

Minutes of a meeting of IPSA's Board

Wednesday 28 October 2020

By conference call

Board Members: Richard Lloyd (Interim Chair)

Sir Robert Owen

Rt. Hon Jenny Willott

Will Lifford

In attendance: Ian Todd, Chief Executive

Alastair Bridges, Director of Finance and Corporate Services

Lee Bridges, Director of Regulation and Insight

Karen Walker, Director of Strategy and Change (Item 7 only)

Georgia Wilson, Director of Improvement and MP Support

Head of Communications

Head of Policy and Assurance

Compliance Officer (Item 3)

Content Manager (Item 6)

Senior Policy Adviser (Item 8)

Senior Policy Adviser (Item 9)

Executive Assistant and Board Secretary (Minutes)

Status: Submitted for approval at the meeting of the Board on 24 November 2020

1. Welcome and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 The Interim Chair welcomed Ian Todd and Lee Bridges to the meeting. There were no interests declared not previously recorded. As a Trustee of the Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund, the Director of Finance and Corporate Services declared an interest under item 9 on the 'McCloud judgment'.

2. Minutes and Actions List

- 2.1 The minutes of the Board meeting of 10 September were approved with minor amendments. All actions completed to date were noted.

3. Compliance Officer's Report

- 3.1 The Compliance Officer presented a quarterly report of current investigations; some of which had been concluded and published. Updates on developments since writing and background sought by the Board on specific cases were provided.
- 3.2 The Compliance Officer had identified two wider policy issues. The first concerned the implications of the Working Time Directive when a member of staff simultaneously works for several MPs. The second focused on liability for breaches of the Scheme by staff when their MP is on long-term leave. The latter raised particular issues when the breach leads to repayment of monies. On both questions, employment law advice and strengthened validation were discussed as ways forward.
- 3.3 It was also highlighted that there is no formal procedure by which complaints could be made against the Compliance Officer. As a statutorily independent postholder, the complaints policy covering IPSA staff did not apply. It was agreed that work to draw up a complaints process should be commissioned. The Policy team would also consider any role for the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. Separately, updated Compliance Officer procedures would be brought to the Board in the near future.
- 3.4 The Board noted the report with thanks.

4. Chief Executive's Report

- 4.1 The CEO report had exceptionally been written by Directors to update the Board on performance during the transition from the former to the incumbent CEO. The CEO

report would assume a more strategic focus from the November Board meeting and offer an open, transparent, and frank account of successes and challenges in IPSA's delivery.

- 4.2 Owing to the impact of the pandemic and extension of the financial year-end deadline, the Chief Executive proposed delaying the Annual Publication of MPs' Business Costs until January 2021. This would enable IPSA to publish the data accurately, in line with good financial practice, and at better value for public money.
- 4.3 The Board agreed this recommendation. The Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee is to be provided with more detail on the accounting treatment of debt. The importance of having a clear, defined, and consistent policy on the recognition of debt was also noted.
- 4.4 The Board sought and received further detail on the implementation of the payment card policy, including improved reporting, on efforts to reduce non-reportable and reportable data breaches, and on higher levels of staff turnover.
- 4.5 The Board noted the report. It also noted that the wider external context made it essential that further, careful thought is given to staff wellbeing and our communications with users. It also underlined the importance of recognising the impact of the pandemic and a febrile political atmosphere on the wellbeing and security of MPs' offices. The Chief Executive reassured the Board that these were central considerations for IPSA. Work was underway to ensure that IPSA staff who wished could, exceptionally and in a covid-secure way, use the office to access business documents or for their wellbeing. Virtual all-staff and team events were also planned. IPSA also remained wholly committed to funding security measures recommended by the Police.

5. Complaints Report

- 5.1 The Director of Improvement and MP Support presented the second quarterly edition of the complaints report. An update was provided on complaints received since the writing of the report. Overall, more complaints were being upheld compared to last year, but fewer responses to complaints were being appealed. This indicated that our handling of complaints was leading to higher-quality responses which more comprehensively addressed the issues and enabled lesson-learning.
- 5.2 Analysis of the causes of complaints identified issues of process or capacity, or a mixture of both. It was noted that the number of complaints relating to payment

cards had declined markedly, which coincided with greater proactive effort from IPSA teams to support MPs' offices with reconciliation. As complaints regarding rent remained a problem, a similar approach could be explored with success.

- 5.3 The Board noted the report. It was encouraged that IPSA had made progress in reducing complaints and in identifying common themes to inform improvements. More feedback on the handling of complaints from complainants was requested for future reports. Work remained to reach a service ethos of 'right first time, every time'.

6. Website Update

- 6.1 The Head of Communications introduced the Content Manager who had steered the successful launch of IPSA's new information website for MPs. The website had received positive feedback from MPs and staff for providing a more user-friendly, mobile-compatible, and accessible platform to search for materials. The Content Manager presented data on the site's most visited pages.
- 6.2 The Content Manager previewed the prototype of IPSA's new public website, which aimed to engage the public on IPSA's role and the information it publishes through a new, cleaner, and more user and mobile-friendly format.
- 6.3 The Board thanked the Content Manager for a successful launch and for the demo, asking for the materials to be circulated to Board members for further consideration.

7. Purpose and Strategy

- 7.1 The Director of Strategy and Change introduced a presentation, alongside high-level budget options from the Director of Finance and Corporate Services, which followed the strategic steer of the Board's Change Oversight Committee. The presentation covered short-term deliverables where IPSA could make user improvements both tangible and compatible with the longer-term plans. Whilst much of the investment would improve user experience, enable better compliance, and provide better value for money, it was noted that the priorities identified might require adjustment depending on the 2021/22 budget.
- 7.2 The Board noted the presentation with thanks. It suggested that a 'from and to' timeline of current to desired processes, experience, and efficiency would be helpful to illustrate the difference that these changes will make to IPSA's operations and to the experience of MPs' offices. Forecasted multi-year costs and savings from the

investments would also be required to make the case. Subject to drafting changes, the Board welcomed the proposed purpose, vision, and objectives

- 7.3 On high-level budget options for 2021/22, the Director of Finance and Corporate Services outlined the proposed draft Subhead A and Subhead B. Areas of potential financial pressure were also flagged. On Subhead B, the steer of the Board was to budget fully for the cost of delivering the service and improvements that delivery of the strategy requires, including sufficient IT budget, rather than rolling forward the original baseline budget for 2020/21.
- 7.4 On the Subhead A budget, the Board sought additional data from IPSA's 'call to evidence' in September to further understand the pressures faced by MPs' offices. Directors reported feedback to the Board on the experiences of MPs' staff, which involved high workload, overtime, time off in lieu, and untaken leave. Political and media considerations, the need to invest time in training new recruits, and delays in security clearance have also had an impact on MPs' staffing capacity. The Board noted this feedback, which would further inform its discussion in November.

8. Automatic Pay Changes for MPs' Staff

- 8.1 The Head of Policy and Assurance introduced a paper to consult on automatically implementing cost-of-living pay changes for MPs' staff. It proposed that the uplifting of MPs' staff pay should be introduced on an opt-out basis, with the uplift informed by benchmarking and decided annually under the Board's discretion. The consultation also aimed to tie in the end-of-tenancy cleaning Scheme change discussed by the Board in September.
- 8.2 The Board agreed with the recommendation to consult on automatic pay changes for MPs' staff as proposed, subject to amending the proposed opt-out to an annual process. It noted the importance of carefully communicating this consultation, in parallel with that on MPs' pay. On end-of-tenancy cleaning, it asked the Executive to reconsider the tone and timing of the consultation, preferring instead to separately launch a technical consultative exercise in due course.

9. McCloud Judgment

- 9.1 The Head of Policy and Assurance and Senior Policy Adviser introduced their paper in light of the McCloud judgment on age discrimination in certain public sector pension schemes. It recommended that the Board awaits further legal advice before indicating whether changes are needed to the MPs' scheme, but meantime works

with the PCPF Trustees to size the potential impact on the scheme and its members and to gauge stakeholder reaction. It also recommended that the Board give direction on key questions to inform preparatory work.

- 9.2 The Board agreed that it should await legal advice on McCloud before making a decision on any potential policy change. It also determined that a return to final salary arrangements should not be considered if a remedy is needed but that, given the uniqueness of the MPs' pension scheme, the Board would be prepared to consider options for remedies which have not been consulted on by the government.

10. Report from the Change Oversight Committee

- 10.1 The Board approved the report of the Change Oversight Committee of 7 October.

11. Financial Position and Management Accounts

- 11.1 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services presented the financial position as at the closure of September's books. Some underspends had been reallocated into the central budget, which has been helpful in light of financial pressures identified and flagged to the Board. A substantive review is again planned in the third quarter.
- 11.2 The Board received detail on procedures for debt recovery, but noted debt levels with concern. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services noted that a cross-team compliance panel now met regularly to progress this as a priority. The Director of Improvement and MP Support also provided assurance that the implementation of the payment card policy had improved the repayment of monies owed.

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

- 12.1 The Board noted its Programme of Work for 2020-21. The Interim Chair and Chief Executive would work to quickly finalise the Board agenda for 24 November, before considering the objectives, contents, and frequency of the wider programme for 2021.

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