

## Minutes of a meeting of IPSA's Board

Wednesday 30 October 2019

**Board Members:** Richard Lloyd (Interim Chair)

Sir Robert Owen

Rt. Hon Jenny Willott

Will Lifford

**In attendance:** Marcial Boo, Chief Executive

Vicky Fox, Director of Regulation and Insight

Georgia Wilson, Director of Improvement and MP Support

Alastair Bridges, Director of Finance and Corporate Services

Head of Policy and Assurance

Head of Communications

Compliance Officer (Item 3)

Head of Human Resources (Item 7)

Head of Data, Publication, and Validation (Item 9)

Deputy Publication and Validation Manager (Item 9)

Senior Policy Adviser (Item 10)

Executive Assistant and Board Secretary (Minutes)

**Status:** Submitted for approval at the meeting of the Board on 11 December 2019

## **1. Welcome and Declarations of Interest**

- 1.1 The Interim Chair opened the meeting and invited the Board and members of staff to declare any interests not previously recorded. No declarations were forthcoming.

## **2. Minutes and Actions List**

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 19 September 2019 were approved, subject to one minor amendment. All actions were completed or in progress.

## **3. Compliance Officer's Report**

- 3.1 The Compliance Officer summarised her report and updated the Board on developments since its writing, which the Board noted.

## **4. Chief Executive's Report**

- 4.1 The Chief Executive presented performance statistics to the Board. This was a work in progress, with more to do to analyse the numbers and to present the data comprehensibly. However, the data show reducing call wait times and consistently high payroll accuracy. Improvements were noted in terms of resolving IPSA Online IT queries. The Board welcomed the report, and requested a further iteration of the performance data, with key indicators, at the next meeting.
- 4.2 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services informed the Board of the process by which IPSA would seek approval for additional election-related expenditure from the Treasury and Parliament.
- 4.3 The Chief Executive referred the Board to the application of the Scheme's rules to unusual circumstances, such as MPs who moved party or constituency or who were deselected.
- 4.4 It was recommended to the Board that the winding-up payment be made available to MPs who stand in a different constituency but are not elected, in order to provide financial assistance to former MPs while they are winding up their affairs. Paragraph 10.19 of the Scheme allows IPSA to use its discretion to grant this payment. The Board agreed and approved the recommendation.
- 4.5 After carefully considering the options, the Board also confirmed that the rules relating to the loss-of-office payment should be applied as written, with eligibility remaining conditional on the MP, as an office-holder for a particular constituency, standing in the '*same seat*', and not being re-elected. The Board stressed the importance of communicating this to MPs concerned as soon as possible.

- 4.6 The Board discussed the topic of reassurance measures, including the House of Commons Commission's request that the Board consider funding CCTV at MPs' homes. The Board concluded that it wished to consider this further at its meeting of 11 December. IPSA was liaising with the police to seek guidance on appropriate standards for the agreed reassurance measures, with a view to communicating the new arrangements to MPs in November.
- 4.7 The Board confirmed that the implementation of its earlier decision on reassurance measures in MPs' constituency offices should meanwhile proceed. A letter informing the Speaker of the Board's decision should be sent promptly.
- 4.8 The Director of Regulation and Insight noted that twenty responses had been received to the consultation on amending the confidentiality clause in MP staff contracts. Virtually all respondents were in favour. The Board confirmed that it was content for this amended clause to apply to all new members of staff after the General Election and that advice be provided to MPs and their staff on how to make the change to existing contracts of employment.
- 4.9 The Board requested and received the specific details of a partially-approved contingency application.

## **5. 2020-21 Corporate Plan**

- 5.1 The Chief Executive presented a draft plan and sought the Board's steer on IPSA's priorities for 2020-21.
- 5.2 The Board was keen to see ambitious cross-organisational priorities to improve performance and customer service in both regulatory and MP support functions, but that we needed to pace our work in line with IPSA's capacity. The plan should deliver IPSA's ambition to professionalise MPs' offices and seek value for money. The Board was also clear that a key objective was to boost IPSA professionalism, including staff development.
- 5.3 For its February Strategy Day, the Board wished to discuss in more depth what a modern, effective, impactful regulator achieving ambitious service outcomes looks like.

## **6. General Election**

- 6.1 The Director of Improvement and MP Support updated the Board on IPSA's General Election planning, and commented on its interplay with year-end preparations. The recruitment of a General Election Programme Manager was being fast-tracked.

- 6.2 She also flagged that the winding-up period would run over Christmas, with feedback suggesting that contacting landlords and making redundancies will prove challenging over this period. As such, it was recommended that the winding-up period for MPs should be extended to 29 February 2020.
- 6.3 The Board considered the financial and operational implications of extending the winding-up period. The Board agreed that the period could be extended.
- 6.4 The Board delegated internal approval of the proposal for increased expenditure on General Election-related matters to the Interim Chair and Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. It noted that the Interim Chair and the Chair of IPSA's Remuneration Committee would be meeting the executive weekly to oversee progress.

## **7. MPs' Staff Job Description and Salary Range Review**

- 7.1 The Head of Human Resources submitted a paper that noted the findings of the engagement work with MPs' staff, including a survey with six-hundred respondents, one-to-one interviews, special meetings of the MP Staff User Group, and meetings with the MPs' and Peers Staff Association (MAPSA) and the union Unite.
- 7.2 She recommended adopting changes to MPs' staff descriptions in order to modernise job responsibilities and to offer flexibility by introducing a free-text box to the contract tool. The Head of Human Resources also outlined the financial implications of Hays' recommendation to increase staff pay ranges following independent benchmarking. She asked the Board to consider the implications of these changes when considering the draft budget for 2020-21 at its December meeting.
- 7.3 The Board thanked the Head of Human Resources for her work and noted that it was particularly helpful to work closely with MPs' staff on this. The Board agreed to the recommendations on job descriptions.
- 7.4 On pay ranges, the Board sought clarification of the Hays recommendations and suggested that, for its meeting in December, the proposals display the pay bands using the upper and lower quartiles. Value for money considerations will also need to be more fully addressed in the December discussion.
- 7.5 The Board noted that it would also discuss at a future meeting wider issues relating to MPs' staff in the context of the White report.

## **8. Annual Review of Assurance**

- 8.1 The Head of Policy and Assurance presented a draft of the Annual Review of Assurance, including sample data visualisations and incorporating comments made by the Board at its 19 September meeting. The General Election had postponed publication. The Board approved publication of the review at an appropriate date in the week after the 12 December General Election.

## **9. Annual Publication**

- 9.1 The Head of Data, Publication, and Validation introduced his paper on the annual publication of aggregated business costs for 2018-19. This was originally scheduled to be published on 21 November, but it too would be published after the General Election. The Board agreed with this approach.
- 9.2 The Head of Data, Publication, and Validation provided statistics on staffing, travel, security, and disability-related expenditure. The first claims made on the new expenses system, IPSA Online, would not be published till January 2020.
- 9.3 The Board thanked the Head of Data, Publication, and Validation and his team for producing an easily digestible report, especially given the complexity of the data needed to create it.

## **10. Constituency Office Standards**

- 10.1 The Senior Policy Adviser introduced his paper which built on the review conducted in 2018. The guidance document was produced after consultation with MPs and staff and is intended to be the first iteration of evolving guidance to help MPs find good-quality office accommodation, with information on leases and security.
- 10.2 The Board suggested that the guidance be more clearly framed to support new MPs. Their queries could include whether refurbishment costs come out of the start-up supplement and how VAT is taken into account. It should also seek to dissuade new MPs from signing long-term contractual commitments given the liabilities that can follow. The Board also noted that the guidance could helpfully direct MPs to online information.
- 10.3 The Board approved the guidance, subject to minor edits and a commitment that it would be reviewed following post-election feedback and further policy work.

## **11. Scheme Changes**

- 11.1 The Head of Policy and Assurance presented a consultation document on limited changes proposed to the Scheme. This work included a focus on value for money.
- 11.2 The proposed changes sought to clarify the rules on security assistance and add flexibility in certain areas, such as on eligible properties and measures for MPs' staff. It also aimed to tighten the oversight of MPs who sublet their offices. A question remained as to whether to launch this before or during dissolution.
- 11.3 The Board suggested that it would be sensible to communicate as soon as possible that IPSA's funding of reassurance measures will proceed as planned. As the proposed consultation does not cover changes relating to these reassurance measures, only police-recommended measures would continue to be mentioned in the Scheme.
- 11.4 The Board commented on the proposed requirement of a market rate valuation if the MP is renting from their local political association and agreed that this should also be proposed as a requirement for MPs subletting to connected parties.
- 11.5 The Board approved the consultation document and its launch, including extending the deadline for responses to 31 January 2020.

## **12. Financial Position and Management Accounts**

- 12.1 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services presented IPSA's financial position. The General Election would involve significant additional costs, including winding-up payments and loss-of-office payments to MPs, and some additional organisational costs to IPSA. The Board approved the report.

## **13. Formal Approval of Accounts**

- 13.1 The Board formally approved the accounts, subject to finalising three outstanding matters.

## **14. Board Programme of Work**

- 14.1 The Board considered its Programme of Work for the remainder of 2019-20 and approved Board and Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting dates for 2020-21.

## **15. Any Other Business**

15.1 The Chair thanked Board Members for their attendance and staff for their work. The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 11 December.