

Simplification Thematic Review

April 2024

At the beginning of the Sixth Senedd the Board agreed their strategic objectives and work programme. One of the objectives is to 'simplify the Determination to provide flexibility for Members to determine their own priorities with proportionate safeguards, in co-operation with the Senedd Commission'.

The objective continues:

The Determination should be simple, clear and transparent for Members and the public, with the right level of checks and balances to maintain the confidence of the public. It will provide flexibility for Members to decide their own small business model and priorities with an emphasis on Members' accountability to the public. The provision for Members through the Determination and the services the Commission provides will complement each other in effectively supporting Members in their work.

Thematic review to simplify the Determination

The Board has agreed to conduct a thematic review to make it as simple as possible for Members and Support Staff to understand what funding will be made available and how to claim it, and to make it as simple as possible for those in the Members' Business Support team to apply the regime efficiently, economically and with reduced risk of dispute.

The first phase of this work, a systematic review of the drafting of the Determination with an eye to consistency, clarity of language and removing unnecessary controls has begun.

The following changes were made during the Annual Review of the Determination 2022-23 as a result of the simplification thematic review:

- In response to feedback from Members and staff, a version of the Determination showing tracked changes made as a result of the Annual Review process has been published alongside the revised Determination.
- Officials supporting the Board and Members Business Support held familiarisation drop in sessions on the latest version of the Determination. Senedd Members and their support staff said they were pleased with the increased level of engagement on the Annual Review, commenting that it allowed them to plan their budgets in good time.
- In response to the consultation on the Annual Review of the Determination 2023-24, the Board made the wording in the Determination clearer to show which funds are available for DSE assessments and health and safety measures.
- Responses to the consultation on the Annual Review showed that the requirements of the Determination meant that Members were often unable to find suitable providers when procuring goods and services and the threshold for sourcing three quotes meant resulted in increased administrative effort. This led to the Board changing the Determination to require three written quotations for any expenditure on goods or services with an estimated value above £1,500, increasing it from £750. Alongside ensuring that Members may seek prior approval from the Members' Business Support Team in exceptional cases to disapply the requirement, this will result in a more efficient and less time-consuming procurement process.

The following changes were made during the Annual Review of the Determination 2023-24:

- There will no longer be a requirement to seek prior permission from the Senedd Commission before incurring accommodation costs for overnight stays outside the Cardiff area;

- Members can submit one business case in relation to a visit by more than one Member for international trips;
- Members will no longer have to purchase or hire photocopiers from an approved list of suppliers;
- It will clearly state that travel and hotel rates which may be claimed for reimbursement for Members' staff are the same as those for Members;
- The Chiefs of Staff of the political groups were updated on the agreed changes to the Determination in good time for them to plan their budgets for the financial year 2024-25. A 'tracked change' version of the Determination was published online, making it easier to see what has changed.
- The wording was changed with regards to the submission of late claims for Members' business costs. Comments on the Determination showed that there was inconsistency and confusion around the use of the words '*must*' and '*may*' in the same paragraph on processing late claims. The wording was clarified to show that a late submission without a reasonable justification '*will*' result in the claim being disallowed. It was felt that this reduced confusion and increased the timeliness of claims leading to a more accurate budget position being available to staff, enabling greater budget control and planning.
- It will clearly state that reimbursements for the costs of accommodation on committee business are a matter for the Senedd Commission and are not covered by the Determination;
- The maximum number of days classed as 'time off for public duties' will be calculated over a financial year rather than a 12 month rolling period. This will align more appropriately with the requirements for mandatory armed forces training and ensure this allowance is consistent with others based on the financial year.