their parliamentary duties. The current rules on the use of these envelopes were approved by Mr Speaker on the advice of the Administration Committee. Revised rules and guidance have been approved by the House of Commons Commission to take into account the introduction of the Communications Allowance and the annual limits on the House stationery provision.
- 4.2. An annual financial limit of £7,000 for each Member of Parliament is put on this provision which includes the cost of various types of stationery in addition to the postage costs of the pre-paid envelopes. The administration and supervision of the provision and enforcement of the rules which apply are carried out by the Serjeant at Arms. Significant complaints regarding abuse of the provision of House stationery and pre-paid envelopes are referred to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.
- 4.3. You or your staff can order House stationery and pre-paid envelope provision for Parliamentary or constituency offices from the House of Commons stationery catalogue on your bespoke stationery order form (or via the internet by ordering from your bespoke account at [www.banner-online.biz](http://www.banner-online.biz)). If circumstances mean that you need to order more than the normal maximum provided for on the forms then Members or their staff should contact the Serjeant at Arms' office for authorisation.





## 5. Transfers between Allowances

- 5.1. You may transfer money from your Incidental Expenses Provision (IEP) to the Communications Allowance. There is no limit on the amount of money that can be transferred from the IEP.
- 5.2. A maximum of 10% of the Staffing Allowance can be transferred to either the Communications Allowance or the IEP, or a combination of both.
- 5.3. Money cannot be transferred from the Communications Allowance to any other parliamentary allowance.
- 5.4. The cash-limit on the House stationery is not an allowance and cannot be transferred elsewhere or added to.
- 5.5. In some circumstances you may carry forward an unspent balance or ask for an advance from the following year's Communications Allowance. Please contact DFA if you wish to discuss this further.

## 6. Budget statements

- 6.1. **Communications Allowance:** Statements of expenditure for the allowance will be sent to Members on a monthly basis.
- 6.2. **House stationery:** Statements will be issued when you have been provided with more than £1,000 worth of House stationery and pre-paid envelopes in a quarter and at the point in the year when you have been provided with £5,000 worth of such items. Following the £5,000 statement you will receive monthly statements. Once the annual maximum of £7,000 has been reached no more House stationery or pre-paid envelopes will be issued to you from this provision during that financial year.



## 7. Making a claim from the Communications Allowance

- 7.1. You should complete a **Comms 1** form to claim reimbursement for any expenditure incurred directly by you. Invoices for any item of £250 or over must be submitted with this form.
- 7.2. You should complete a **Comms 2** form to ask the Department of Finance & Administration to make a payment directly to a supplier on your behalf. Invoices for all payments must be submitted with this form.
- 7.3. You will be sent a pack of these forms; copies of the forms will also be available on the DFA intranet.
- 7.4. You should complete a **Periodic Form B** if you wish to make regular payments to a supplier, for example to a company who maintains your web site. We will require the name and bank details of all suppliers in order to make such payments.
- 7.5. All completed forms should be sent to the Validation Team, Department of Finance & Administration, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. If you have any enquiries about how to complete the forms, please contact the Enquiries and Advice Team on 020 7219 1340. Forms will be sent to you in hard-copy and are available on the Parliamentary Intranet.



## 8. Services to Members

- 8.1. The Department of Finance and Administration aims to ensure that Parliamentary allowance payments are accurate and timely and that your queries are dealt with effectively. Advice is always available on the allowance rules, including the appropriateness of the content of newsletters and websites. Our service standards are set out each year in the Department's business plan. We aim to deal with claims for payment within 7 working days, which means reimbursement within 10 working days allowing for the electronic transfer of funds.
- 8.2. Both DFA and SAA take your comments and concerns seriously. If you wish to pass on any such comments about DFA services please call the Enquiries and Advice Team on 020 7219 1340 or you can contact Terry Bird, the Director of Operations, directly on 020 7219 4292.
- 8.3. The Serjeant at Arms Department is responsible for the administration of the provision of House of Commons stationery and pre-paid envelopes. Comments about the provision should be passed to Ruby Beech, Assistant Serjeant at Arms, on 020 7219 3070.

## 9. Freedom of Information

- 9.1 The annual amount you claim from the Communications Allowance and your use of the provided House of Commons stationery and pre-paid envelopes will be disclosed as part of the House's annual release of information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Appendix One  
Green Book: new section 6





## Frequently asked questions

### What can I use the Communications Allowance (CA) for?

The CA can be used to meet the cost of engaging proactively with constituents through a variety of media, including the following items:

- Regular reports to constituents
- Newsletters
- Targeted correspondence relating to local or constituency-wide issues such as:
  - Contact with local groups
  - Circular letters
  - Questionnaires or surveys
  - Petitions
- Contact and surgery details, including advertisements
- Costs associated with the publishing, printing or distribution of the above, including direct mailing and postage
- Set-up and maintenance of websites
- Purchase (or leasing) of equipment for the specific purpose of producing the above items (equipment which may be used to this effect but has other uses - such as photocopiers – should be claimed from your IEP).
- Freepost facilities

### How do I claim?

There are three main ways to claim:

- You can meet the bill yourself and claim the sum back. Use a Members' Reimbursement form (Comms1)
- We can pay the supplier direct. Use a Direct Payment to Third Parties form (Comms2) and attach a copy of the invoice
- You can set up a regular payment arrangement. Use a Periodic Payments form (B1), and attach a copy of your contract with the supplier.

### How long does it take for payment to be made?

We aim to pay invoices within 7 working days of an invoice reaching us. Please submit invoices promptly.

### What budget information will I get?

The Department will send you a monthly statement showing actual expenditure to date.



## Section 6: The Communications Allowance

### 6.1.1. Scope and purpose of the allowance

The Communications Allowance (CA) is available to meet the cost of Members engaging proactively with their constituents through a variety of media. It can be used for the production of unsolicited communications within the parameters set out in this Section.

The CA may only be used to help Members inform their constituents about what they have been doing and to consult them on issues of importance to them locally. It cannot be used to meet personal costs or the costs of party political activities or campaigning. The main areas of expenditure available from the CA are outlined below.

**It is each Member's responsibility to ensure that all expenditure funded by the CA is wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred on their Parliamentary duties.**

### 6.2.1. Principles and Propriety

You must avoid any arrangement which may give rise to an accusation that you – or someone close to you - is obtaining an element of profit from public funds; or that public money is being diverted for the benefit of a political organisation.

The content of any communications paid from the allowances must not seek to compare the Member's party favourably with another, promote one party at the expense of another or seek to undermine the reputation of political opponents.

Members are encouraged to submit the content of newsletters to DFA for consideration in advance of publication (see Appendix 2 paragraph 20). Members should note that the Members Estimate Committee have instructed DFA to conduct random checks of websites and to report the results to the Committee (see Appendix 3 paragraph 29).

### 6.3.1. Spend which may be met from the Communications Allowance

Sections 6.14.1 and 6.15.1 give detailed examples of expenditure which is allowable, provided that it is incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily on Parliamentary duties. The allowable expenditure includes:

- Regular reports to constituents
- Newsletters
- Questionnaires and surveys
- Petitions
- Targeted communications



- Contact cards
- Distribution costs including direct mailing and postage
- Websites
- Some capital purchases

#### **6.4.1. Proportion of the allowance which may be claimed during the year**

The allowances year runs from 1 April to 31 March.

#### **6.4.2.**

If you enter or leave Parliament part way through the allowances year your entitlement will be calculated on a quarterly basis. For example, if you leave in July (i.e. during the second quarter) you will be entitled to two quarters' worth of the CA. If you have spent more than this you will be asked to repay the excess.

#### **6.5.1. Tax implications**

The CA is taxable and must be included in your tax return, but expenses which Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) accept as wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred in the performance of your Parliamentary duties are likely to be eligible for tax relief.

#### **6.5.2.**

Some of the items allowable under the CA may nevertheless give rise to a tax charge. For information about tax implications please contact the Enquiries and Advice Team on 020 7219 1340.

#### **6.6.1. Transfers into and out of the CA**

You may transfer up to 10% of the staffing allowance to the CA subject to a minimum transfer of £500 (please note that the 10% limit includes any transfers you may wish to make to the IEP). You may also transfer money from the Incidental Expenses Provision to the CA; there is no limit on the amount of money that can be transferred from the IEP.

#### **6.6.2.**

You may not transfer money from the CA to any other allowance or top up the allowance from personal or other external sources.

#### **6.6.3. Carryover of Unspent Amounts at Year End and Provision for Advances**

In some circumstances you may carry forward an unspent balance or ask for an advance from the following year's allowance. Please contact the Enquiries and Advice Team if you wish to discuss this further.



#### **6.7.1. Annual adjustment**

The CA will be adjusted annually in line with the movement in the Retail Prices Index. Each March, the Department will announce the increase in CA for the year ahead based on the RPI at 31 December of the previous year.

#### **6.8.1. At the end of the allowances year**

If part of the CA remains unspent at the end of the allowances year, then - providing the spend was incurred during that year - claims may be made against it for 2 months i.e. until the end of May.

#### **6.9.1. Avoidance of overspends**

We can process claims only if you have sufficient funds in the CA to cover these costs. You can augment the CA with a transfer from the staffing allowance or from the Incidental Expenses Provision (see 6.6.1. above).

#### **6.9.2.**

If you have exhausted the CA and cannot augment it, it will be your responsibility to meet any bills due from your own resources. The Department will not process these.

#### **6.10.1. Verifiable expenditure**

Evidence in the form of invoices or receipts must be provided for all items of expenditure of £250 or more.

#### **6.11.1. Capital purchases**

You may purchase or lease capital equipment from the CA if it is to be used for the purpose of proactive communications such as producing newsletters/annual reports and designing and maintaining websites. Equipment that mostly has other office purposes should be purchased or leased using the IEP. So, for example, a photocopier may not be purchased out of this allowance as it may be used for other purposes, but a risograph may as its purpose is the mass production of published material.

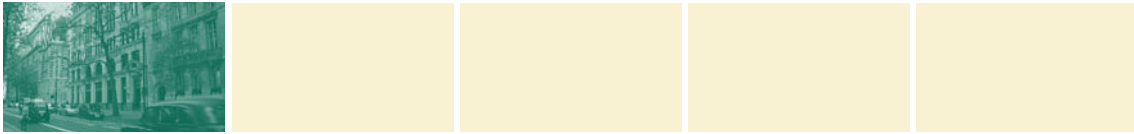
#### **6.11.2.**

Costs of capital equipment may not be split between allowances and DFA can offer advice about which is the most suitable allowance in cases of doubt.

#### **6.12.1. Newsletters**

The purpose of the publication must be to inform constituents about your work as a Member, to provide information about how to contact you or to seek views





on issues of importance to them locally. No party political or campaigning material is allowable in any part of a publication funded, in whole or in part, from the allowances. Members wishing to produce a joint publication with an MSP, MEP or AM must ensure the entire content is free of such material. If you wish to include material which is not allowed under these rules, you must fund the whole cost from another source.

#### 6.12.2. Websites

The CA may be used to pay for setting up and maintaining a website or web presence only if its purpose is to inform constituents about your work as a Member and to provide contact details. It must not be used to fund party political activity or campaigning. If you include material which is not allowed under these rules, you must fund the whole cost from another source.

#### 6.12.3.

The following material is likely to be allowable in your newsletter or on your website, provided it meets the criteria given in 6.12.4:

- information about you
- information about Parliament, debates etc
- details of how to get in touch, which may include an on-line form
- on-line surgeries

- details of surgeries
- newsletters
- news e.g. press releases, about your work as a Member
- links to public service and other websites e.g. Parliament, local council and services etc provided these are kept on a separate page
- bought in staffing costs for website design and maintenance
- services that allow you to promote your parliamentary activities, but not your political activities, digitally. This might include the use of podcasts, weblogs and other related activities
- locally targeted communication with constituents or specific groups (e.g. voluntary sector organisations) in order to gauge opinions or impart information specific to your roll as a constituency Member of Parliament

#### 6.12.4

You must not use your CA funded publications or websites:

- to conduct business activities or to obtain inappropriate private benefit.
- for fund raising
- to encourage people to join a particular political party
- to publish or promote any publication, unless it meets the rules in 6.1.1 and 6.2.1 above
- to advertise on behalf of any other commercial organisation



- to promote or campaign on behalf of any person seeking election
- to criticise or campaign against anyone seeking election or otherwise seek to undermine the reputation of political opponents
- for the purpose of advancing perspectives or arguments with the intention of promoting the interests of any political party or organisation you support, or damaging the interests of any other such party or organisation
- for petitions, surveys or questionnaires associate with national political campaigning or local elections

#### **6.13.1. Documentation required**

- A copy of any agreement for cost sharing (only required if you produce your publications etc jointly with another Member, with a Member of a devolved body or a MEP)
- A copy of any agreement for services, for example for staffing or facilities, with your constituency association or other party political organisation

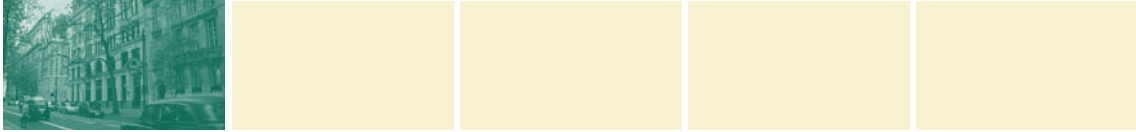
You must also inform the Department of any alterations to the terms of these. In addition, you must enclose a hard copy of your website home page with any claims in relation to expenditure on your website (see Appendix 3 paragraph 23).

#### **6.14.1. Examples of expenditure allowable under the Communications Allowance**

- Regular Reports or Newsletters
- Targeted correspondence relating to issues of importance locally, including
  - Contact with local groupings
  - Circulars
  - Questionnaires or surveys
  - Petitions
- Contact and surgery details, including advertisements
- Set up and maintenance of websites
- Costs associated with the publishing, printing or distribution of the above, including bought-in contractor time
- Purchase (or leasing) of equipment for the specific purpose of producing the above items
- Freepost facilities

#### **6.15.1. Examples of expenditure not allowable under the Communications Allowance**

- Payment of staff salaries
- Stationery or postage associated with routine casework or correspondence, including House of Commons pre-paid envelopes
- Telephone costs – mobile or land line
- Merchandising e.g. mugs, rulers or key fobs with contact or other details

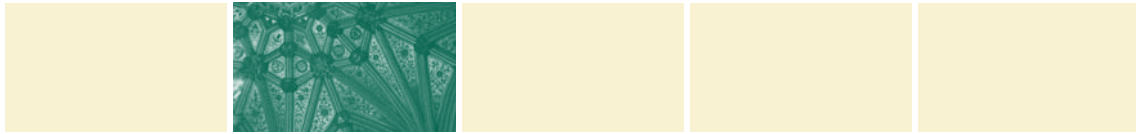


- Christmas and birthday cards (but Members may correspond with new voters)
- Petitions, surveys or questionnaires associated with national political campaigning or local elections
- Party political activities
- Membership drives
- Fundraising
- Office running costs (including rent and utility bills)
- Office supplies

Some of these costs may be claimed from the Incidental Expenses Provision.

Appendix Two  
Rules and guidance on producing newsletters and  
other publications from the Communications Allowance





1. This appendix sets out the rules that must be followed if you use your Communications Allowance (CA) to pay for producing a newsletter or other publication.
2. It is important that you follow the rules on content as listed below. You are responsible for ensuring that these rules are fully observed. If they have not been, you may be asked to repay costs involved, and you may also expose yourself to allegations of misuse of the allowances. The Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) can provide advice on the rules and content of your publications.
3. You are reminded that you should seek at all times to ensure that value for money is being provided and that costs are in accordance with the level of service for which you are being charged.

#### **Scope of permitted publications**

4. Subject to the rules which follow, you may use your allowances to fund:
  - Regular reports to constituents
  - Newsletters
  - Circulars
  - Petitions
  - Questionnaires and surveys
5. The following are not permitted:
  - Small calendars
  - Contact and surgery details
  - Locally targeted communication with constituents or specific groups (e.g. voluntary sector organisations) in order to gauge opinions or impart information specific to your role as a constituency Member of Parliament
  - Information sheets to new residents/electors
6. The following are not permitted:
  - Communications associated with routine casework
  - 18th birthday cards
  - Christmas cards
  - Merchandising
  - Party political activities, including fundraising or membership drives
  - Purchase of House of Commons pre-paid envelopes

#### **Principles**

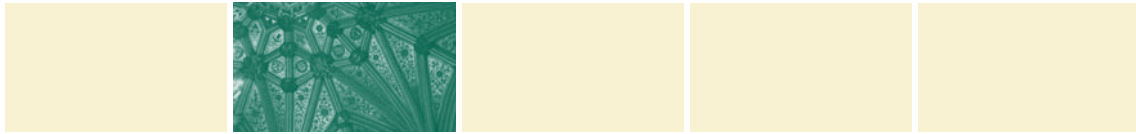
6. The purpose of the publication must be to inform constituents about your work as a Member, consult with constituents or local groups, or provide information about how to contact you.
7. No party political or campaigning material is allowable in any part of a publication funded, wholly or in part, from the allowance.



8. Members wishing to produce a joint publication with an MSP, MEP or AM must ensure the entire content is free of such material. **If you wish to include material not allowed under these rules, you must fund the whole cost of your publication from another source.**
9. You alone are responsible for ensuring that these rules are fully observed. If they have not been, you will be asked to repay any costs involved, and you may also expose yourself to allegations of misuse of the allowances. DFA can provide advice on the rules and review any publication on your behalf (see para. 20).
12. The cost of envelopes and postage or freepost facilities can be met from your Communications Allowance.
13. You must not use House of Commons pre-paid envelopes for the distribution of these publications.

#### **Content**

10. Parliamentary newsletters and other publications can be distributed to all constituents or a targeted local grouping, for example local head teachers, or residents affected by a development scheme.
11. Parliamentary newsletters and other publications may be included in the same mail drop as any political material but it must be placed in a separate envelope or cover. **The Communications Allowance should not be used to meet the cost of distributing any non-parliamentary material.**
14. The following material is likely to be allowable, subject to paragraph 15 below:
  - information about you
  - factual information about Parliament, debates etc
  - details of surgeries and how to get in touch
  - factual material about your work as a Member
  - factual information about local public services e.g. the local authority
  - surveys/questionnaires relating to matters of importance locally or for use by the Member locally
  - paid advertising by locally based businesses, provided that the receipts are set against the cost of the publication or reimbursed to the Communications Allowance.
15. You must not use the Communications Allowance:
  - to fund publications that promote, criticise or campaign for or against anyone seeking election



- to advance perspectives or arguments with the intention of promoting the interests of any person, political party or organisation you support, or damaging the interests of any other such person, party or organisation
- for fund raising
- for surveys or questionnaires linked to party political or national campaigning
- to conduct business activities, or to obtain inappropriate private benefit.

#### **Party Emblems/Logos**

16. The use of party logos, whilst not disallowed entirely, is restricted to proportionate and discreet use; alternatively you may prefer to use the House emblem (the crowned portcullis) as this reflects the Parliamentary nature and purpose of the material being circulated.
17. Photographs of Members wearing Party rosettes can be acceptable, but again should be proportionate and should not appear when the publication is to be circulated close to or during an election period. Photographs displaying party campaign slogans or campaign material are not acceptable in publications funded by the Communications Allowance.

#### **Payment arrangements**

18. Your publication must include a short notice explaining that costs are to be met from the allowances, and giving the source of any other funding.

#### **Procedures**

19. The Department of Finance and Administration is responsible for interpreting and enforcing rules relating to Parliamentary allowances, as set out in the Green Book and in this publication. If you are satisfied that your publication conforms to the above rules, you may meet the costs from your Communications Allowance in the normal way. Members are not required to submit publications to DFA prior to printing. However, the Department does offer advice and guidance on the content of newsletters and Members are encouraged to make use of this service.
20. If you want advice on the proposed content of any publication, you may approach DFA whose experienced staff will undertake a full review on your behalf. The Department will aim to complete this within 3 working days. Please allow time for this process before going to print. While the Department will always offer advice in good faith, responsibility for ensuring compliance with the rules remains unchanged. In the event of a complaint to the



Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, he will wish to know whether advice was sought.

#### **Taxation**

21. It is your responsibility to keep records and any receipts e.g. from advertising, to make any necessary entry in the Register of Members' Interests and to notify HMRC if appropriate.
22. HMRC reserve the right to assess as income payments made from public funds in respect of Members' publications. However, DFA is advised that in general they are unlikely to levy a tax charge if your publication meets these rules.

#### **Content of Newsletters etc.**

23. The content of publications should not seek, directly or indirectly, to compare a Member's party favourably with another, promote one party at the expense of another or seek to undermine the reputations of political opponents. In this context, the selective use of statistics should also be avoided. This means that the following examples would not be acceptable:
 

*"Investment in our national health service will have trebled over the past 10 years to 2007/08."*

*"Council tax has already increased by a staggering amount since 1997."*

24. You may wish to refer to increased Government funding or Government intervention and how it has affected your constituency. This can be included where you can demonstrate how your involvement has brought this about. This is especially relevant where local, constituency-based schemes have benefited from the support of the Member:
 

*"As a result of my Private Member's Bill, the government have decided to award 40,000 free bus passes for pensioners."*

*"I helped the \*\*\*\*\* Theatre retain its £85,000 grant from the Association of London Government and was delighted that they received a £400,000 increase in its grant from the government-funded Arts Council for the next three years."*
25. You may state your opinion on a range of issues that affect your constituents. However, it should always be clear that they are personal views and not just statements of support/opposition for a particular national policy.
26. Gauging public opinion on local issues is allowable. But surveys that seek opinions and views purely on national and international matters are unlikely to be acceptable.





The following questions would therefore be acceptable:

*“What are your views on the A\* bypass?”*

*“What is your experience of treatment received at xxxxx hospital?”*

27. The following generalised questions would not be acceptable:

*“What issues concern you most?”*

- *Health*
- *Unemployment*
- *Europe*
- *Education*
- *Crime”*

Appendix Three  
Rules and guidance on Members' Websites funded  
from the Communications Allowance





### Introduction

1. This appendix sets out the rules that must be followed if you use your Communications Allowance (CA) to pay for setting up and/or running a website. These rules also apply if your website is set up, or maintained, by employees paid from the staffing allowance.
2. It is important that you follow the rules on content as listed below. You are responsible for ensuring that these rules are fully observed. If they have not been, you will be asked to repay costs involved, and you may also expose yourself to allegations of misuse of the allowances. The Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) can provide advice on the rules and content of your website.
3. You are reminded that you should seek at all times to ensure that value for money is being provided and that costs are in accordance with the level of service for which you are being charged.
4. The website should make clear that any complaints about content should be made initially to the Director of Finance and Administration (see paragraph 24).  
*Note: This guidance does not apply to pre-election periods. The Department of Finance and Administration will issue separate guidance to cover these.*

### Scope of Websites funded from the CA

5. The CA may be used to pay for setting up and/or maintaining a website only if its purpose is to inform or communicate with constituents about your work as a Member and/or to provide contact details. It must not be used to fund party political activity or campaigning. **You may not use the Communications Allowance to pay for individual web pages or parts of websites, where other parts of the site are paid for from other sources.**

### Content

6. The following material is likely to be allowable:
  - information about you
  - information about Parliament, debates etc
  - details of how to get in touch, which may include an on-line form
  - details of your surgeries
  - on-line surgeries
  - newsletters (provided that these meet the criteria for funding from the CA)
  - news e.g. press releases or articles about your work as a Member of Parliament
  - services that allow you to promote your parliamentary activities, but not your political activities, digitally. This might include the use of podcasts, weblogs and other related activities



7. You must not use your website
  - to conduct business activities
  - to obtain inappropriate private benefit
  - for fund raising
  - to encourage people to join a particular political party
  - to publish or promote any publication, unless it meets the rules above
  - for advertising of a commercial nature
  - to campaign on behalf of or against any person seeking election
  - to advance perspectives or arguments with the intention of promoting the interests of any person, political party or organisation you support, or damaging the interests of any other such person, party or organisation.

#### **Links to other websites**

8. In order to maintain a clear distinction between your website, which is financed from public funds, and any other domain, you must make a clear distinction between your site and any site to which links are provided. You may do this by taking users through a page that confirms they are leaving your website, or by requiring them to acknowledge it through a pop-up form.

#### **On-line surveys and petitions**

9. Surveys should relate only to matters of importance locally or for use by the Member locally and not be based on party political campaigns.
10. Petitions should be restricted to those initiated by you and propose specific, non-party political action. For example, it is acceptable for a petition to seeking support for the retention or expansion of local services. But it is not appropriate in the wording of a petition to criticise those who may take an opposite view.

#### **Digital communications**

11. Web technology is developing rapidly, and you may take advantage of these developments by using your website to promote your activities digitally, including the use of podcasts, weblogs etc, provided this meets the principles and rules given above. New forms of online presence are becoming available. These are likely to be acceptable to the extent that they conform to the principles set out in this guidance. In cases of doubt, contact DFA on 020 7219 4757.



12. If you have any interactive forum, you should ensure that it is regularly monitored by your site administrator in order to remove, or to avoid the publication of, any offensive or inappropriate comments. Although we accept that this type of open forum is likely to generate some political observations, you should not encourage party political comment or engage in party political debate on line.
13. If you wish to discuss your plans with DFA, please do so on 020 7219 4757.
- General content questions**
14. The content of your website or online presence should not seek, directly or indirectly, to compare a Member's party favourably with another, promote one party at the expense of another or seek to undermine the reputations of political opponents. In this context, the selective use of statistics should also be avoided. This means that stating the following on your website would not be acceptable:
- "Investment in our national health service will have trebled over the past 10 years to 2007/08."*
- "Council tax has already increased by a staggering amount since 1997."*
15. You may wish to refer to increased Government funding or Government intervention and how it has affected your constituency. This can be included where you can demonstrate how your involvement has brought this about. This is especially relevant where local, constituency-based schemes have benefited from your support, such as in the following statements:
- "As a result of my Private Member's Bill, the government have decided to award 40,000 free bus passes for pensioners."*
- "I helped the \*\*\*\*\* Theatre retain its £85,000 grant from the Association of London Government and was delighted that they received a £400,000 increase in its grant from the government-funded Arts Council for the next three years."*
16. You may state your opinion on a range of issues that affect your constituents. However, it should always be clear that they are personal views and not just statements of support/opposition for a particular national policy.
17. Gauging public opinion on local issues on your website is allowable. But surveys that seek opinions and views purely on national and international matters are unlikely to be acceptable.



18. The following questions would therefore be acceptable:

*“What are your views on the A\* bypass?”*

*“What is your experience of treatment received at xxxxx hospital?”*

19. The following generalised questions would not be acceptable:

*“What issues concern you most?”*

- *Health*
- *Unemployment*
- *Europe*
- *Education*
- *Crime*

#### **Party Emblems/Logos**

20. The use of party logos should be restricted to proportionate and discrete use. You may reproduce the House emblem (the crowned portcullis) on your website only if it satisfies the rules above.
21. Photographs or videos on your website of yourself or other Members wearing Party rosettes can be acceptable, but should be proportionate and should not appear close to or during an election period. Photographs or videos displaying or including party campaign slogans or campaign material are not acceptable in publications funded by the Communications Allowance.

#### **Procedures**

22. There are a variety of methods by which you may choose to design, update and administer your website. In the interest of clarity, you should ensure that invoices relating to such costs are clearly set out and describe the scope of the services that have been provided. If these are not clear you may be asked for further information before payment is completed.
23. If your web material satisfies the rules above, you may meet the costs as appropriate from your CA without advance approval from officials in the Department of Finance and Administration. However, the Members Estimate Committee has decided that you must enclose a hard copy of the home page of your website with any claims.
24. There is a minimum requirement for you to display, prominently, on the homepage of your website, a statement that it is funded from Parliamentary allowances and that complaints about content should be made initially to the Director of Finance and Administration, House of Commons.

#### **Taxation**

25. HMRC reserve the right to consider the tax position in relation to the costs of Members’ websites. But we are advised that in general HMRC is unlikely to levy a tax charge if your website meets rules above.



26. You are advised that it is your responsibility to keep records and any receipts e.g. from advertising, to make any necessary entry in the Register of Members' Interests, and to notify HMRC if appropriate.

#### **Advice**

27. The Department of Finance and Administration is responsible for interpreting and enforcing the rules set out in the Green Book and in this publication. If you are satisfied that your website conforms to the rules in this booklet, you may meet the costs from your CA the normal way. You are not required to submit details of your website to DFA in advance. However, the Department does offer advice and guidance on the content of websites and you are encouraged to make use of this service.
28. If you want such advice, you may approach DFA whose experienced staff will discuss the content and design of your website with you. The Department will aim to complete this within 3 working days. While the Department will always offer advice in good faith, responsibility for ensuring compliance with the rules remains unchanged. In the event of a complaint to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, he may wish to know whether advice was sought.

#### **Checks**

29. The Members Estimate Committee has instructed the Department of Finance and Administration to conduct random checks on Members' Parliamentary websites and to report the results of these checks to the Committee from time to time.

**For further information and advice on using your allowance to fund your website contact the Department of Finance & Administration on 020 7219 4757**

Appendix Four  
Rules and guidance on the House emblem,  
House of Commons stationery and pre-paid envelopes







### Introduction

1. This guidance sets out the rules governing the use of House of Commons stationery and pre-paid envelopes which are made available to enable you to carry out your parliamentary duties.
2. The costs are paid for from public funds and it is your responsibility to ensure that all costs are wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred on Parliamentary duties. The costs of stationery you order are recorded and included under the Postage Costs heading in the allowances expenditure information published each year.
3. The Code of Conduct for Members, to which the House has agreed, applies to the use of House of Commons stationery and pre-paid envelopes in the same way as it applies to allowances, other expenses, facilities and services provided from the public purse. You must ensure that your use of provided House stationery and pre-paid envelopes is strictly in accordance with the rules laid down on these matters. If you are in any doubt as to whether any proposed use of stationery or pre-paid envelopes is appropriate, the Serjeant at Arms office will be happy to give guidance.

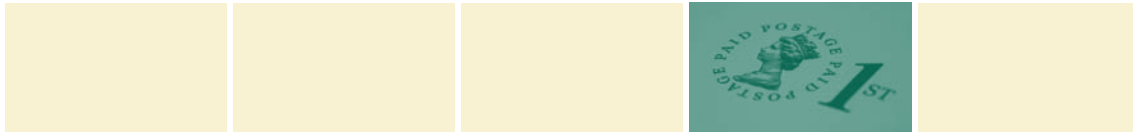
4. Supervision and enforcement of the rules are normally a matter for the Serjeant at Arms. Complaints about misuse may be sent directly to the Parliamentary Commissioner or referred there by the Serjeant at Arms. The application and interpretation of the rules, initially however, rests on the good sense of individual Members.

### Use of the House Emblem

5. The principal emblem of the House is the crowned portcullis. It is a royal badge and its use by the House has been formally authorised by licence granted by Her Majesty the Queen. The designs and symbols of the House should not be used for purposes to which such authentication is inappropriate, or where there is a risk that their use might wrongly be regarded, or represented, as having the authority of the House.

### Original House Stationery

6. In the course of a financial year, a Member is entitled to be provided free of charge with original House stationery to a value of up to £7,000. This includes the cost of both the stationery itself and the cost of postage on pre-paid envelopes. Members may also purchase original House stationery (but not pre-paid envelopes) using their Incidental Expenses Provision.



7. Original House stationery, however it is acquired, should not, in any circumstances, be used for the following purposes:
  - a) communications of a business or commercial nature;
  - b) in connection with fund raising for the benefit of a political party, advocating membership of a political party, or supporting the return of any person to public office;
  - c) for correspondence of All-Party and Parliamentary Groups which include persons who are not Members of either House.
8. You are asked to limit your use of House stationery for personal correspondence to modest amounts and are reminded that pre-paid envelopes should not be used, in any circumstances, for personal correspondence.
9. If you wish to use original House of Commons stationery to send to people on issues on which they have not previously contacted you, you must purchase it from the suppliers. Alternatively, you may photocopy stationery which includes the crowned portcullis and the words "House of Commons". Such mail must comply with the rules set out in paragraph 7 and may not be sent using pre-paid envelopes.

### **Pre-paid envelopes**

10. In broad terms, the pre-paid envelopes are designed to enable you to reply to letters received and to write to individuals and organisations in pursuit of your parliamentary business. They should not be used to send mail to people on issues on which they have not previously contacted you. You should refer to the guidance note on publications funded from the Communication Allowance (such as annual reports) for help with the costs of mail to inform your constituents about, for example, news about your work as a Member.
11. Pre-paid envelopes may only be used in pursuit of your parliamentary duties. This includes
  - a) administrative correspondence enabling you to run your office, such as current working documents sent between Westminster and the constituency
  - b) correspondence with Members or staff of either House, where this cannot be sent using the internal mail system
  - c) correspondence with public bodies in the United Kingdom such as Government Departments, Agencies and NDPBs, devolved assemblies, local government, and international organisations, where this cannot be sent using the IDS
  - d) correspondence with constituents in connection with an issue on which they have previously contacted you.



12. Someone who has signed a petition which has been addressed to you, who has sent you a campaign postcard or letter, or who has raised an issue with you in person, is considered to have contacted you for the purpose of these rules, unless the petition or campaign was itself instigated by you or by someone acting on your behalf. Pre-paid envelopes and House stationery provided from a Members' cash-limited entitlement should only be used to reply once to this kind of correspondence in specific response to such contact.
13. Pre-paid envelopes may only be used to send updates to constituents on an ongoing basis where the updates relate to specific cases which have been raised with you by those constituents (such as progress on asylum applications). Pre-paid envelopes may not be used to send updates of more general concern.
14. Pre-paid envelopes must not be used:
  - a) for correspondence of a personal, business or commercial nature
  - b) for correspondence of All-Party and Parliamentary Groups which include persons who are not members of either House
  - c) in connection with fund-raising for the benefit of a political party or supporting the return of any person to public office
  - d) for internal mail
  - e) for mail sent from the House of Commons to Government Department addresses within the M25 system (which should be fully addressed marked 'VIA IDS' and posted in an Internal Mail posting box without payment of postage)
  - f) for questionnaires and surveys
  - g) for birthday or greeting cards or messages
  - h) for correspondence with constituents on issues on which they have not previously contacted you or on which they have only contacted you at your own instigation.
15. Items which may not be sent in pre-paid envelopes on their own, such as circulars, newsletters, cards and calendars, must not be attached to correspondence legitimately sent using pre-paid envelopes.
16. Pre-paid envelopes may not be overprinted in any way: the front of the envelope should only include the name and address of the intended recipient.
17. You are asked to note that pre-paid envelopes, postcards and plastic mailers are charged for as soon as they have been supplied. Pre-paid envelopes should be safeguarded to prevent misuse and not be overprinted in any way. Spoilt envelopes should be returned to the SAA Department or the Postmaster to ensure return of postage.



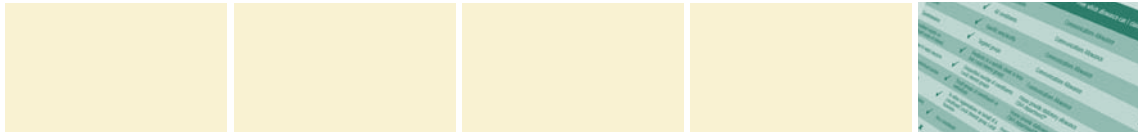
18. You are encouraged to use second-class pre-paid envelopes. First-class envelopes should only be used for priority mail.
19. A special pre-paid envelope is available for letters to individuals and organisations in other EU member states.
20. The standard pre-paid envelopes may be used to write to members of the armed forces serving overseas through the British Forces Post Office.

#### **Dissolution**

21. House stationery, House emblems and pre-paid envelopes should not be used during the period of dissolution. In correspondence, you should not use the title MP or the address of the House of Commons until after Polling Day.

Appendix Five  
Some examples

|   | From which allowance can I claim reimbursement       |   |
|---|--|---|
| ✓ All constituents                                  | Communications Allowance                             |   |
| ✓ Specific area/locality                            | Communications Allowance                             |   |
| ✓ Targeted groups                                   | Communications Allowance                             |   |
| ✓ Residents in a specific street or locality        | Communications Allowance                             |   |
| ✓ Unspecified number of constituents                | Communications Allowance                             |   |
| ✓ Small groups of constituents or individuals       | House provide stationery allowance (SAA department)* | ✗ |
| ✓ To other organisations on behalf of a constituent | House provide stationery allowance (SAA department)* | ✗ |
| ✓ Any constituent                                   | House provide stationery allowance (SAA department)* | ✗ |



| Can I send out...?   | Answer | Who to?   | From which allowance can I claim reimbursement? | Can I use HC pre-paid envelopes? |
|--|--------|---|---|----------------------------------|
| Annual Reports   | ✓      | All constituents  | Communications Allowance                        | ✗                                |
| Surveys  | ✓      | All constituents or targeted groups                                 | Communications Allowance                        | ✗                                |
| Petitions  | ✓      | Specific area/locality/demographic group                            | Communications Allowance                        | ✗                                |
| Questionnaires   | ✓      | Targeted groups   | Communications Allowance                        | ✗                                |
| Localised reports on relevant areas of interest                          | ✓      | Residents in a specific street or location<br>Local interest groups | Communications Allowance                        | ✗                                |
| Responses to local concerns  | ✓      | Constituents affected by issue<br>Local interest groups             | House stationery provision (SAA department)*    | ✓                                |
| Responses to individual queries  | ✓      | Individuals or small groups of constituents                         | House stationery provision (SAA department)*    | ✓                                |
| Communication with 3rd parties   | ✓      | To other organisations on behalf of a constituent                   | House stationery provision (SAA department)*    | ✓                                |
| Stationery or postage associated with routine casework or correspondence | ✓      | Any constituent   | House stationery provision (SAA department)*    | ✓                                |
| Christmas and birthday cards   | ✗      | N/A   | N/A   | N/A                              |

\*The IEP and CA can be used for these items if the stationery provision has been exhausted

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