

### 63) THE NEONATAL EXPENSES FUND - The latest in a series of articles by Iain Gregory of Caithness CAB

I always get up at 5am but on Saturday decided to have an extra 10 minutes thinking time. This did not go down well with the cats who detached themselves from Liz's pillow and stood on my chest – as they weigh a good 5kg each I was well aware of this. They then proceeded to pat me on the nose and, when that failed to get a response, attacked my feet. I gave up and minutes later two heads were buried in feeding bowls whilst I mainlined caffeine, had a quick shave, shower and breakfast and headed for Dornoch to meet John and Don for a day's hike. Traffic was very heavy and slow and I was so bored I even switched on the radio (I normally just listen to the engine), but the airwaves were filled with politicians blaming each other for things so I turned it off.

It struck me that the only disadvantage of living in Caithness is that it can take a long time to get down the line and at CCAB we often have inquiries from people who need to get to Raigmore Hospital to visit a sick relative and who simply do not have the money. One of the most distressing situations is when a new-born baby is involved and the parents naturally want to spend every possible minute with the wee soul. Well, happily help is at hand. The Scottish Government have introduced a humane and very sensible scheme to help parents (and guardians) whose premature or ill new-born baby is in hospital. This is not widely known yet because the fund only commenced on 01/04/18, but I suspect it is going to be very relevant to Caithness Families. The Neonatal Expenses Fund is designed to make sure that parents can visit – every day if they wish – for as long as the baby is in hospital. You can claim for a return journey and for meals each day. OK, the meals allowance is only £8.50 and the mileage paid is only 14p per mile, but it means that folk can manage and it will make a huge difference to them. Return bus / train fares are covered, but things like overnight accommodation are not, although you can claim for car parking charges. Taxi fares are only payable if authorised by hospital staff – say for example that there was no public transport available and the need to get to the hospital was urgent, or mum's medical condition was such that a taxi was vital. Airfares can also be claimed, but only when there is no realistic alternative – for example if the parents live on an island and have to get to a mainland hospital.

You need to claim within 3 months of the baby's discharge from hospital and you need to keep receipts for meals and so on, but you can claim at intervals throughout baby's stay – weekly or daily if you wish. You can download the claim form (which needs to be signed by a hospital medical professional) from <https://www.mygov.scot/neonatal-expenses-fund/> or get one from the hospital. CCAB will happily get one for you as well.

And don't forget our Katrina at CCAB is always there to help if you have a young family and need some financial, budgeting or debt advice – just phone her.