

Minutes of a meeting of IPSA's Board

Thursday 19 September 2019

Board Members: Sir Robert Owen (Acting Chair)

Rt. Hon Jenny Willott

Will Lifford

Richard Lloyd

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

Research Officer (Item 4)

Senior Policy Advisor (Item 7)

Executive Assistant and Board Secretary (Minutes)

Apologies: Ruth Evans, Chairman

Status: Submitted for approval at the meeting of the Board on 30 October 2019

1. Welcome and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 The Acting Chair opened the meeting and passed on the apologies of the Chair. The views of the Chair on the day's business had been received and were referenced throughout the meeting and taken into account at appropriate points of discussion.
- 1.2 The Acting Chair 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 3 September 2019 were approved.

3. Chief Executive's Report

- 3.1 The Chief Executive noted that pressure on teams had eased since the last meeting. This was due to the hard work of teams and measures agreed by the Board in July, such as additional recruitment and extra resource to support technical system fixes. Data indicated that IPSA was providing faster, improved customer service than before summer. Feedback, both anecdotal and from the MPs' Staff User Group, suggested that MPs' staff were familiarising themselves with the system. The core of the system, such as payroll and reimbursements, continued to run smoothly. The Board welcomed the report and requested detailed KPIs and reporting data for the next meeting.
- 3.2 The Board sought further detail as to Freedom of Information requests received. The Head of Policy and Assurance gave a brief summary and highlighted the sharp rise in the past six months. The Chief Executive pointed to recent Subject Access requests, which have been resource intensive and stretched the capacity of some teams.
- 3.3 The Board was satisfied that IPSA's validation processes had identified and escalated issues to the Compliance Officer in good time.
- 3.4 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services summarised a non-reportable data breach and informed the Board of controls implemented to minimise future risks. The Board agreed with his judgment and actions in response. The Board then asked for an update on the 2017 data breach. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services summarised legal advice received and committed to work with the Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on financial considerations.
- 3.5 The Board suggested that IPSA employees could have a general objective of supporting improvements to customer service. The Chief Executive noted that all employees are already set to have an additional objective to demonstrate IPSA's values, and undertook to discuss the Board's suggestion internally.

- 3.6 The Board sought to clarify the scope of the external advice received on constituency offices. The Head of Policy and Assurance commented that it largely focused on physical features, such as location and accessibility. She would ensure that the advice aligned with that on security provided by the House. The Director of Regulation and Insight intended to accelerate this work to be ready for an election.
- 3.7 The Director of Improvement and MP Support added that the House was planning to give security and wellbeing briefings to new MPs. She had offered IPSA's support to this process and had been invited to join the House's Working Group in this regard.
- 3.8 The Board asked for an update as to the status of the budget transfer request to SCIPSA. The Chief Executive informed the Board that SCIPSA would likely ask for him to appear before its private meeting scheduled for 16 October. The Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Corporate Services agreed to work closely with the Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee when considering how to ensure readiness for an election. The Board would be kept updated on these discussions.
- 3.9 The Board received confirmation that publication of MPs' claims would not proceed if Parliament was not sitting. The Board considered the implications of potential election dates on publication more widely, noting that it may complicate year-end work.

4 Response to Gemma White QC's Report

- 4.1 The Board was keen to respond to the White report in a timely but considered way, highlighting the consultation on a proposed change to the confidentiality clause in MPs' staff contracts as an example of this. The wider strategic issues raised should be discussed at the Board's Strategy Day in January.
- 4.2 The Director of Regulation and Insight noted that political events have made the House's timetable for responding to the report uncertain, but all Speaker candidates had made tackling bullying and harassment central to their campaigns. She maintained regular contact with MAPSA and unions who welcomed IPSA's positive approach. She had held talks with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.
- 4.3 Turning to the White recommendation of potential sanctions on MPs who do not attend Valuing Everyone training, the Board endorsed the Director of Regulation and Insight's recommendation to explore this in more detail with the House.
- 4.4 On the question of collecting exit data relating to MPs' staff, the Board suggested that IPSA could provide template exit surveys for MPs interested in gathering this feedback from their departing staff. This would be voluntary, respectful of the employment relationship between MP and staff, as well as conducive to better HR practice. IPSA could explore this with staff representatives and House authorities.

- 4.5 For data collection more widely, the Board was reluctant to intrude on the employment relationship between MPs and their staff, particularly as the House's position is not yet clear. It would be inappropriate for IPSA to collect information, such as diversity data, with no clear rationale of what it intended to do with it.
- 4.6 On the White report's finding that some MPs' staff are required to undertake non-parliamentary work, the Board considered the Director of Regulation and Insight's recommendation that IPSA should undertake an assurance review in this area, but recognised that evidence could be difficult to collect if staff feel unable to respond to IPSA's questions. The Board agreed to proceed carefully and proportionately with clear guidance and potentially a pilot on conducting this work.

5 Funding of MPs' Security Measures

- 5.1 The Head of Policy and Assurance opened by making the distinction between recommended/further measures advised by the Police and reassurance measures, such as CCTV or security guards, aimed at reducing the fear of crime. The Board was invited to consider whether and how the latter could be funded. The Board reaffirmed its stance that only Police-recommended measures should be paid for from the security budget.
- 5.2 The Director of Regulation and Insight summarised correspondence with the Director of Security for Parliament on recent security incidents.
- 5.3 The Board recognised the anxiety of MPs and their staff and agreed that provision should be available for reassurance measures at constituency offices, with funding provided through a ring-fenced portion of the office costs budget. Operationalising the process for seeking, funding, and installing these new measures was to be explored in further detail.
- 5.4 The Board, however, established two conditions for the use of this funding. First, MPs must have first installed recommended or further measures advised by the Police to be eligible for any reassurance measure funding. Second, the reassurance measures should be based on independent research from criminologists or other experts as to what is effective in reducing the fear of crime.
- 5.5 The Chief Executive agreed to write to the Deputy Speaker to inform interested parties of the Board's decision.

6 General Election Planning

- 6.1 The Director of Improvement and MP Support thanked the Director of Regulation and Insight for her support in drawing on the lessons of the 2015 and 2017 Elections in preparing plans for any forthcoming election. The plan included assumptions (including an election date and projected MP turnover), which are reviewed weekly.

- 6.2 The Board was keen that IPSA benefit from opportunities provided by an election, such as the potential to implement real-time regulation, effective engagement with new MPs to help them establish professional offices, and channel optimisation to direct queries to the right forum. Clear guidance and accessible online content were crucial, as well as turning learning into continuous improvement.
- 6.3 The Director of Improvement and MP Support responded that work was underway to channel demand across teams and to improve the homepage and guidance. The Director of Regulation and Insight added that her team was looking at what real-time regulation would be feasible to facilitate the winding-up of MPs' financial affairs.
- 6.4 The Board commented on the 2017 General Election data, which showed a large increase in email queries about payroll issues. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services confirmed that all teams will be ready for an election. The Chief Executive echoed this, noting that the House believes that IPSA is well-prepared.

7 Staffing Budget Review

- 7.1 The Board discussed recommendations relating to MPs' staffing budgets, noting that final decisions would be made at later Board meetings. The Board was clear that a robust evidence base was needed before committing a permanent and sizeable increase in public funding for MPs' staffing costs. The Head of Policy and Assurance noted that submissions received following the call for evidence were not large in number and did not provide historical data. No correlation was found between constituency type and volume of casework. The Board agreed to maintain the assumption that each MP should have a budget to employ the equivalent of four full-time staff and MPs' staffing budgets should continue to be calculated using the 60th percentile of salary ranges.
- 7.2 The Board agreed that including amounts in the staffing budget for training, health and welfare was important to support the professionalisation of MPs' offices.
- 7.3 The Board were supportive of the recommendation to consult on providing additional, ring-fenced funding for paid interns. The Head of Policy and Assurance should explore if IPSA could work with the Speaker's placement scheme on this.
- 7.4 The Board did not support MPs being able to top up their budgets to employ more staff through IPSA's payroll. If granted, this could be seen as IPSA's payroll arm being used for free, including with staff potentially performing non-parliamentary tasks. It could also provide an inequitable advantage to wealthier MPs who could perhaps afford to employ more staff.

- 7.5 The Board agreed to discuss other issues relating to MPs' staff and the level of the budget at future Board meetings, including the Strategy Day scheduled for January.

8 Annual Assurance Report

- 8.1 The Head of Policy and Assurance introduced the first draft of the Annual Assurance Report. The two specific reports referred to were already in the public domain.
- 8.2 The Board offered drafting suggestions and asked that the report note IPSA's shift towards pre-payment validation. The report should also include our internal controls which check the work of validators. The Board thanked the Head of Policy and Assurance for a well-written review.

9 Financial Position and Management Accounts

- 9.1 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services noted that this month's financial figures included the internal reprioritisation of resources to focus on IPSA Online, but not the budget transfer request put to SCIPSA. Some volatility concerning MPs' staffing budgets was noted in Subhead A and would be monitored closely, as would uncapped travel expenses.
- 9.2 The Board was grateful to the Head of IT for substantial savings made, whilst maintaining progress in delivering IPSA's IT Strategy.

10 Board Programme of Work

- 10.1 The Board considered potential work on value for money. The Chief Executive agreed that this was an important piece of work, forming part of a wider question as to what model of support MPs would prefer and what level of funding they would consider appropriate. An initial discussion could take place during the Strategy Day.
- 10.2 The Board offered feedback on proposed meeting dates beyond March 2020.

11 Any Other Business

- 11.1 The Acting Chair thanked the Board and Executive for their work.
- 11.2 The date of the next Board meeting was confirmed as 30 October 2019.