



Minute

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of IPSA Monday 11 November 2013

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| Present | Sir Ian Kennedy, Chair Sir Neil Butterfield [items 3.4 – 5] Liz Padmore Anne Whitaker Tony Wright Andrew McDonald, Chief Executive Briony Carew, Policy Manager Tony Hodges, Policy and Communications Officer Tony Lord, Head of Policy | Mark Anderson, Head of Communications Julian Muller, Head of IT and Data Security [item 3] John Sills, Director of Policy and Communications Nick Lee, Head of Board and Chief Executive Office |
| Apologies | Belinda Brown, Director of People, Performance and Pay Philip Lloyd, Director of Finance and Operations | |
| Status | As approved for publication following the meeting of the Board on 20 February 2014. | |
| Publication | For publication no later than 19 March 2014. | |

1. Welcome

1.1. The Chair welcomed the Board to the meeting.

Declarations of interests

1.2. There were no new declarations of interest.

2. Review of the *MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses*

IPSA/131111/2 + annex A – Review of the Scheme 2013/14: Final draft consultation document

2.1. The Policy Manager introduced the final draft consultation paper with respect to the review of the *MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses*.

Name of the Scheme

2.2. The Board noted that:

- one MP had asked that IPSA refer to business costs as 'operating costs' on the ground that MPs did not operate a business; and
- while it did not propose further to amend the title of the Scheme, it would be important to continue to stress that business costs as described in the Scheme represented the necessary costs of an MP carrying out his or her parliamentary functions.

Use of volunteers

2.3. The Board noted that, with respect to MPs who chose to make use of volunteers or engage staff and describe them as interns, it was ultimately a matter for them to make the necessary judgements about the status of the individual in question.

Referendum on Scottish independence

2.4. The Board agreed that the question in the consultation paper with respect to the imposition of restrictions on spending related to the Scottish independence referendum should be an open one, providing the legislative context in which the question was asked.

2.5. The Board agreed to approve the consultation paper, subject to the minor amendments agreed and subject to the final signoff of the Chair.

Briony Carew to arrange for signoff and publication of final draft consultation on the Scheme.

3. Publication policy

IPSA/131111/1 + annexes A – H – Publication policy

Data breach

3.1. The Head of Communications reported that:

- an error had recently been identified where a mistake during redaction had led to the inappropriate publication on a piece of data;
- assurance work had been carried out to review data previously published to identify if other such errors existed and, if so, to address them;
- a number of errors had been identified and these had been removed from the live website. IPSA's contractor was now carrying out a search to identify any other problems or possible problems with respect the more than 600,000 lines available on the publication website. Any further steps necessary would be taken following this search; and
- greater automation would be introduced so as to reduce the risk of inappropriate publication of data in the future.

3.2. The Board agreed to note the report and the steps being taken to address it.

Nadhim Zahawi MP

3.3. The Board noted that:

- there had been significant recent coverage of claims by Nadhim Zahawi MP with respect of residential accommodation in his constituency with respect of which he made claims from IPSA;
- where MPs owned a property either in London or in their constituency, they were entitled to claim for costs associated with that property (e.g. utility bills) but not for the cost of that property itself (i.e. the mortgage); and
- it had previously agreed to review in due course the level of the budget for associated expenditure available to MPs as part of the review of accommodation.

Publication policy

3.4. The Director of Policy and Communications introduced a paper setting out the issues for consideration as part of the review of IPSA's publication policy. He noted, in particular, that:

- work would continue to prepare a consultation paper ahead of IPSA's learning the decision of the Upper-Tier Tribunal. That paper might need to be adjusted in the light of the Tribunal's decision, and the Board would have a further opportunity to decide how to proceed once the decision was known; and
- in the light of the Board's discussion, a draft consultation paper would be brought to the meeting of the Board in February 2014 for further discussion.

3.5. The Board noted that:

- underlying the policy on publication was an assumption in favour of transparency, reflecting IPSA's duties under the Parliamentary Standards Act as amended, the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act;
- the publication policy would be revised throughout so as to reflect the fact that IPSA paid both MPs' costs *and* their expenses;
- the data published by IPSA would ordinarily only capture that under its control (so, for example, it would not include ministerial salaries, which were outwith IPSA's remit); and
- with the exception of claims relating to disability and security, all claims were published, including those designated as 'not paid' or which were subsequently repaid by MPs, reflecting a focus on providing data about transactions without editorialising or reaching any judgements about any particular claims.

Publication of MPs' costs and expenses

3.6. The Policy and Communications Officer noted that there were a number of different types of data about MPs' claims which IPSA held but which it did not actively publish. These included, for example, the names of landlords, or the approximate location of residential accommodation with respect of which costs were claimed.

3.7. The Board noted that:

- MPs were expected to notify suppliers that their details might be published in response to a request under the Freedom of Information Act, or published actively under IPSA's publication policy;

- with respect to MPs' offices, both the address and the name of the landlord would be released if the former was in the public domain. The details of home offices were not, however, actively published; and
- because the number of hours in individual contracts varied, it was not possible consistently to show the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff employed by each MP.

3.8. The Board agreed to consult on the publication of the level of each budget available each year to each MP, after uplifts (e.g. through the contingency process, or as a consequence of having dependents registered) had been applied.

Publication of the 'notes' field

3.9. The Board noted that:

- IPSA did not currently actively publish the notes field attached to claims, which provided a more detailed layer of information on claims in addition to that which it currently published; and
- to publish this field would increase transparency but would also significantly increase the amount of data needing to be checked and redacted before publication and the risk of a data breach arising from a redaction error, the consequences of which were potentially serious.

3.10. The Board agreed:

- that it was important that the description of any claim made clear the purpose of the expenditure incurred;
- not actively to publish the notes field; and
- nevertheless to provide better guidance to MPs on the appropriate usage of this field, bearing in mind the possibility of IPSA's being required to disclose data entered in this field in response to a request under the Freedom of Information Act.

Kelvin Launchbury / John Sills to arrange for improved guidance on the use of the description and notes fields within the online expenses system.

Information about IPSA

3.11. The Board noted that given the context in which IPSA operated, it was important to provide a high level of transparency about its own administration.

3.12. The Board agreed the proposed amendments to the publication scheme with respect of information about IPSA.

Nick Lee to circulate to the Board the policy on procurement.

4. Review of MPs' accommodation: Resourcing

4.1. The Chief Executive introduced a presentation setting out resourcing pressures in 2013/14, and the implications of those pressures for the work in support of the review of MPs' accommodation. He noted, in particular, that:

- IPSA's planning reflected three priorities: preparation for a general election in 2015; driving up quality; and MPs' pay and pensions;
- in addition to these priorities, a number of additional in-year pressures had placed a strain on resources. The decision of the Upper-Tier Tribunal and the need to move to new accommodation might create additional burdens before the end of the financial year, but the timing of these was not yet clear;
- nevertheless, good progress was being made against the corporate plan's priorities; and
- it would be difficult for IPSA to implement new policies (particularly if they represented a significant departure from IPSA's earlier approach) before the General Election if they were not decided by March 2014 at the latest.

4.2. The Board agreed, with respect to the review of MPs' accommodation:

- that it was important that decisions about the timing of policy work be taken in the light of the resources available to carry out that work;
- ahead of the General Election expected to take place in May 2015, to prioritise the review of the rules governing the rental of offices from political parties, the possibility of introducing a flat-finder service and a review of accommodation budgets; and
- following the General Election, to undertake a full review of MPs' accommodation.

John Sills to circulate a note confirming the timetable for the review of MPs' accommodation.

5. Any other business

5.1. There was no other business.

Meeting closed.