

HOUSE COMMITTEE

7 October 2004

International and Inter-regional Contacts

PURPOSE

1. To provide the framework for a discussion of the value and benefits to the Assembly of Members' external visits.

BACKGROUND

2. Members' external visits fall broadly into four categories:
 - **Committee visits** are organised by Committee Services at the request of Committee Chairs and Members. All visits are designed to support and enhance the work of the Committees through interaction with and by learning from parliamentarians and practitioners;
 - **Visits associated with the National Assembly's membership of inter-Parliamentary organisations**, including Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, (BIIPB) and the Conférence Des Assemblés Législatives Régionales Européennes (CALRE). Membership of these organisations promotes inter-regional links, raises the profile of the Assembly and ensures that the Assembly benefits from interaction with other parliaments and assemblies. Attendance at meetings ensures that the Assembly maximises the benefits of membership and gets the best return on the membership fees;
 - **Fact-finding missions by individual AMs**, allowable under the Determination of Members' Allowances, details of which are provided at Annex 1 enable Members to enhance their understanding of other parliaments and assemblies and to learn about specific subject areas;
 - **Member delegations** to regional parliaments, councils or assemblies are also intended for the same purpose as individual fact-finding missions and are covered by the same Determination.

ISSUES

3. Members' travel expenditure incurred on visits is paid from the public purse. All such visits, and associated expenditure, are defined and regulated by guidance provided to Members.
4. Clearly, it is essential that the Assembly reaps real benefits from visits undertaken by Members and the House Committee recognises its responsibility for the proper use of its budget. Each category of visit contributes to the work of the Assembly in different ways. In the case of Committees, visits are carried out as part of policy reviews and the information and understanding gained on visits are included and integrated in the Committees' reviews and reports. The contributions of

Members attending meetings of inter-parliamentary bodies, on behalf of the Assembly, are included in the reports and minutes of the meetings, which are prepared by the organisations.

5. A small number of groups of Members have visited European regional capitals on fact-finding missions on specific subjects. Other Members have visited the European Parliament in Brussels to gain a greater insight into the workings of the EU. The purpose of such visits is agreed in advance as stipulated in the Determination of Members Allowances (see Annex 1).
6. In addition, the House Committee at its meeting of January 29 2004 agreed to a protocol relating to overseas travel and expenditure. This is attached as Annex 2.

COMPLIANCE

7. There are no compliance issues arising from this paper. There are no issues relating to equality of opportunity, race equality or sustainable development.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8. There are no financial implications over and above the expenditure occurred on visits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. It is recommended that the House Committee considers the contents of this paper and the associated public interest in such visits.

Annex 1**Determination of Pay and Allowances (AMs)****1. Entitlement**

- 1.1 In any year each Member is entitled to make a total of three return journeys between the United Kingdom and any of the European Community Institutions in Brussels.
- 1.2 In any year each Member is entitled to make one return journey to the any one of the European Community Institutions in Luxembourg or Strasbourg or the national parliament of another European Union member state in addition to any journeys undertaken under paragraph 1.1
- 1.3 In either case, the principal purpose of the visit must be undertaken for purposes in connection with the responsibilities of the member as an Assembly Member.
- 1.4 A Member is entitled to claim the actual cost to him/her of travel expenses incurred and an entitlement to a subsistence allowance subject to the following maxima:
- the cost of the cheapest, suitable and available return air fare to one of the appropriate destinations; plus
 - two nights accommodation, meals and incidental travel.
- 1.5 A Member not travelling by air may claim actual travelling costs within the maximum set in paragraph 1.4 above.

2. Application

- 2.1 Members must submit in advance to the Fees Office a statement of the visit's purpose, location and duration and the persons or organisations to be met. A Member is entitled to claim this allowance only where the journey to which the claim relates has been agreed in advance by the Fees Office. The acceptability of any other claims for this allowance not so agreed will be at the discretion of the Presiding Officer.

3. Travel to Regional parliaments, councils or assemblies

- 3.1 A Member may apply to the Presiding Officer for permission to form a delegation to visit a regional parliament, regional council or regional assembly within the European Union. The application must show clearly the likely benefits of the visit to the business or interests of the National Assembly for Wales and clearly indicate the people or organisations to be visited. Any visit made under this paragraph shall be in place of a visit that might otherwise be made under paragraph 1.2.

(The National Assembly for Wales(Assembly Members and Officers)(Salaries, Allowances etc.) Determination 2003)

Annex 2**External Relations Strategy and Travel****PURPOSE**

1. Following initial consideration of this matter at its last meeting, to seek the House Committee's approval of:-
 - ◆ the underlying principles and protocols for relations between the National Assembly for Wales and other parliaments and assemblies, and
 - ◆ the approval of common principles for the arrangement of foreign travel where the costs are met by the Assembly.

BACKGROUND

2. The National Assembly for Wales has welcomed a diverse and continual stream of visiting individuals and delegations from other parliaments and assemblies within the UK and overseas. Many visitors make direct contact with the Assembly whilst others come through established inter-parliamentary organisations, in particular the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the British Branch of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).
3. Since late 2001, the Assembly Parliamentary Service Overseas and External Liaison Unit has developed a pro-active role with an inter-parliamentary focus, to co-ordinate the Assembly's programme of overseas and external liaison. It co-ordinates programmes for visitors to the Assembly and Assembly delegations travelling on Assembly business. Responsibility for FCO government to government visitors to Wales has transferred to the Assembly's European and External Affairs Division.
4. To establish priorities for overseas contacts and consistency in travel arrangements, it would assist to have some agreed principles in place. This paper is an amended version of the paper presented to the Committee at its last meeting, and takes on board points made at the last meeting and subsequently by the Chair.

ISSUES

5. It would seem appropriate at this stage in the development of the Assembly's overseas relations to agree a framework of principles to guide decisions on future programmes. Draft Guiding Principles are at **Appendix 1**.
6. It is important that the Assembly is consistent in matters of protocol in receiving visiting delegations. The draft Standard Protocols and Procedures, detailed at **Appendix 2**, have been developed, based on experience to date and accepted practice.

7. The arrangements for Assembly Members and officials travelling abroad on outward delegations also need to be clarified. A paper setting out recommended principles is attached as **Appendix 3**.

COMPLIANCE ISSUES

8. The principles at Appendix 3 address the way in which foreign travel should be organised within existing authorities and budgets. Any payments/allowances would normally be paid under the National Assembly for Wales (Assembly Members and Officers) (Salaries, Allowances etc) Determination 2003, which was made under section 16 of the Government of Wales Act.
9. The proposals in this paper do not affect, and is not affected by, the Assembly's statutory duties in relation to equality of opportunity, race equality, and sustainable development.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10. Incoming visitors are generally self-funded. The Presiding Officer offers hospitality at his discretion to visitors and the associated expenditure is charged to the Presiding Office.
11. Outward Assembly delegations and British Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body activities are financed from the Members' Travel and Allowance budget. CPA activities are financed separately from a dedicated CPA budget.
12. Appendix 3 covers the organisation of travel funded from existing budgets. There are no direct financial implications other than the benefits of a consistent approach to the organisation of foreign travel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

13. It is recommended that the House Committee consider and endorse if appropriate:
 - the Guiding Principles for overseas relations as detailed in Appendix 1;
 - the Standard Protocol Procedures at Appendix 2;
 - the principles for foreign travel at Appendix 3.

Appendix 1**GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EXTERNAL RELATIONS**

The Assembly, in the conduct of its relations with other Parliaments and Assemblies, will observe the following principles:

Corporate Objectives

1. That the Overseas and External Liaison activity should serve the objectives of the Assembly identified in the 2003/4 Presiding Office Corporate Statement, namely:
 - We will strengthen our co-operation with other democratic institutions in the United Kingdom, Europe, the Commonwealth and the rest of the world;
 - We will increase public understanding and awareness of the Assembly throughout Wales, and we will endeavour to make the Assembly accessible to all.

2. That the Assembly continues to maintain relations with, or membership of, established inter-parliamentary organisations, namely:
 - the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) (membership);
 - the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body (BIIPB) (membership);
 - the Conference of Presidents of European Regions with Legislative Power (CALRE) (membership);
 - the British Inter-Parliamentary Union (BIPU) (co-operative relationship).

Principles

3. That the Assembly pro-actively seeks to further develop relations with other European regional parliaments and the federal parliaments of the Commonwealth in order to develop corporate knowledge and raise external profile in a focused manner. In particular:
 - Smaller nations and regions with geographical and/or cultural affinities such as Catalonia, the Basque Region and Flanders;
 - The four Motor Regions where strong links with Wales already exist: Baden-Wurtemberg, Catalonia, Lombardy and the Rhone-Alps;
 - Australian and Canadian state legislatures;
 - EU countries or candidate countries or regions with geographic and/or cultural affinities.

4. That the Assembly should respond positively to requests for visits to the Assembly from other institutions with a shared commitment to participatory democracy.

5. That visitors to the Assembly are normally responsible for their own expenses, travel and accommodation costs and arrangements (approved CPA activities excepted, as these are managed within CPA rules and conventions). Any departure from this principle will be subject to the agreement of the House Committee in the particular case.
6. That Members may at their own discretion make use of the facility to travel to European Community Institutions etc under Section 8 of the National Assembly for Wales (Assembly Members and Officers) (Salaries, Allowances etc.) Determination 2003, but, in respect of all other outward visits, there should be clearly defined purposes and anticipated results (supporting the guiding principles) from visits by Assembly Members and officials, and that they represent value for money for the National Assembly.
7. That Overseas and External Liaison activity undertaken by the National Assembly will be sensitive to wider international relations.
8. That information, including objectives, destinations, delegates and costs of inter-parliamentary and external liaison programmes, are open and available for public scrutiny.
9. That the House Committee and the European and External Affairs Committee are kept informed of the forward programme of activities and receive relevant reports.
10. That liaison be maintained in appropriate circumstances with the European and External Affairs Division (EEAD) of the Welsh Assembly Government over the co-ordination of programmes for visitors across the corporate body.

Appendix 2

PROTOCOL ARRANGEMENTS FOR VISITORS TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES

	Flag	Receiving Line / Courtesy Call	Red Carpet	Address to Members	Visitors Book	Hospitality	Gift	Scanning
Visitor Category								
Royal and State Visits	Royal Standard	Receiving line in reception: Presiding Officer First Minister Party Leaders Deputy Presiding Officer Perm Sec Clerk	Yes	To Members in Chamber	Bespoke for display	Presiding Officer hosted, all Members invited	No	No
A								
National level Heads of State and Government. International political figures.	Yes	Receiving line at Chamber Door: PO First Minister	No	Pre-plenary to Members in the Chamber at the discretion of	Yes	Welsh Assembly Government – led	In liaison with visitor’s protocol dept	No

	Flag	Receiving Line / Courtesy Call	Red Carpet	Address to Members	Visitors Book	Hospitality	Gift	Scanning
Regional / Provincial Heads of State from 'special relationship' e.g: Ontario, Motor Regions New South Wales		Party Leaders DPO		the PO				
A1								
Regional / Provincial Heads of State and Government	Yes	PO to meet in reception Courtesy Call on PO	No	Pre-plenary to Members in the Chamber at the discretion of the PO	Yes	Welsh Assembly Government – led	Yes	No
A2								
Parliamentary - Presiding Officers, Presidents, Speakers	If provided	PO meets in reception Courtesy Call on PO	No	Option of presentation / seminar in Committee or	Yes	Presiding Officer's lunch (Presiding Officer plus	Yes	No

	Flag	Receiving Line / Courtesy Call	Red Carpet	Address to Members	Visitors Book	Hospitality	Gift	Scanning
				Conference Room		representatives from the party groups)		
B								
Diplomatic – Heads of Mission	If provided	Met by officials Courtesy Call on PO	No	Option of presentation / seminar in Committee or Conference Room	Yes		Yes	VIP Pass
C								
Parliamentary Visiting Members and delegations	No	Met by PO or officials Courtesy call on PO	No	Informal meeting with cross-party representation if schedule permits.	Yes	Presiding Officer's lunch (Presiding Officer plus representatives from the party groups)	Yes	No VIP Pass
CPA visitors	CPA	Met by CPA Branch Exec	No	Informal meeting with cross-	Yes	CPA to arrange	CPA to arrange	No VIP Pass

	Flag	Receiving Line / Courtesy Call	Red Carpet	Address to Members	Visitors Book	Hospitality	Gift	Scanning
		Courtesy call on PO		party representation if schedule permits				
D								
Officials	No	Officials to meet Courtesy call on Clerk	No	No	No	Hosted by Clerk	No – unless to reciprocate	Standard pass and scan
Others – sports, media, cultural, religious, business	No	Met by sponsoring Member	No	Sponsoring Member / Minister to arrange event in Conference Room or Neuadd	No	Sponsoring Member	Member to arrange	Standard pass and scan

APPENDIX 3**GUIDANCE ON FOREIGN TRAVEL BY ASSEMBLY MEMBERS****Coverage**

1. The National Assembly for Wales provides for Members to travel to the EU in connection with their responsibilities as individual Assembly Members as set out in Section 8 of the National Assembly for Wales (Assembly Members and Officers) (Salaries, Allowances etc.) Determination 2003. A copy of the relevant part of this is at **Annex A**. In respect of travel under that Section, this guidance should be read as subject to that Determination.
2. Assembly Members also travel abroad on Assembly business in a number of other capacities for which the cost falls to the Presiding Office:
 - as Members of Committees;
 - as part of delegations representing the National Assembly as a Member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA);
 - as part of the Assembly's delegation to the British-Irish Inter Parliamentary Body (BIIPB);
 - the Presiding Officer represents the Assembly at the Conference (of Presidents) of European Regional Assemblies with Legislative Power (CALRE).
3. There are budgets for each of these and rules and procedures for assessing priorities and authorising such travel.
4. The purpose of this policy is to set out the principles according to which travel by Assembly Members should normally be arranged.

Travel**General**

5. Members are expected to travel by the most suitable, cost-effective means available and in determining this, allowance may be made for efficient use of their time. Where possible, travel should be arranged in advance by Presiding Office officials (such as Fees Office or the Committee Secretariat) using the Assembly's approved travel agent (though officials should always take steps to satisfy themselves that the agent has produced the most economic options). This will ensure best advice is obtained on the mode of travel and fares, in compliance with procurement procedures. It also avoids the need for Members (or officials) to pay in advance for travel.
6. When travel is not booked in advance, such as that arranged after arrival within a country, care should be taken to secure cost-effective means. Claims for reimbursement will be considered with these principles in mind.

Air travel

7. As a general principle, Members may travel using 'fully flexible' tickets if the advantage of being able to cancel such tickets at short notice outweighs the cost saving offered by cheaper, less flexible tickets. A judgement should be made in each case as to whether this is appropriate.
8. For flights of up to 2½ hours' duration, including when these are 'legs' of a longer overall journey, Members will normally travel normal economy class if this is available. For longer flights, or when economy class is not available, Members may travel premium economy, or business class. First class air fares should not be used.
9. Officials may travel in the same class as the Member(s) they are accompanying.

Rail

10. Members may travel First or Standard class depending on personal preference and availability.

Other travel

11. This should be arranged according to the principles outlined above. Where necessary and appropriate, taxis may be used.

Reimbursement of Travel Costs paid directly

12. Normally, air fares should be booked in advance through the Assembly staff and will be paid for directly by the relevant Division. Rail tickets should be booked in this way also. Where this is not possible or where it is more economic for Members to pay for travel direct, Members may claim the actual cost of travel they have paid for themselves on the basis of receipts or used tickets. Receipts should be provided for taxi fares and these may include modest tips.

Subsistence and Overnight Accommodation

13. Where a Member stays away overnight on official business, he or she may claim the cost of suitable overnight accommodation. Receipts must be provided.
14. A Member may also claim reasonable and necessary incidental expenses such as meals. Receipts or other evidence must be provided in support of such claims. Alternatively, Members may claim the flat rate of £25 per night agreed by the Presiding Officer to cover the cost of meals and all other incidentals.

Variations to travel arrangements for personal reasons

15. Members are expected to travel by the most cost-effective means. Where a Member wishes to combine a visit with other business, or a private visit, they may make their own alternative arrangements and claim the actual costs incurred on Assembly business up to the ceiling of the level that would have been incurred otherwise. Tickets or vouchers are needed to justify all such claims.
16. It is not permitted for a Member to claim the cost of a higher class of travel than that actually used, even when a higher class might have been permitted. Even within these ceilings, Members may not claim any costs associated with travel for partners, dependants or other people not required to accompany them for the purposes of Assembly business.
17. Officials should not be expected to go to undue lengths to make separate arrangements in order to accommodate a Member's additional personal requirements.

Liaison with Foreign and Commonwealth Office

18. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office offers a wide range of advice and support for individuals and Committees making visits abroad and officials will seek advice before making any arrangements to visit areas where there might be political, security or other sensitivities to consider. British Embassies and High Commissions are generally willing to assist Members on official visits abroad, and it is helpful to notify the FCO in advance when official visits are planned. The normal contact point would be the Devolution Desk at the Parliamentary Relations and Devolution Department in London.

General Advice on travel to particular locations

19. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Internet site gives a range of advice on travelling to different areas and should be consulted early on when a visit abroad is being considered.

Insurance

20. The National Assembly has a 'blanket' travel insurance policy that will cover Members needs in most circumstances. It is advisable to check with Fees Office on the extent of the cover at the time, particularly if a visit is to an unusual or troubled destination.