

# Consultation on IPSA's publication policy for MPs' business costs and expenses

May 2018



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## Introduction

1. IPSA's publication scheme sets out what we will and will not publish (including what we will redact) about MPs' business costs and expenses. This consultation seeks views on a small number of proposed changes to the policy.

## Background

2. Transparency lies at the heart of IPSA's approach to the regulation of MPs' business costs and expenses and is crucial to its effectiveness. We have a legal duty to publish information under the [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#) and the [Parliamentary Standards Act 2009](#). However, since we began our operations, we have seen the publication of information as more than a legal obligation. We believe strongly that the public has the right to know how taxpayers' money is being spent by MPs and by IPSA itself. Transparency is an important regulatory tool. The fact that the detail of MPs' claims are published, and can be viewed by anyone online, provides an incentive for self-regulation by MPs before claims are even submitted to us.
3. During our first parliament, starting in November 2010, we published over 900,000 claims made by MPs and their staff for the business costs to support their parliamentary work. We have now published over a million claims made by MPs. Every two months, we publish the claims for the two months from four and five months previously. So, for example, on 10 May 2018, we published the claims for December 2017 and January 2018. These are all available on our website: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/mp-costs>.
4. In addition to the two-monthly cycle of publication, we publish MPs' annual spending for the previous financial year every autumn, along with some information on staffing and, historically, landlords.
5. IPSA first consulted on its proposed publication scheme in June 2010, both for MPs' costs and expenses and IPSA's own activities<sup>1</sup>. The key question concerned what information should and should not be redacted. Like all public bodies, we have responsibilities under the [Data Protection Act 1998](#) to protect people's personal information. The first principle of data protection is that personal data shall be processed fairly and lawfully. Public interest can be taken into account, but data must not be used in ways that have unjustified adverse effects on the individuals

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<sup>1</sup> Previous consultations held on IPSA's publication policy can be found at: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/publications/consultations/publication-policy>.

concerned. So we are careful to redact sensitive personal information, such as MPs' financial details and personal addresses, from the information we publish.

6. Over time, we have refined the way we present data about MPs' expenditure, including, for example, by providing the public with the ability to transfer data onto a spreadsheet for further analysis. As our approach to regulation evolved and the appetite for information that IPSA held grew, we conducted a second review in 2014. This sought to take into account a sharp increase in the number and complexity of FOI requests we had received, by making public on a regular basis the sort of information commonly being requested. Between 2014 and 2015, we began publishing additional information, including: details of MPs' landlords, budget uplifts and reductions, sums written off, contingency applications, details of MPs' staffing arrangements, reward and recognition payments and details of historic mortgage interest subsidies.
7. In 2016 we conducted our third review. This sought to improve our publication processes and take account of the fact that we now publish redacted images of receipts on request, following the Court of Appeal's judgement on this matter in April 2015. The subsequent policy, which came into effect in April 2017, is our current policy: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/media/1607/ipsa-publication-scheme-april-2017.pdf>

### **Security concerns**

8. We take the security of MPs, their staff and family members very seriously. Our publication policy clearly states that IPSA will not publish information that the police advise poses a risk to MPs' security, or that of their staff or family. In this respect, our policy states that we will not publish:
  - a. any details concerning the Security Assistance budget, from which IPSA funds the cost of certain security measures required at MPs' constituency offices and accommodation;
  - b. details of MPs' private addresses, other than the town or city and the first part of the postcode;
  - c. car registration numbers, and specific journey times;
  - d. individual travel claims made by MPs representing constituencies in Northern Ireland;
  - e. names, addresses or other contact details of small suppliers with regular access to MPs' homes; and
  - f. the names of hotels or members' clubs at which an MP stays in London or their constituency.
9. Following the murder of Jo Cox MP in 2016, last year's terrorist attack in Westminster and a general increase in security concerns, in March 2017 we reconsidered some of the specific information we publish. We sought the advice of the National Counter

Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO). They did not suggest any specific amendments to our publication policy, but recommended that IPSA should consider potential, as well as actual, risk in the way we publish data. They said that this should be done proactively, rather than only relying on an MP to identify something which presents a risk and request its removal.

#### *Mileage claims*

10. On this basis, we took the decision to immediately stop publishing any information about the places MPs travel to or from when they claim mileage. This was in response to concerns that this information could be used to identify locations which MPs may frequently visit.
11. We are shortly to implement a new online claims system which will not require MPs to insert information about where they travel from or to, other than from a pre-determined list of locations (e.g. 'office'). As such, we consider there to be limited risk that any future mileage claim details could cause security risk, and so we do not consider any amendment to the publication policy is required.

#### *Landlord names*

12. The names of landlords from whom MPs rent accommodation have only been published proactively, once a year, since the 2015 General Election. They were first published, as the result of a Freedom of Information request, in November 2012. But it made sense to publish this information proactively to avoid the need to respond to FOI requests at random. Following a public consultation on our publication policy in 2014, we began the annual publication of landlords' names in 2015. In addition to landlords' names, we published the first part of the postcode for properties where IPSA funds are used to pay the rent.
13. We wrote to MPs and their landlords in advance of each publication to notify them that their details would be published. If they had valid security concerns, we did not publish the name of the landlord. We also removed landlord names which make it clear where the MP's residence is. The details of all other MPs' landlords were published in our annual publications in 2015 and 2016.
14. Given the current security climate, MPs have become increasingly concerned about the publication of landlord names and the risk that their address could be identified, despite the opportunity for them to tell us about individual risks so that we can redact names where appropriate. Taking this into account, we decided in March 2017 to stop publishing landlord names. This removed any potential for information to be published which enables an MP's address to be identified.

15. We believe that we need to balance our commitment to transparency against the needs of MPs to be supported in carrying out their parliamentary activities without unduly risking their security. As such, with security concerns currently paramount, we propose to amend the publication policy to reflect the fact that we will no longer publish landlord names.

QUESTION 1: Do you agree that the publication policy should be amended to remove from the list of information we publish the names of landlords from whom MPs rent accommodation?

## Other publication issues

### *Direct suppliers*

16. IPSA can make payments directly to a number of suppliers on behalf of MPs, removing the need for an MP to pay, claim or provide evidence; instead, the necessary information is provided to us by the suppliers, and the relevant amounts are charged to the MP's budgets and published on our website.
17. Our current publication policy states: 'all claim details entered onto IPSA's online expenses system by MPs or their nominated proxies' (paragraph 6). For the sake of accuracy, we propose to include in this part of the policy that the claim details we publish include those purchased directly from suppliers, as well as all those entered onto the online expenses system by MPs and their nominated proxies. This will not result in any addition to what we publish, but rather clarify what we already do.

QUESTION 2: Do you agree we should include reference to direct suppliers in our publication policy for the sake of clarity and accuracy?

QUESTION 3: Are there any other issues relating to the publication of MPs' business costs and expenses which you wish to raise?

## How to respond

18. This consultation runs from 10 May to 15 June 2018. You can respond via the online survey available at: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/publications/consultations/>
19. You can also send your response by email to [consultation@theipsa.org.uk](mailto:consultation@theipsa.org.uk), or by post to:  
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