

# Building public confidence through meaningful transparency

A consultation – October 2026



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## Consultation: Building public confidence through meaningful transparency

### Introduction

1. This consultation sets out IPSA's intention to develop a new Transparency Strategy and asks whether our proposed objectives, design principles and priorities for this strategy would help us provide meaningful transparency about parliamentary funding and IPSA's work.
2. It also sets out proposed changes to the way that funding data is currently published, including how this should evolve along with expected changes to IPSA's operating model.

### Background

3. Transparency is at the core of IPSA's purpose. Our founding legislation, the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, set a general duty for IPSA to carry out its regulatory and support activity transparently (as well as efficiently and cost-effectively). This duty of transparency is strengthened by the statutory requirement to publish information about the funding provided to MPs, in a way IPSA considers appropriate. This sets a clear duty of transparency and publication while leaving it to IPSA's judgement how and when such information is published.
4. IPSA's [Publication Policy](#) sets out the information that will and will not be routinely published, as well as the frequency of publication. Currently, publication of information relating to most categories of funding takes place every two months, with the exception of a few cost types, such as staff payroll information, rent and travel costs. Requests for funding which have not been allowed because they are outside of the regulatory rules are also published with the bimonthly cycle. Each year, normally in the autumn, IPSA publishes annual information covering the previous financial year, including each MP's total spend against budget in each category, applications made for additional funding, and outstanding loans (for example, deposits for rental accommodation).
5. The information is published on the IPSA website, with dedicated pages for each MP's staffing and business costs. Published data largely reflects the information input into IPSA's online system by the MP or their proxy (i.e. a member of staff authorised by the MP to undertake certain administrative tasks on their behalf), including in free-text description fields. We redact information which could identify individuals, contrary to IPSA's data protection obligations, or for security reasons.

6. Over the years, changes to the Publication Policy and presentation of data have reflected IPSA's evolving understanding of the impact of the information it publishes. This includes where data and information could be misinterpreted out of context, or where publication could create a security risk to MPs, their family members or their staff.
7. As part of our wider work to improve the way we regulate and support MPs, we have also considered how to ensure our publication function provides not just data, but meaningful information to members of the public about IPSA's regulatory role, the funding we provide to MPs, and how it is used.
8. We have listened to feedback about the detrimental impact that publication of staffing and business costs can have, where data is taken out of context or used to support the spread of misinformation. MPs and their staff have told us that they often need to 'defend' expenditure that is legitimate and within the rules, in the face of criticism which, at the extreme, can lead to abuse and threats of violence. In some cases, this may discourage them from accessing legitimate funding.
9. In the past few years, we have adjusted our publication approach, including the following changes:
  - Stopped publishing detail about funding for travel by MPs, their staff members and dependents, based on advice about the potential security risks. Instead, total cost figures, broken down by travel type, are published annually.
  - Ended detailed publication of small amounts under £50, based on concerns about these amounts being misconstrued or taken out of context. Instead we aggregate these by category to be published after the end of the relevant financial year.
  - Decided to publish funding for staff training, health and wellbeing from the staff development budget in aggregate across all MPs. This removes the risk of any personal information, especially about a staff member's health, being disclosed.
10. In 2023, we also introduced additional contextual and explanatory information to accompany the publication of annual data. These [Supporting Democracy](#) reports are available on the IPSA website and shared with MPs and their staff to support them in responding to queries about their published data from members of the public and the media.
11. These incremental improvements reflect IPSA's aspiration to make this information more accessible to the public, but also a more meaningful and accurate

representation of how funding is used by MPs and their staff to deliver parliamentary work. We know there is still more to do, and IPSA's [Five-Year Strategy](#) commits us to further work to build public confidence in our role and the integrity of parliamentary funding.

12. The proposals in this consultation have emerged from a more fundamental review of transparency and publication at IPSA. We believe it is time to take a step back and consider how data publication contributes to IPSA's transparency functions as a whole. Over the coming period, we intend to make continual improvements to the way IPSA delivers transparency, building on the responses from this consultation as well as the implementation of a new website, increased engagement with members of the public and other future developments.

## How to respond

13. We are keen to hear the views of members of the public, MPs, their staff, and our wider stakeholders on the proposals in this consultation document. We would also like to hear views about any positive or negative impacts on protected characteristic groups, feeding into an Equality Impact Assessment on the changes proposed in this consultation.
14. You are strongly encouraged to use our [online survey](#) to submit your response. Please do not send us responses by post, as this may delay consideration of your views.
15. If you require reasonable adjustments to enable an alternative response, you can email us at [consultation@theipsa.org.uk](mailto:consultation@theipsa.org.uk), and a member of our team will contact you to coordinate your response.
16. We will summarise the responses we receive when we publish our decisions. In doing so, we may refer to individual respondents and the content of their responses. We may also publish a list of who responded. If you would like your response to be treated as confidential, please say so clearly in your response. We will not quote from confidential responses or attribute the views in them to any particular respondent.
17. Whether your response is confidential or not, we will not publish your email address or any other contact details in compliance with data protection law and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). For more information about what we do with personal data, please visit [our privacy notice](#).
18. **Please send us your response by 11:59pm on 6 December 2026.**

## A holistic Transparency Strategy for IPSA

19. The publication of data on the funding provided to MPs is an integral part of the way that IPSA ensures transparency over its activities. But we also routinely publish information about other aspects of our work – for example, minutes from IPSA Board meetings, expenses and salary information for IPSA Board members and executive leadership, and financial and corporate information published in IPSA's Annual Report and Accounts. Like other public bodies, IPSA is also subject to the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act and responds to requests for information in line with those statutory requirements.
20. These activities all respond to different requirements and follow different schedules, but ultimately, they contribute to how well IPSA is meeting its obligations to carry out its functions transparently. A Transparency Strategy would ensure these functions are carried out in a joined-up way and in line with a common set of principles. It would enable IPSA to articulate its objectives for the way it provides transparency over MPs' funding and its own work and would guide future decisions about new or existing transparency activity.
21. As high-level objectives for all transparency activity, we are proposing the following:
  - **Transparency should support accountability (MPs' and IPSA's) and drive principles-based behaviour:** MPs feel able to seek the funding they are entitled to and are comfortable to justify how they have complied with IPSA's regulatory principles. Likewise, IPSA can account for its own decisions and explain how they were fair, proportionate and in pursuit of its regulatory aims.
  - **Transparency should support external scrutiny:** Information is published in a way that is accessible, supports understanding and enables members of the public to make informed judgements about the cost of democracy.
  - **Transparency should be meaningful, fair and safe:** Published information tells a complete picture, reduces room for misinterpretation and does not create a risk to the safety of MPs and their staff.
  - **Transparency should support IPSA's authority and credibility as a regulator:** IPSA is positioned as the definitive source of information on MPs' parliamentary funding.
22. Following on from these objectives, we suggest that certain principles should guide the design of new or improved content. We have benchmarked against other organisations tasked with providing transparency over public spending and other leaders in this area and propose the following design principles:

|                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Narrative-led</b>         | Align contextual and explanatory information to organisational priorities and strategy and IPSA's regulatory position.                                                                            |
| <b>Tailored</b>              | Employ a layered approach that allows for different audiences and levels of engagement – e.g. high-level summaries, snapshots, filter and search functions, as well as raw data for 'superusers'. |
| <b>Accessible and visual</b> | Explain terminology in plain English and use technology to help viewers navigate and interpret data.                                                                                              |
| <b>Proactive</b>             | Anticipate topics of public and media interest, allowing IPSA to retain control over how and when data enters the public domain.                                                                  |

23. Once a Transparency Strategy has been established, it will support decisions on the priorities for transparency work over the rest of the Five-Year Strategy period (2026-2031). Currently we envisage this to include the following:

- Additional public engagement activities to support understanding and awareness of IPSA's role, the funding provided to MPs and how this supports MPs and their staff to represent their constituents
- Engagement with the media to increase understanding of how IPSA regulates and our role in the wider landscape of ethics and integrity in public life
- Developing different forms of collateral to help visualise MP funding data, infographics and explainers
- Capitalising on a new IPSA website, which we expect to be built in 2027, including new, more flexible functionality, better searchability and spaces to accommodate different types of information for different audiences.

**Question 1: Do you agree with the proposed objectives and design principles that should guide IPSA's transparency activity?**

**Question 2: What should IPSA's priorities be over the Five-Year Strategy period to improve transparency and support public confidence in parliamentary funding?**

## Proactive publication of MPs' staff workforce information

24. In general, IPSA puts information into the public domain in one of two ways: proactively, in line with the Publication Policy and other processes; and reactively, in response to FOI requests and other data requests including Parliamentary Questions.

25. One area which is often the subject of data requests is information about the MPs' staff population – for instance, requests for data on turnover (i.e. how many MPs' staff have left their roles over a certain period), for average salaries and for basic demographic information on gender and age. While neither IPSA nor MPs as employers are subject to statutory requirements to publish gender pay gap information, this is also sometimes the subject of data requests.
26. We are proposing to increase the amount of non-personal (anonymised) information about the MPs' staff population that we publish proactively. Where information is likely to be released anyway in response to ad-hoc requests, proactive publication would allow us to retain control over the timing and format of how such information becomes public. For example, information would be published to a regular schedule and accompanied by relevant contextual and explanatory information, to reduce the risk of misinterpretation.
27. This proactive publication of staffing information could take place annually – as part of the 'thematic' annual publication described later in this consultation document – and cover the following:
- Numbers of staff in each of the seven standard job roles as at the end of the financial year (31 March)
  - Staff turnover figures for the financial year (across all offices)
  - Basic demographic information about age and gender of staff members as at 31 March
  - Gender pay gap across all MPs' staff as at 31 March.
28. Following a consultation in 2024, IPSA is currently trialling the voluntary collection of additional demographic information from staff members, including ethnicity, sexual orientation and marital status. Whether this continues in the longer term will depend on take-up and evaluation of the trial period. In the event IPSA does decide to continue collecting this information, we will consider whether to also release additional categories of demographic information about MPs' staff with this proposed proactive publication.
29. The way that IPSA publishes information about funding for MPs' staff – including salaries and employer 'on-costs' (i.e. employer National Insurance and pension contributions) is the subject of frequent feedback. This is discussed further below.

**Question 3: Do you agree that, in order to control how and when information about the MP staff workforce is shared, IPSA should publish this information proactively?**

## **Question 4: Are there other categories of information that should be published proactively?**

### **The timing and format of publication about MPs' funding**

#### **Frequency of data publication**

30. Since 2010, IPSA has published detailed data on MPs' funding every two months, with an annual publication event covering certain data (such as annual totals) for the previous financial year.
31. The bimonthly cycle was established as IPSA considered it to strike the right balance between publishing information too regularly, so as to become less meaningful, and publishing an overwhelming amount of data in one go. Bimonthly data covers a two-month period and is published around four to five months after the relevant costs have been processed. Publication happens on the second or third Thursday of the month according to an established schedule. Prior to publication, data is made available to MPs and proxies to review, at least three weeks in advance. Internally, preparation of the data follows a strict timetable to ensure that it can be reviewed, redacted, formatted and thoroughly checked.
32. We think there is a case to reduce the frequency of this detailed data publication. Over the past few years, IPSA has moved toward annual aggregation of certain cost types, whether for security reasons or to improve accuracy. Examples include travel, rental costs and items under £50. This has meant significantly fewer lines of data being made available at bimonthly points, with aggregated information appearing only at the annual publication. Those lines remaining in the bimonthly cycle can therefore appear artificially out of context against an MP's wider funding.
33. Publishing larger datasets less frequently should provide a more rounded picture of funding and may make it easier for members of the public to understand funding information in context and identify trends over time.
34. We are proposing to move to a 'triannual' cycle of data publication, meaning publication every four months, or three times a year. Our initial proposal is that publication would take place as follows:
  - March (covering data processed in August-November)
  - July (covering data processed in December-March)
  - November (covering data processed in April-July).
35. Reducing the frequency of publication would mean fewer points in the year when MPs might have to respond to media or other external questions about their data. On

the other hand, it could impact on MPs and their proxies (staff members delegated certain responsibilities by their MP) in having to review a larger dataset before each publication.

**Question 5: Do you agree that the frequency of detailed data publication should be reduced from six times a year to three times a year?**

## **Making annual publication more meaningful**

36. There are certain categories of funding information that IPSA publishes annually reflecting a whole financial year; including the salary paid to individual MPs; the total funding for staff payroll in an MP's office; the total amount paid by an MP in reward and recognition payments; annual rental costs for an MP's constituency office and/or parliamentary accommodation; total travel costs broken down by type; and total spend against each capped budget for the year. In past years this annual publication has normally happened in November, and timing is in part linked to IPSA's financial year-end process, ensuring that the data reflects the final position once accounting corrections have been made.
37. Annual publication provides important transparency over how public money has been used during a given financial year and also provides the opportunity to publish certain information accurately and safely, i.e. without increasing the security risk to MPs or the risk of individual staff members being identified.
38. However we have long had feedback from MPs and staff that the release of so much information on one day can lead to misinterpretation and the temptation to rank MPs as more or less 'expensive' than others, without the necessary context to explain why funding levels might differ across constituencies.
39. Of particular concern has been the way that costs associated with staffing – particularly staff payroll (salaries and employer on-costs) – is presented by IPSA and what this means for how it is portrayed by the press and on social media.
40. Staff payroll costs make up nearly 80% of the total funding provided to MPs by IPSA, so while transparency about this use of public money is essential, this includes clarity about the fact that these amounts go directly to the more than 3,000 staff members whose work is vital to the functioning of UK parliamentary democracy. Although staff payroll costs are clearly identified as such on IPSA's website, this does not seem to affect the persistent notion among some media and members of the public that these are part of 'MPs' expenses' and of financial benefit to an MP personally.

41. We believe there is much more we could do to contextualise and explain the funding we provide – including why funding needs might differ between MPs’ offices – and how it contributes to the representation and support that constituents expect from their MPs. In 2023, we introduced the [Supporting Democracy reports](#) to accompany annual publication. These reports aim to counter some common myths and misunderstandings about how MPs’ funding works and to provide some contextual information on what MPs and their staff do and how funding supports this.
42. We intend to build upon this by creating new, more detailed themed reports on key areas of funding – for example, staffing, travel and running a constituency office – for each annual publication of data. These would enable more in-depth analysis of things like year-on-year trends, how MPs have used the funding provided, how the needs of constituencies differ. A thematic report on MPs’ staffing could include illustrative content about different staff roles in the office, the day-to-day work of MPs’ staff, and additional information about the staff workforce (e.g. demographics, turnover) as proposed earlier in this consultation document.
43. In the medium term, we expect that the implementation of a new IPSA website will provide the opportunity to integrate this information more seamlessly with the data itself, providing a more visual and interactive experience for users of the site to access data in the way that is most helpful and understandable. We will use insights from new public engagement activity to ensure that new ways of presenting data are accessible and meaningful to members of the public.

**Question 6: Do you have any comments about IPSA’s intention to produce thematic reports on key topics alongside annual data publication, to increase public understanding of how funding supports MPs and their staff to represent and support constituents?**

## Changes to IPSA’s operating model

44. IPSA has been changing the way it operates across a number of areas, in line with its new principles-based regulatory approach and its continuing commitment to reducing the administrative burden on MPs and their staff.

## Exceptional funding and the staffing support fund

45. In previous years, IPSA operated a ‘contingency funding’ process, which was the route for considering requests from MPs for additional funding where they had overspent (or were forecasting to overspend) their annual budget or where a cost fell outside of the Scheme rules, but which they believed was necessary to incur. In April 2026, the contingency process was replaced by a new ‘exceptional funding

framework’ as the mechanism for providing additional financial support based on consideration of individual needs and circumstances. This new framework provides a more flexible, targeted route for additional support, aligned to IPSA’s regulatory principles. Significantly for 2026-27, this includes the new ‘staffing support fund’ designed to provide additional staffing resource to offices dealing with heavy workloads and other issues requiring support.

46. Instead of reverting to a panel of senior managers as was the case for contingency applications, decision-making under the new framework sits with operational staff who have the most complete understanding of the circumstances. Instead of MPs and proxies needing to submit a contingency application form, the new framework emphasises early conversations between an MP’s office and their IPSA Account Manager or Payroll Services Officer.
47. There is also no longer a contingency budget, with additional funding provided in different ways depending on the type of support. Costs can be allocated to the staffing support fund for additional staffing resource relating to caseload and other work pressures; or a separate ‘other additional funding’ budget for support relating to office, accommodation and other non-payroll costs. Financial support may also be provided through increases to existing budgets – as is the case for support with high office rental costs – or through the transfer of funding between the office costs and staffing budgets (known as ‘virement’), where appropriate.
48. We are proposing to update the Publication Policy to reflect the fact that there are no more contingency applications from the 2026-27 financial year onwards; and that as of the 2026-27 financial year, the contingency budget has been replaced by the staffing support fund and other central funding.
49. Individual lines of funding provided to an MP in relation to office costs, accommodation and other non-payroll costs would be published according to the established publication approach. Increases to standard budgets and virement between budgets would also follow the established approach, i.e. publication of the budget amount available to an MP in each category with a short description of the reason for non-standard amounts, such as ‘Uplift to the office costs budget following a request for exceptional funding’.
50. For 2026-27, we intend to publish funding provided through the staffing support fund as an annual aggregate across all MPs, rather than reflected against individual offices. This is based on feedback about hesitancy among MPs to request additional staffing support, to avoid unfair criticism where offices struggling with heavy workloads who require support are perceived as ‘more expensive’. The staffing support fund was introduced in response to evidence of significantly increasing

workloads in MPs' offices and the consequential impacts on the wellbeing and retention of staff, and our priority now is for offices to come forward so that we can deliver this support where it is needed. Following this pilot year, we will review the effectiveness of the staffing support fund approach, including how it might evolve in future and the appropriate level of transparency over this funding.

**Question 7: Do you agree that IPSA's Publication Policy should be updated to reflect the new framework for 'exceptional funding', which replaced the previous contingency funding process in April 2026, as described in this section?**

## **Publication of centralised services**

51. A significant element of IPSA's Five-Year Strategy is the expansion of 'centralised services'. Under this model, IPSA procures and holds contracts for key services required by all or most MPs' offices, such as utilities, rather than individual offices arranging and paying for those services themselves. This should reduce the administrative burden on offices in sourcing and managing their own suppliers; reduce the need for MPs or staff to make payments and then wait for reimbursement; and would give better assurance over the value for money of such contracts.
52. IPSA has recently procured a centralised contract with Onecom for the provision of broadband services to MPs' constituency offices and parliamentary accommodation. MPs who were previously taking part in a broadband contract operated by Parliament are currently having their service transitioned to the new contract. Other MPs have also been offered to take up the centralised offer, and we expect that these numbers will increase over time as MPs' individual contract terms come to an end.
53. For the 2026-27 financial year, broadband costs for MPs who have moved from the historical Parliament broadband contract to Onecom will be covered centrally by IPSA, as a transitional arrangement. Due to the particular arrangements, we intend to publish the total amount spent in relation to these offices as an aggregate figure separate to our routine data publication process. Costs for any MPs opting into the Onecom service during the year will be published against their office costs and/or accommodation budgets according to the established approach.
54. In future years, there are likely to be multiple centralised services in operation, and we are considering how to provide transparency over such costs in the most meaningful way and in line with the objectives and design principles outlined in the first section of this consultation. Our early view is that the approach should reflect the relative balance of control over costs and support accountability of decision-making, both IPSA's and the MP's.

55. For instance, where there is a high degree of discretion for the MP to decide what funding to access via the contract, the responsibility for decisions about spending rests with both the MP – for their decision to access funding – and with IPSA – for having negotiated the contract and relevant prices. In such cases, this funding could be published against individual MPs’ budgets, while separate information regarding the contract could also be published as part of IPSA’s wider transparency activity.
56. On the other hand, where a service is offered at a standard fee or a set of standard fees based on variables such as geography, the accountability sits mainly with IPSA for having procured and agreed the contract. In this case, we could consider publication of costs relating to the service completely separate to individual MPs’ data pages – for example, a dedicated section of the site or thematic report showing information about the fee structure and which MPs had opted into the service.
57. We would need to be mindful to ensure that, even where costs are published differently depending on the funding route, the data remains coherent to users and does not increase confusion or misinterpretation.
58. We are keen to hear views from our stakeholders about whether this suggested approach to publication of centralised services would deliver meaningful and fair information, as well as supporting accountability and external scrutiny of both IPSA and MPs.

**Question 8: Do you have any comments on the proposed approach to publication of centralised services in future?**

## Equality Impact Assessment

59. We welcome views about whether any of the proposals in this consultation could have an impact, positive or negative, on equality and diversity in relation to MPs, their staff or any members of the public. This supports our objective, in line with IPSA’s public sector equality duty, to eliminate discriminatory impacts and advance equality in the way we carry out our public role.

**Question 9: What likely or actual impact do you believe the matters raised in this consultation may have on equality and diversity in relation to MPs, their staff or any members of the public?**