

Minutes of a meeting of IPSA's Board

Thursday 14 March 2019

Present: Ruth Evans, Chairman
Sir Robert Owen
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
IPSA Assurance Analyst (Agenda Item 6)
IPSA Policy Advisor (Agenda Items 7 and 10)
Senior Executive Assistant and Board Secretary (Minutes)
IPSA Publication and Validation Team Member (Observer)

Status: Submitted for approval at the meeting of the Board on 08 May 2019

1. Welcome and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed those attending, inviting the Board and members of staff to declare any interests not previously recorded. No declarations were forthcoming.
- 1.2 The Board noted that a new Lay Member for the Speaker's Committee for the IPSA had been announced as Ms Cindy Butts. She would be inducted in May.

2. Minutes of previous meetings and matters arising

Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 24 January were approved as a correct record, subject to amending the names of individual attendees to their formal roles or job titles.

Actions arising from the previous meeting

- 2.2 All actions due to be completed from the previous meeting had been completed.

3. Chief Executive's Report

- 3.1 The Chief Executive reported that the last six weeks have been very demanding for IPSA staff due to the office move, the hosting of the first-ever international conference for parliamentary regulators, and the final phase of the IPSA Online programme prior to going live in April.
- 3.2 MPs' pay and staffing budgets had been announced in the last month. The announcement had triggered many responses, including a letter from Gareth Snell MP which had been co-signed by 170 MPs.
- 3.3 The IPSA Head of HR had resigned and would be leaving at the end of April. She had been a great asset to IPSA. A successor is being recruited.
- 3.4 IPSA received a Freedom of Information request regarding MPs' spending on security by political party and property type. IPSA had considered whether disclosure could be viewed as a breach of confidentiality, perhaps leading to safety concerns for those affected. The Board agreed that IPSA should be cautious in the way it handles personal data about MPs' security arrangements, while maintaining legal compliance and a commitment to transparency.

- 3.5 In relation to another FOI request, the Information Commissioner's Office upheld IPSA's decision to withhold the release of research papers from the European Research Group (ERG) pooled service. The requestor has appealed the ICO's decision to the Information Tribunal. IPSA has been joined as a respondent and is required to attend the appeal hearing in May 2019. The Board will be kept updated with developments on both FOI matters.
- 3.6 The Board welcomed that IPSA has established a data ethics framework in line with its obligations under the GDPR.
- 3.7 The Chief Executive informed the Board of the review being conducted by Gemma White QC into allegations of bullying and harassment by MPs of their staff, following his second meeting with her. Ms White was interested in IPSA's approach to MPs' staff contracts and the advice that IPSA was able to give to MPs' staff. The Board noted that IPSA would have no knowledge of any findings or conclusions of the review prior to its expected publication in May. IPSA would work with the House of Commons to be ready to respond to any recommendations arising.
- 3.8 The Chief Executive presented IPSA's new pay and reward strategy that would become effective from April 2019. The Board queried whether a £5 innovation award would be valued by staff. The Executive noted that this was a token thank-you that staff had welcomed, and that there were, in addition, other recognition payments for exceptional performance. There would, however, be no pay progression in the new strategy, but instead a biannual review of staff salaries, benchmarked independently.
- 3.9 The Board noted that IPSA's performance indicators did not currently match the organisation's business priorities. The Chief Executive reminded the Board that these would be reviewed later in 2019 after IPSA Online is launched.

4. Compliance Officer's Report

- 4.1 The Board welcomed the Compliance Officer's report. The Board noted that Chris Davies MP had been referred to the police and charged with two offences of making false instruments, contrary to the Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981 and one offence of providing false or misleading information contrary to the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009. He would appear in court on 22 March.
- 4.2 The Board considered the Compliance Officer's overview of complaints for 2018-19 and noted that there has been a significant drop in the number of complaints compared to previous years. The Compliance Officer suggested that this may be due

to the improved way in which mileage claims are now published.

5. Compliance Investigation on Johnny Mercer – Management response

- 5.1 The complaint against Johnny Mercer MP has been concluded. The closure report was presented to the Board. The Compliance Officer found a small number of claims that were outside the Scheme – one was a duplicate claim, one was submitted past the 90 day deadline, and one related to costs resulting from a hacked phone line. The MP repaid £900 to IPSA.
- 5.2 The complainant was satisfied with the outcome, but stated that the investigation should have been managed more quickly. The Compliance Officer agreed. Her team will review the timescales for completing investigations. The Board noted the management response to the investigation recommendations, as well as the planned actions and timescales.

6. Professional Services Assurance Report

- 6.1 The Assurance Analyst presented the report on claims made by MPs for professional services. The Board thanked her for her thorough work. The Board asked that IPSA review this issue again once IPSA Online has been embedded to check whether the new, more automated system would change the findings.
- 6.2 The Board noted that a number of MPs may not have the correct employment status in place for individuals providing them with professional services. The Board agreed that the responsibility for this lies with MPs and that, if HMRC finds that an incorrect employment status has resulted in incorrect tax payments, it could impose fines or charges. The Board asked the Chief Executive to issue formal guidance to MPs during 2019 on MPs' staff employment status and on HMRC policies to make it clear that this is for MPs to apply correctly to those they pay.
- 6.3 The Board also asked IPSA to review the recommendations of both the Professional Services assurance report, and the Subletting assurance report, in order to bring forward the implementation dates of the actions where possible.

7. Staffing Budget Review

- 7.1 The Board were updated by IPSA's Policy Advisor on the Staffing Budget Review. IPSA had received 156 responses to its online survey, with the call for evidence leading to 13 further responses from MPs' offices.

- 7.2 Respondents generally perceived that the volume of their parliamentary work, especially constituency casework, had significantly increased, with higher expectations from constituents. Some MPs and their staff flagged their concern that the increased volume of communication from constituents was due to cuts in social services and other public services, including to mental health or disability support, that were now being compensated for by MPs' offices.
- 7.3 The Board noted the feedback from MPs and their staff on the perceived inflexibility of IPSA's staff contract tool, and particularly that MPs' staff must select from a list of 28 potential job titles. The survey results indicated that the use of the contract tool to select appropriate job titles for MPs' staff could be too restrictive as, in reality, the boundaries between roles, job titles and responsibilities are flexible. IPSA's Head of Policy and Assurance informed the Board that IPSA would review the job descriptions available for MPs' staff on the contract tool later in 2019.
- 7.4 The Board asked that IPSA provide a further update on the staffing budget review by July 2019. The Board asked for additional analysis of the responses to the survey, for example to compare the results from inner-city and rural constituencies. The Board also asked that IPSA find out from MPs what, other than employing more staff, would make their professional lives easier.

8. Response to MPs' pay increase (2.7%) and staffing budgets (1.5%)

- 8.1 The Chief Executive updated the Board on the reaction to the announcement of MPs' salary and staffing budget increases for 2019-20. The Board agreed to meet MPs' staff representatives, including from Unite and the Members' and Peers' Staff Association, at a meeting to be scheduled on 21 March to hear about their concerns directly. This meeting would be held before the Board would confirm any decision on MPs' staffing budgets for 2019-20.

9. Constituency Mileage Pilot

- 9.1 The Policy Advisor updated the Board on the progress of the pilot to give a lump-sum allowance for MPs' mileage for journeys within their constituencies. The pilot would, from April 2019, offer a £500 (net) annual allowance to each of the 14 participating MPs. The amount had been chosen following an analysis of the previous two years' data.
- 9.2 The Board asked how we would know whether the allowance was set at the right level with a sample of only 13 MPs. The Executive said that this was an issue that would be monitored and reviewed through the pilot. The pilot was voluntary, and the Board

would be advised of the results in 2020 prior to deciding whether it should be rolled out to other MPs.

10. Annual MPs' Survey Results 2018-19

- 10.1 The Director of Regulation and Insight presented the results of IPSA's annual survey of MPs and their staff. There were 291 responses, which represented a substantial increase on last year's 93 responses.
- 10.2 The Director of Regulation and Insight highlighted that satisfaction scores among respondents were higher this year than in the two previous years. Fully 68% of respondents thought IPSA's services were either good or very good, up from 53% in 2017-18. These results were very positive.
- 10.3 Feedback on IPSA's communications had also been positive, with the survey showing that IPSA's emailed Bulletin and its Twitter feed had exceeded expectations.
- 10.4 Areas for improvement included that IPSA could have kept MPs and their staff more informed of the reasons for the delays to IPSA Online. Some MPs expressed a lack of confidence in their knowledge of the Scheme and its rules.
- 10.5 The Board were grateful for the work that had been done on the survey and for the positive results that demonstrated that IPSA was a strong, improving organisation. The Chief Executive thanked the Board for their praise. He noted that separate research from Ipsos MORI indicated that more recently elected MPs were more positive about IPSA than those who remembered IPSA's early days. He was clear that, while welcoming the latest strong results, there was still work to do to improve IPSA's reputation and operational practice.

11. Communications Strategy

- 11.1 The Chief Executive presented an updated IPSA communications strategy. He noted that the Board had last approved a full communications strategy in January 2015. More recently, in November 2018 and January 2019, the Board had discussed and approved IPSA's approach to public engagement and media handling. The existing communications strategy had served us well, but now needed to be updated.
- 11.2 The Board thanked IPSA for its comprehensive work in putting together documents that covered the full range of communications activity, including stakeholder and public engagement, as well as internal communications and media handling.

- 11.3 The Board approved the proposed actions to be ready for any media coverage of the ten-year anniversary of the MPs' expenses scandal. The Board also thanked the Executive for its work in hosting the first-ever international conference of parliamentary regulators, which would put IPSA in a strong position to demonstrate the progress that had been made since IPSA's establishment a decade ago. In particular, the Board approved the Executive's proposal to build good relationships in advance of the anniversary with key journalists and other stakeholders.
- 11.4 The Board asked that the Executive ensure that IPSA's communications strategy links clearly to the organisation's corporate strategy and business plan. The Board also asked that the strategy is shared with all staff at IPSA.

Internal Communications

- 11.5 The Head of Communications presented IPSA's internal communications strategy to the Board. IPSA's approach to internal communications uses various channels to inform staff of IPSA's current work, future plans and other ongoing developments, as well as ways in which staff can be involved in IPSA's decision-making.
- 11.6 The staff survey results of December 2018 showed that overall staff engagement in the organisation is up to 65%. This is higher than levels of engagement in the civil service, and means that IPSA has achieved its staff engagement target. Survey scores for internal communications had also improved positively.
- 11.7 The Board noted the range of ways in which IPSA keeps its staff informed of, and engaged in, the organisation's activity, and approved the approach to internal communications.

12. IPSA Staff Survey Results

- 12.1 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services presented IPSA's staff survey results for 2018. The survey ran from 3 to 14 December 2018 and was sent to all staff. The response rate was 86%, equalling last year's.
- 12.2 Of the 59 questions asked, 29 showed an improvement on last year's results, and 29 showed a decline from 2016, with one remaining the same.
- 12.3 The Board welcomed the improved scores in areas such as line management, communication and staff engagement. They recognised the last of these as a strong indicator of positive engagement in IPSA by staff.

- 12.4 The Board recognised that there were poorer scores on change management, perhaps due to the survey being conducted when the launch of IPSA Online was imminent but a final date had not been announced. The Board also noted that the staff survey had produced much lower scores for IPSA's leadership, which included Board members. It noted that one way that this could be addressed is by improving the visibility of Board members.
- 12.5 The Board asked the Director of Finance and Corporate Services to conduct a review of the results in six months' time to test whether there had been any changes after IPSA Online had launched.

13. Financial Position and Management Account

- 13.1 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services presented a paper on IPSA's financial position as at January 2019. He noted that IPSA's office move to The Strand had proved more capital intensive than originally forecast, and that security spending continued to run somewhat below budget. The figures were otherwise in line with previous Board papers.
- 13.2 The Board noted and approved IPSA's financial position and the key figures contained in the report.

14. The Board's Programme of Work for 2019-20

- 14.1 The Board considered its programme of work for 2019-20. The Board asked that a discussion of the financial benefit of IPSA Online should be scheduled for September 2019, but otherwise approved the work programme.

15. Any Other Business

- 15.1 The date of next Audit and Risk Assurance meeting was confirmed for 8 May from 10am.
- 15.2 No further items were raised. The Chair thanked the Board and Executive for their attendance, bringing proceedings to a close.

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