

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

Agreed by the Speaker and the House of Commons Commission, March 2007

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.