

Minutes of a meeting of IPSA's Board

Tuesday 19 May 2020

By conference call

Board Members: Richard Lloyd (Interim Chair)

Sir Robert Owen

Rt. Hon Jenny Willott

Will Lifford

In attendance: Marcial Boo, Chief Executive

Alastair Bridges, Director of Finance and Corporate Services

Vicky Fox, Director of Regulation and Insight

Georgia Wilson, Director of Improvement and MP Support

Head of Communications

Head of Policy and Assurance

Executive Assistant and Board Secretary (Minutes)

Status: Submitted for approval at the meeting of the Board on 10 June 2020

1. Welcome and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 The Interim Chair opened the meeting and invited all to declare any interests not previously recorded. No such declarations were forthcoming.

2. Minutes and Actions List

- 2.1 The minutes of Board meeting of 21 April were approved, with one amendment. All actions due were completed.

3. Business Continuity Planning and Improvement Update

- 3.1 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services updated the Board on matters discussed at daily business continuity planning meetings held by the Executive. Standing items included finance and risk, stakeholder engagement, and data and cybersecurity.
- 3.2 Significant operational decisions had been taken at the meetings, such as a system change to enable claims by proxies, whose MPs were absent, to be authorised, as well as the implementation of a phone booking system to all MPs. Both measures have been welcomed by MPs' offices.
- 3.3 The Executive had also approved guidance for IPSA staff working remotely to support their wellbeing and maintain high data security standards. No reportable data breaches had occurred since the move to remote-working, with the Data Protection Officer investigating and assessing every incident in writing. The Board welcomed this and reemphasised the need to guard against risks to cybersecurity.
- 3.4 Critical workstreams, such as IPSA's organisational design and improvement priorities, were being taken forward at pace in spite of home-working. Two process improvement workshops, for example, had successfully been conducted remotely. Engagement continued with stakeholders, in particular the MP Staff User Group, MAPSA, Unite, and the Speaker's Committee for the IPSA (SCIPSA).
- 3.5 In the short-term, IPSA would continue to follow government guidance and work remotely for the "foreseeable future". The Executive was engaging with senior managers and the Staff Focus Group to discuss an outline approach to returning to the office, including staggered hours and phased return. Any such return would have

to satisfy three tests: a) that the office itself was safe, b) staff could travel safely to the office, and c) that IPSA was following government guidance.

- 3.6 Looking to the longer-term, the Executive would consider how to maintain any beneficial innovations from this new way of working. The universally positive feedback from MPs' offices for the phone booking system was an example. There were lessons on working in a more agile way too. The Board approved the approach and agreed that it was essential to capture these benefits and learnings, and for them to be included in the organisational design work underway.
- 3.7 The Chief Executive updated the Board on the improvement programme. The paper included a proposal, intended to implement a recommendation of the governance review, for the Board's Change Oversight Committee to draw on external expertise to inform their decision-making. A more detailed update on the improvement programme, including work on its data strategy, risk management, workstreams and programme governance, would be presented to the Board in June, with further papers in July.
- 3.8 The Board supported implementation of the recommendation of the governance review to draw on external expertise as proposed. It agreed that a lay member of SCIPSA and a senior person with expertise in digital service delivery should receive formal invitations to attend Change Oversight Committee meetings as non-voting observers, entitled to claim costs at the same rate as lay members of SCIPSA. The Board's standing orders would need to be amended to reflect this. In parallel, the organisation should build upon and extend its engagement with MPs and their staff in order to ensure that users of IPSA's support services are able to input into improvement work.
- 3.9 The Board asked that delivery dates be added to each element of the improvement programme. The Chief Executive assured the Board that this was a standard programme procedure. The Board also asked that the organisational design review consider the outsourcing of IPSA's payroll function. The Chief Executive agreed to do so. The Board further emphasised the importance of providing consistent advice to MPs and that IPSA should recruit permanent rather than temporary staff. The Chief Executive confirmed that much recruitment activity was being conducted on a fixed-term contract basis until the organisational design review had concluded in July. Initial evidence of applications for some posts indicated a very strong field.
- 3.10 The Board asked that, when thinking about implementing MPs' staffing budget changes in future, IPSA consider how the Welsh Assembly uprates staff pay.
- 3.11 The Director of Regulation and Insight and the Director of Finance and Corporate Services updated the Board on the workload and wellbeing of staff in their directorates. Concerns on capacity, working hours, and overtime were raised. Teams

were nonetheless delivering accurate work at speed. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services noted that May is particularly busy for the payroll team, with many salary amendment forms to process following the substantial uplift to MPs' 2020-21 staffing budget. Recognising this, further plans for improving the phone system are being developed.

- 3.12 The Board noted the good progress made by teams and took encouragement from the monthly performance data.

4. Report from SCIPSA

- 4.1 The Interim Chair summarised the SCIPSA meeting of 13 May 2020. The meeting was productive, with members of the Committee receptive and responding constructively to IPSA's clear commitment to improve. The Board welcomed this report.

5. MPs' Staffing Budgets

- 5.1 In response to feedback from MPs' offices, and following discussion at the Board's Change Oversight Committee, the Director of Regulation and Insight and Head of Policy and Assurance introduced a paper recommending a temporary and capped uplift, on an opt-in basis, to MPs' staffing budgets.

- 5.2 The Board agreed:

- a temporary uplift to the staffing budget capped at the level of the equivalent cost (salary plus on-costs) of one full-time caseworker at the midpoint of the salary range for a fixed-term period of 6 months;
- to give MPs the flexibility to use this uplift to recruit to different posts (e.g. staff with other job descriptions), but within the cap agreed above;
- to allow the use of this uplift for additional overtime or increased hours for existing staff;
- that requests to use the uplift to recruit a permanent staff member should be refused;
- that the process for making use of this uplift be streamlined and involve minimal bureaucracy. As such, only a new starter form and a fixed-term contract (stating that the funding is needed to cover increased workload as a result of the pandemic) would be required of the MP;
- that no action be taken where an MP requests an uplift for a specific purpose but uses the amount to cover other staffing costs;
- that an MP may make multiple requests during the financial year, so long as the costs do not exceed the maximum uplift amount in total.

5.3 The Board agreed to expedite a consultation with statutory consultees, rather than a full public consultation, given the urgency. It delegated the tasks of defining the period of consultation and communications to the Executive, with sign-off from the Interim Chair. Within this period, formal authority could be sought from SCIPSA and HM Treasury.

6. Draft Addendum to the Scheme

6.1 The Head of Policy and Assurance presented a redrafted addendum to the Scheme. This included greater clarity on when MPs should submit documentation for claims which they cannot currently evidence, though with discretion to extend the date where the circumstances justify. It also included the proposal to pay the HMRC home-working allowance, on an opt-out basis, to MPs' staff. Following the consultation, a final Board decision would take place in June.

6.2 The Board approved the draft addendum in principle, subject to considering further views after the consultation period. The Board noted three areas for further discussion. First, it may be helpful for the deadline for evidence to be set as the end of three months following the month in which the cost was incurred. Second, the Board sought further detail on the taxable benefit implications of the homeworking allowance if MPs' staff return in a phased way to their offices. Third, it asked the Executive to consider the payment of the allowance to connected parties in more detail. The Board emphasised that the communications of what MPs' staff cannot claim if they are in receipt of this opt-out allowance should be clear and unambiguous.

7. Report from the Change Oversight Committee

7.1 The Interim Chair and Chief Executive noted that the Change Oversight Committee now met with monthly rather than weekly frequency, in between Board meetings.

7.2 The Board received assurance that the communication to MPs of how the £10,000 office cost uplift is impacting each MP's 2020-21 budget is in hand. MPs will have the flexibility to move costs within the office cost budget, whether for the coronavirus-related uplift or not, without IPSA losing any of the detail or evidence required for audit and assurance purposes.

8. Financial Position and Management Accounts

- 8.1 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services introduced the final management account report for the 2019-20 financial year. In financial terms, it was a very eventful year. IPSA's prudent estimate had secured financial support for all General Election expenditure and, in addition, some coronavirus-related expenditure at the end of the year. Detail was provided on Subhead A and Subhead B figures. It was also noted that the decision to extend the year-end deadline from 26 April to 30 June will mean that IPSA cannot provide MPs with a definitive starting position for their 2020-21 financial year until after that date.
- 8.2 Issues raised during the interim audit had been fixed, with processes implemented to prevent reoccurrence. An outline audit timetable had been agreed with the NAO.
- 8.3 The Board noted the report, with thanks.

9. Board Programme of Work 2020-21 and Any Other Business

- 9.1 The Board considered its Programme of Work for 2020-21, in line with its revised monthly cycle. It agreed to add a progress report on the implementation of governance review recommendations to its July agenda. The Chief Executive noted that one recommendation had been fulfilled at this meeting and that work to take forward the others were planned to be implemented from June to December 2020.

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