

# Review of IPSA's Publication Scheme Consultation

July 2018



# Executive Summary

We held a public consultation on our Publication Scheme between 10 May and 15 June 2018. We received three written responses from MPs and nine responses to the online survey (two members of the public, three MPs and four MPs' staff), all of which were supportive for the proposed changes.

Having considered these, we have adopted the proposed changes and published a revised Publication Scheme, a full copy of which can be found on our website at:

<http://www.theipsa.org.uk/publications/consultations/publication-policy>.

# Consultation report

## Introduction

1. IPSA's Publication Scheme sets out what we will and will not publish (including what we will redact) about MPs' business costs and expenses. Transparency lies at the heart of IPSA's approach to the regulation of MPs' business costs and expenses and is crucial to its effectiveness.
2. Since November 2010, we have published over one million claims made by MPs and their staff for the business costs to support their parliamentary work. Every two months, we publish the claims for the two months from four and five months previously. These are all available on our website: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/mp-costs>.
3. In addition to the two-monthly cycle of publication, we publish MPs' annual spending for the previous financial year every autumn, along with some information on staffing and, historically, the names of MPs' landlords for properties which are rented using IPSA funds.
4. Since we were established in May 2010, we have conducted four reviews of the Publication Scheme, which have sought to reflect the evolution in our approach to regulation and change in appetite for information that we hold. Full details of previous consultations held on our publication policy can be found at: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/publications/consultations/publication-policy>.
5. The amendments proposed to the Publication Scheme in this review sought to ensure the continued security of MPs, their staff and their families, relating to the publication of MPs' mileage costs and the names of landlords from whom MPs rent accommodation. We also proposed a minor change relating to the publication of claims made by MPs through direct suppliers.

## Security concerns

6. We take the security of MPs, their staff and family members very seriously. Our publication policy clearly states that IPSA will not publish information that the police advise poses a risk to MPs' security, or that of their staff or family.
7. Following the murder of Jo Cox MP in 2016, the terrorist attack in Westminster and a general increase in security concerns, in March 2017 we reconsidered some of the specific information we publish. We sought the advice of the National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO). They did not suggest any specific amendments to our publication policy, but recommended that IPSA should consider potential, as well as actual, risk in the way we publish data. They said that this should be done

proactively, rather than only relying on an MP to identify something that presents a risk and request its removal.

8. The names of landlords from whom MPs rent accommodation have only been published proactively, once a year, since the 2015 General Election. They were first published as the result of a Freedom of Information request in November 2012. But it made sense to publish this information proactively to avoid the need to respond to FOI requests at random.
9. Given recent security risks, MPs have become increasingly concerned about the publication of landlords' names and the risk that their address could be identified, despite the opportunity for them to tell us about individual risks so that we can redact names where appropriate. On this basis, we decided in March 2017 to stop publishing landlord names. This removed any potential for published information to identify an MP's address.
10. We believe that we need to balance our commitment to transparency against the needs of MPs to be supported in carrying out their parliamentary activities without unduly risking their security. As such, with security concerns paramount, we proposed to amend the publication policy to reflect the fact that we will no longer publish landlord names.

QUESTION 1: Do you agree that the publication policy should be amended to remove from the list of information we publish the names of landlords from whom MPs rent accommodation?

11. All the written responses received were supportive of this proposal, along with 78% of responses to the online survey. As such, we have amended the Publication Scheme accordingly, removing the paragraph that previously stated that we would publish landlords' names.
12. When we began publishing landlords' names in April 2014, we also committed to publishing the first part of the postcode for the properties these landlords rented to MPs. The publication of these two details were intrinsically linked. As we will no longer be publishing landlord names, we will also cease publishing MPs' partial postcodes.
13. One MP asked us to look at how much information we publish about the hotels that MPs stay in, noting that one London hotel is commonly used by large numbers of MPs and could be a security risk. We do not publish the name of hotels at which MPs stay, nor any information which may identify them.

#### **Other publication issues**

14. IPSA can make payments directly to a number of suppliers on behalf of MPs, removing the need for an MP to pay, claim or provide evidence; instead, the suppliers provide

the necessary information to us, and the relevant amounts are charged to the MP's budgets and published on our website.

15. Our current publication policy states that we publish: 'all claim details entered onto IPSA's online expenses system by MPs or their nominated proxies' (paragraph 6). For the sake of accuracy and clarity, we proposed to state in this part of the policy that the claim details we publish include those purchased directly from suppliers, as well as all those entered onto the online expenses system by MPs and their nominated proxies. This will not result in any addition to what we publish, but rather clarify what we already do.

QUESTION 2: Do you agree we should include reference to direct suppliers in our publication policy for the sake of clarity and accuracy?

16. Again, respondents were supportive of this minor addition to the Scheme, which we have amended it as proposed.

QUESTION 3: Are there any other issues relating to the publication of MPs' business costs and expenses which you wish to raise?

17. We received three additional general comments in relation to our publication policy. Two comments asked for a further distinction to be made between staffing costs and business costs; one comment noted that 'many people are under the impression that MPs claim nearly £200k in expenses when this is actually staff salaries and office rental'.
18. The data published on our website currently distinguishes between office, travel and staffing costs. We will continue to make this distinction when publishing MPs' costs.

### **Next steps**

19. We are grateful to all those that responded to our consultation. The revised Publication Scheme incorporates the following changes:
  - a. Added a line to make clear that purchases made through direct supplies will be published (paragraph 6);
  - b. Removed the paragraph which previously said that we publish landlord names;
  - c. Removed the paragraph about publishing the first part of the postcode for residential accommodation and offices, as the previous formulation was linked to the paragraph about landlord names; and
  - d. Amended the paragraph, which previously said we would begin publishing MPs' debt 'in 2018', to confirm we will do so once IPSA's new IT system is live (paragraph 14).




20. A full copy of the revised Publication Scheme alongside responses to the consultation is on our website at: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/publications/consultations/publication-policy>.

# Consultation responses




## Written responses from MPs

Respondent	Response
David TC Davies MP	I note from the document that you are looking to redact information about MPs' accommodation for security reasons. I would support this. I would also ask you to look at how much information is published about the hotels which MPs stay in.
Rt Hon Ken Clarke MP	Thank you very much indeed for your recent letter about your public consultations on MPs' remuneration and IPSA's publication policy. I have read your proposals carefully and I am writing to tell you that I support entirely all the recommendations that you are making.
Sir Roger Gale MP	For security reasons I think that it is absolutely right that the names of MPs' landlords should not be published. While I have no problem whatsoever with the publication of the cost of all items purchased by MPs through direct suppliers I do not believe that the names of the suppliers themselves should be published as at a local level to do so could lead to embarrassing "why them not us" accusations!

## Responses to the online survey

1. Please let us know if you are a member of the public, an MP or an MP's staff member. This information will be used to assist IPSA's analysis of responses.				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	I am a member of the public		22.22%	2
2	I am an MP		33.33%	3
3	I am a staff member of an MP		44.44%	4
4	I represent a stakeholder organisation		0.00%	0




**2. Do you agree that the publication policy should be amended to remove from the list of information we publish the names of landlords from whom MPs rent accommodation?**

			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		77.78%	7
2	No		11.11%	1
3	Not sure		11.11%	1

Comments: (1)

1	14/06/2018 14:36 PM ID: 88017765	Only on occasions where the property can be identified through the landlords name should the information be withdrawn from publication.
---	--	---

**3. Do you agree we should include reference to direct suppliers in our publication policy for the sake of clarity and accuracy?**

			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		55.56%	5
2	No		22.22%	2
3	Not sure		22.22%	2

**4. Are there any other issues relating to the publication of MPs' business costs and expenses which you wish to raise?**

			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question		100.00%	3
1	06/06/2018 13:42 PM ID: 87514044	Can you bring further clarity to the difference between staff costs and what most people would understand as 'expenses' eg travel and subsistence.  Many people are under the impression that MPs claim nearly £200k in expenses when this is actually staff salaries and office rental.		
2	07/06/2018 08:59 AM ID: 87563449	Clarification in regards to what MPs pay for such as staff and business costs. They are necessary as opposed to luxury expenses.  Also London MPs have higher costs both office and living costs. And therefore need extra resources.		

**4. Are there any other issues relating to the publication of MPs' business costs and expenses which you wish to raise?**

			<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
3	14/06/2018 14:36 PM ID: 88017765	<p>1. When an MP marks a payment card cost as 'not claimed to repay' this should be published. It is both transparent and there is no reason to withdraw this information. Publishing this information would also act as a deterrent to MPs using the payment card as an interest free loan.</p> <p>2. IPSA should not publish whether the journey is first class or not. It isn't important or in the public interest. As long as IPSA confirm the claim is eligible, that is all that matters.</p>		

