

BOARD PAPER	
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OFFICIAL – SENSITIVE

DATE: 30 March 2022

SUBJECT: Update - Publication

PURPOSE: For discussion

ANNEXES: Updated Publication Policy for 1 April

Issue

1. Following the brief discussion at the Board on 2 March, this paper provides further information on resuming bimonthly publication once security advice has been received.
2. The Board is also asked to note that its previous decisions on publication (health and wellbeing costs, reward and recognition payments etc) have been incorporated into a revised Publication Policy document which is included as an annex for the Board's information. As previously agreed, a more fundamental review of how we publish to achieve meaningful transparency is being undertaken in parallel with the regulatory review.

Brief background

3. Bimonthly publication is currently suspended whilst IPSA awaits updated security advice on our publication arrangements. Annual publication of 2020/21 claims was successfully completed in January 2022. There is less detailed information in annual publication which meant that we could publish without prejudicing the outcome of the security review.

Recommendations (including sign-off arrangements)

4. The Board is invited to consider the steps required for the resumption of bimonthly publication and agree that claims data be sent now to offices for review ahead of any changes based on security advice.
5. Once we have received the security advice, we will inform the Board of the timetabling implications for resuming publication (paragraph 12).

Current Position

6. Transparency is one of IPSA's statutory duties and an important part of our raison d'être. The Publication Policy is our statement on how we deliver this duty, and regular publication is a central part of that commitment. Our publication arrangements are currently being reviewed by the Members' Security Support Service (MSSS) in the Parliamentary Security Department as part of their wider review of physical and online security of MPs. It is anticipated that this review will be completed by the end of March.
7. The Board's steer at its meeting on 2 March was that IPSA should await the results of MSSS' security review before resuming bimonthly publication and deciding in what form this might proceed. The key consideration now therefore is around timing.
8. The suspension of normal bimonthly publication in October 2021 means that the most recent detailed claims published to date are those processed in May 2021 (published on 16 September). We have cancelled the November 21, January 22, and March 22 publications, covering claims processed from June to November 2021. This means that in early May 2022 the most recent claims published will be one-year old.
9. The publication team have been processing claims data in the usual way since the suspension took place, except for the step where we send it to MPs in advance to enable them to review what is to be published and raise any queries. In normal times we give MP offices two weeks to check their data and get back to us with any queries. There is now a significant backlog of claims, and we will need to provide offices with a longer period for checking data prior to publication.
10. Depending on the significance of any recommended changes to what is published, section 6(10) of the Parliamentary Standards Act may require us to consult on the changes prior to implementation.

Issues for consideration

Checking data

11. As mentioned above, it is important that MPs and their offices have an opportunity to review the data to be published before publication occurs. This allows them not just to check the data, but also to prepare for any public reaction to spend in that period. It is possible for the publication team to send out data for checking ahead of us receiving security advice, caveated with an explanation that what they are reviewing may not be published in its entirety, depending on whether we need to make security related changes. This has the benefit of providing offices with more time to review their data and have any resulting queries resolved.

12. Alternatively, to minimise possible confusion we could wait for the outcome of the security review, amend the data if necessary and then send to offices with a deadline of four weeks for any questions to be resolved.

Timing

13. There are a number of permutations for the timing of publication following receipt of security advice, again caveated to what the extent of the changes required are. The following are illustrative, once we have clearer information we can update the Board between meetings. At the time of writing, we assume that the publication timetable could be as follows:

Based on sending data for checking now

April	June 15	June 16	July 14/21
Publication data for June 2021 to January 2022 sent to offices for checking	Board decision on any changes to publication policy following security advice	Communicate changes to MPs and their offices highlighting data sets that have been amended/removed following Board's decision	Claims data for June 2021 to March 2022 published*

Based on awaiting Board decision prior to sending data for checking

June 15	June 16 - 17	June 16	July 14/21
Board decision on any changes to publication policy following security advice	Amend/remove claims data following Board's decision	Publication data sent to MPs and offices for checking (deadline 14 July)	Claims data for June 2021 to March 2022 published*

**Claims data relating to February and March 2022 would be ready to send to offices on 1 June to enable the complete data set to be published in July*

14. **We recommend the first option, that data is sent out to offices now to allow them plenty of time to review their data.**

Backlog

15. We have assumed that all backlog data will be published at the same time, enabling the usual cycle of bimonthly publication to resume in September. Whilst resulting in additional work for MP offices in the short-term checking more data than usual, it has the benefit of getting it over with in one go, rather than a lengthier catch up which would require offices to check more data over several cycles. We will engage with offices in advance to alert them and allow them to plan the checking work.

Alternative approach

16. There was a suggestion at the brief discussion on March 2 that we could restart publication once security advice had been received and not publish the backlog data. Although annual publication would provide some detail of the total expenditure, this would mean that there would be a significant gap in published claims data. Whilst this course of action would reduce the workload on MPs in the short term, the inevitable flood of FOI requests from those in the media and in pressure groups, would mean that we would end up having to publish the data anyway whilst also taking a reputational hit for lack of transparency. We alert MPs and their offices to imminent FOI disclosures, and so the offices would still be checking their data but in a shorter timescale.

Security Advice – No Changes

17. If we were to receive the advice from MSSS at the end of March, with no significant proposed changes to our publication data, then we could aim to restart publication in May. This would require us to send data to MPs for review in early April with publication taking place on the 26 May.

Historic Claims Data

18. Another of the actions taken when the decision was taken to suspend publication was the removal of description fields in previously published data, and the removal of answered FOI requests that included similar detail. Once security advice has been received, we will ensure that historic publications are aligned with the Board's decisions.

Customer assessment

19. There will be an impact on customers as they will be required to restart the checking process for their claims data. We are hearing that the situation in Ukraine and current issues concerning cost of living are making MP offices busy at the moment. In addition, offices are undertaking year-end tasks for the next few weeks. There is therefore the risk of damaging relationships with MPs and offices by burdening them with a significant amount of data to check.
20. In mitigation, offices value the opportunity to review data ahead of publication and see it as an important task. We will ensure that offices are alerted in plenty of time to the resumption of publication to enable them to plan accordingly and lessen the impact.

Communications assessment

21. There has been some media criticism of the decision to suspend bimonthly publication, with unfounded assertions that this suspension was a dilution of IPSA's commitment to transparency. Although we have made the rationale clear for our actions, the wider external environment of cynicism concerning standards in public life means that this is seen in a similar vein. The following extract from the Spectator is a good example of this growing sentiment:

The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) 'paused' publication of individual claims in November, following the murder of Sir David Amess at a surgery in his constituency. Five months on, there is still no sign of this information being released, despite IPSA being founded in the wake of the 2009 expenses row to hold MPs to account. The last publication of expenses was May 2021...

Nearly half-a-year-on, IPSA is now refusing to say when details of expense claims will be released, only claiming that it will be in the 'new financial year' i.e anywhere between April 2022 and April 2023. All this at the same time as IPSA has quietly pulled its Freedom of Information log from its website, meaning that users can no longer see which FOI replies have been published on there since the 2019 general election. So much for the disinfectant of sunlight!

22. We will engage through formal and informal channels to ensure that offices are aware of the resumption of publication, with a clear explanation of any decisions taken based on security advice. This will be particularly important if the advice we receive may be perceived as reducing the amount of information we publish and, in some way, shielding MPs from scrutiny.

ANNEX A: (if applicable)

IPSA Publication Policy – MPs’ Staffing and Business Costs

Section A - Introduction and general principles

1. This document sets out IPSA’s policy on the publication of information on the spending of public funds by MPs, in accordance with the Scheme of MPs’ Staffing and Business Costs (‘the Scheme’). It supersedes all previous policy statements on the publication of MPs’ costs.
2. We will publish information about claims made by MPs, under the Scheme, in regular cycles.
3. Claims will not be published when Parliament is dissolved, or on a day when local, devolved assembly or parliamentary elections are being held.
4. IPSA is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and will handle each request under that Act on a case-by-case basis.
5. IPSA will not publish information that contravenes its responsibilities under data protection law; **that would be subject to an exemption under FOIA**; or that the police advise poses a risk to MPs’ security, or that of their staff or family.

Section B - What we will publish

6. All claim details entered onto IPSA’s online system by MPs or their nominated proxies (with the exception of the information we have specifically chosen not to publish as laid out in Section C below), or items purchased through direct suppliers. This includes claims which have been approved, those which have been refused and those which have subsequently been repaid to us. This does not include items which the MPs have used their IPSA payment cards to pay for, but have chosen not to claim, committing instead to making a repayment. Items purchased through direct suppliers will be published once the necessary information has been provided to us by the relevant suppliers.
7. The maximum budget available and total spend for each MP, in each budget category.
8. Any uplift applied for by MPs, including whether it was a successful or unsuccessful application for contingency funding, or related to the registration of dependants.
9. The aggregate total¹ claimed by all MPs from the Disability and Security budgets.
10. **The aggregate total claimed by all MPs from the MP Parental Leave and Absence Budget.**
11. **The aggregate total claimed by all MPs for staff health and welfare costs.**

¹ An aggregate total is defined as the sum of all MPs’ spending over a financial year, under a specific budget category, but with no breakdown of individual MPs.

12. The aggregate totals for travel claimed by each MP representing a constituency in Northern Ireland, broken down by expense type and journey type. The travel claims of other MPs are published in the same way as other claims.
13. The aggregate total each MP has spent on payroll costs from the following:
 - a. Staffing budget
 - b. Staff Absence budget
 - c. Winding Up budget
14. The following information concerning MPs' staff members on the IPSA payroll:
 - a. Their job title
 - b. Whether they are full time or part time
 - c. Whether they were employed for the whole financial year
 - d. For connected parties² only, the salary received (within a £5,000 bracket)
 - e. For connected parties only, the name of the staff member
15. The total value of all reward and recognition payments made by each MP in a year.
16. MPs' salaries and any additional allowances or payments received.
17. Any deposit loans made to MPs which are outstanding at the end of the financial year.
18. Any amount of money overdue for repayment to IPSA by an MP, including information on why the money needs to be repaid. This will only be published after the MP has had a reasonable amount of time to respond or repay. We will begin publishing this information following the launch of IPSA's new IT system.
19. Any sums of money owed by MPs which IPSA has decided not to recover and which have been written off.

Section C - What we will not publish or will redact (as appropriate)

20. Personal data, where it would contravene any of the data protection principles in the Data Protection Act.
21. The receipts or other supporting documentation provided by MPs in support of their claims, although we will release this information in the event of a Freedom of Information request (subject to the standard exemptions under the Freedom of Information Act).

² A connected party is defined as a spouse, civil partner or cohabiting partner of the MP; a parent, child, grandparent, sibling, uncle, aunt, nephew or niece of the MP or of a spouse, civil partner or cohabiting partner of the MP; or a body corporate, a firm or a trust with which the MP is connected as defined in section 252 of the Companies Act 2006.

22. Any details concerning the Security or Disability budgets. Instead we will publish the aggregate totals claimed by all MPs each financial year.
23. Specific details of any Disability Assistance.
24. MPs' private addresses, other than the town or city.
25. Any customer, account, invoice or policy numbers, or any other serial numbers that may be traced back to sensitive personal data, such as TV licence numbers or flight numbers.
26. MPs' email addresses, telephone numbers or fax numbers, and those of their staff.
27. MPs' financial details such as credit card or bank account details, or those of their staff.
28. MPs' car registration numbers, and those of their staff.
29. Specific journey times.
30. Individual travel claims made by MPs representing constituencies in Northern Ireland (or claims made for their staff and dependants). We will instead publish aggregate totals of these claims, broken down by MP, expense type, traveller type and journey type.
31. The names, addresses or other contact details of small suppliers with regular access to MPs' homes. The names and details of all other suppliers may be published if we publish their invoices or receipts or if they are included in the claim details. It is the responsibility of MPs to notify their suppliers, where appropriate.
32. The names of office cleaners or cleaning companies.
33. The names of hotels or members' clubs at which an MP stays in London or their constituency.
34. The names, including full names, first names, initials or surnames of any staff on the MP's payroll.
35. The salaries of staff on an MP's payroll (except those of connected parties, which are published in brackets of £5,000).
36. The names of MPs' children and spouses or partners.
37. MPs' signatures.
38. The full names of junior staff on company invoices or receipts, as they may not reasonably expect their names to be made public. This does not apply to the names of self-employed people who invoice MPs.
39. The bank account number and sort code of sole traders who invoice MPs. This does not apply to account names.

40. Details of claims which have not yet been finalised. We will only publish claims once they have been through any review process and the final outcome has been determined. Only the final outcome will be published.
41. Information about an item which the MP has used their IPSA payment card to pay for, but has chosen not to claim the cost of from us, committing instead to make a repayment. Exceptionally, this information may be published if the MP does not make a prompt repayment (as outlined in paragraph 18).
42. Items on a receipt or invoice which the MP has not claimed for. Although we can redact separate items, it will not be possible to redact single items which have been claimed in part (for example, we would redact a mini bar item which has not been claimed, but we would not redact a £170 hotel room bill, where only £150 has been claimed).
43. Internal notes made by IPSA system administrators, except where necessary for a claim to be understood.

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