

# Accommodation and Travel Support for Parliamentarians Executive Summary

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The role of a parliamentarian is unique in that it often requires members to spend part of their week away from their main home. As such many legislatures make provision for members to claim the costs of accommodation close to the parliament itself. Travel costs for members are also commonly covered, for journeys to parliament and within constituencies.

This paper provides an insight into how these provisions are designed and operate across a number of UK and international legislatures. Direct comparison of the monetary value of such support is challenging, as each parliament will be making decisions related to the economic context in which they operate. This comparison however, can support discussions about the model of support that Members of the Senedd may require in the Seventh Senedd and the principles on which such support could be designed and reviewed.

A number of legislatures have been reviewed for this paper including the four UK legislatures, New Zealand, Victoria (Australia), Ireland, Canada, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Based on information available online, it is clear that systems for the reimbursement of travel and accommodation costs incurred by parliamentarians are complex.

Of the examples reviewed for this paper, accommodation and travel allowances are often provided for in legislation, with relevant remuneration bodies making decisions about the levels that such allowances are set at, any criteria for claiming reimbursement and how the system will operate.

There do not appear to be any significant differences between single member and multi-member constituency electoral systems. Each parliament reviewed has a system in place with its own unique elements, centred around a general consensus that members should

be reimbursed for reasonable accommodation and travel costs incurred as a result of fulfilling their parliamentary duties, including being able to stay overnight near to parliament if they normally live beyond a commutable distance.

Some parliaments combine different elements of travel and accommodation into a single allowance, while others have a multitude of allowances covering accommodation while attending parliament, accommodation in constituencies or other domestic locations, domestic travel and international travel and accommodation.

There are some common features across the example parliaments covered in this paper:

- Provisions for accommodation when attending parliament, either through allowances or properties owned by the parliament. This often has options for members to either lease a property (continuous accommodation) or stay in hotels (commercial accommodation).
- Eligibility for support for accommodation when attending parliament being linked to the distance of a member's primary residence or constituency from parliament.
- Reimbursement of some associated costs for members who rent a property to attend parliament; although what is included differs quite significantly. Most parliaments reimburse utility, phone and broadband costs.
- Some provision for spouses/ partners and dependants to travel to visit members at their secondary residence.
- The rate of any accommodation allowance being indexed using the rental market in a central area to parliament.
- A requirement that any travel and overnight stays claimed must be in relation to members fulfilling their parliamentary functions.
- Additional travel and accommodation provisions for office holders, including ministers, speakers and leaders of opposition parties.
- Prior approval being required for any international travel, but not always from parliamentary services. In New Zealand, approval is required from a relevant office holder within the member's party.
- Provision of a free rail pass to members

There are also a number of less common features that are noteworthy:

- Nordic nations seem unique in that they have apartments owned by parliament that eligible members are provided with for the duration of their term in office.

- A small number of parliaments reviewed provide members with the option of designating a home in their constituency as their second home in place of a home near to parliament, the costs of which can be reimbursed.
- Denmark's system has a particular focus on public transport usage. Consideration of public transport informs allocation of parliament-owned housing and what travel costs can be reimbursed.
- Some of the systems reviewed take the geographical size of constituencies into account when setting allowance levels for travel costs. Members with larger constituencies are entitled to a larger allowance in these cases, to enable them to travel around their constituency. These systems also allow members to claim costs for overnight accommodation in their constituency if it's deemed reasonable, which is often linked to being over a particular distance from their home.
- There are very different approaches to support for those with caring responsibilities or who are disabled. From the available information it is not always clear what such additional support is provided, beyond provisions for spouses/partners to claim some limited travel and accommodation costs. Some systems note that anyone with additional needs can discuss this on a one-to-one basis. Some of the Nordic examples consider caring responsibilities and health issues when determining the allocation of parliament-owned property.
- A small number of the examples included take attendance at parliament into consideration, with a penalty to those who do not attend for a defined number of days per year.
- New Zealand makes specific provision for uprated allowances in certain circumstances, including large events and unavoidable late bookings, which can impact on hotel rates.