

Minutes of a meeting of IPSA's Board

Friday 24 January 2020

Board Members: Richard Lloyd (Interim Chair)

Sir Robert Owen

Rt. Hon Jenny Willott

Will Lifford

In attendance: Marcial Boo, Chief Executive

Vicky Fox, Director of Regulation and Insight

Alastair Bridges, Director of Finance and Corporate Services

Head of Communications

Head of Human Resources (Item 4)

Head of Finance and Payroll (Item 8)

Head of Policy and Assurance (Item 9)

Executive Assistant and Board Secretary (Minutes)

Apologies: Georgia Wilson, Director of Improvement and MP Support

Status: Submitted for approval at the meeting of the Board on 25 February 2020

1. Welcome and Declarations of Interest

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

2. Minutes and Actions List

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 11 December 2019 were approved.

3. Compliance Officer's Report

- 3.1 The Chief Executive was happy to report any questions or comments to the Compliance Officer, who had sent her apologies for this meeting.
- 3.2 Aside from specific queries to be relayed to the Compliance Officer, the Board asked about MPs whose websites redirected visitors from IPSA-funded pages to party-political or campaign websites. The Director of Regulation and Insight noted that IPSA took action with the Electoral Commission to ensure immediate compliance with spending rules.

ACTION: The Chief Executive to pass specific queries to the Compliance Officer

- 3.3 The Board also considered how compliance investigations were handled when relating to vulnerable individuals. The Director of Regulation and Insight confirmed that IPSA thinks carefully about how it proceeds and that the vulnerability of the individual is a key consideration for IPSA when recovering debt.
- 3.4 The Head of Internal Audit was asked to review all cases that were re-opened following receipt by IPSA of further, externally provided, information. The purpose of his review would be to identify any lessons to be learned by IPSA in its handling, including any errors made, warnings missed, issues with our processes, or other assurance-related concerns.

ACTION: The Head of Internal Audit to produce a report for IPSA's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on such cases, summarising matters identified and recommendations arising from each such review.

- 3.5 The Board noted the report with thanks to the Compliance Officer.

4. Chief Executive's Report

- 4.1 The Chief Executive extended the apologies of the Director of Improvement and MP Support who could not attend the meeting.

- 4.2 The Board discussed the results of the 2019 IPSA staff survey which had just been made available by the survey suppliers.
- 4.3 The Chief Executive described the results as disappointing, with action planning already underway with staff to address issues relating to communications, cross-team collaboration, workload and stress. The results are, however, reflective of a difficult year following the office move, change of expenses system, and General Election. Such issues will not arise in 2020. It was noted that the Civil Service results are also expected to dip in 2019.
- 4.4 The Executive remained wholly committed to improving IPSA staff wellbeing. The Chief Executive underscored the importance of communicating the corporate plan effectively to teams and he would personally spend considerable time listening to their feedback, notably through the Staff Focus Group. An all-staff away day was planned in spring to boost collaboration and morale, with Board Members welcome to attend.
- 4.5 The Board noted the results with concern, highlighting the importance of engaging staff in business planning. The need for a cross-organisational action plan to address staff engagement, with the wider business plan supported by a united senior team, was also underlined. Some results require further probing to understand how best to address the underlying issues. However, to demonstrate how seriously the leadership takes the survey, immediate action should be taken where appropriate. The Board also noted that the most positive scores tended to relate to individual teams and line managers, whereas low or declining scores concerned cross-team collaboration. This was important to bear in mind in organisational design work.
- 4.6 The Chief Executive stated that Directors will take stock of the results and adopt an action plan, with a paper due to the Board in March.

ACTION: The Chief Executive to reflect learnings from the staff survey results in the corporate plan for discussion at the February Strategy Day

- 4.7 General Election activity was progressing on schedule, with one-to-one meetings already held with half of new MPs. The Payroll team had processed 345 new starter forms in January to add new staff to the payroll. This was an outstanding effort for which the team and the Interim Payroll Manager deserved credit. The Operations Manager was also praised as work to support departing MPs remained on track. Two issues were proving complex, relating first to former MPs whose rental agreements

had longer than the stipulated two-month break clause, and second to new MPs who were formerly staff members of departing MPs.

- 4.8 The Board put on record its gratitude to all IPSA staff for their excellent work.
- 4.9 The Board considered the latest round of performance statistics relating to November and December. January has recorded significant demand, with an average of 220 calls per day.
- 4.10 The Board requested further explanation for specific performance indicators. Internal audit should also assure that the dataset from which the KPIs are derived is accurate and robust.

ACTION: The Chief Executive to respond to Board queries relating to IPSA's performance statistics.

ACTION: The Head of Internal Audit to assure the datasets underpinning IPSA's performance information.

- 4.11 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services provided further detail on the 2017 data breach and a separate legal claim.
- 4.12 The Board noted the report.

5. Financial Position and Management Accounts

- 5.1 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services summarised IPSA's financial position. He noted that the Executive was carefully considering areas where targeted spending could be brought forward to Q4 of this financial year, particularly on data analysis and organisational design.
- 5.2 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services noted that the Speaker's Committee for the IPSA had approved the Supplementary Estimate at its meeting of 20 January 2020.
- 5.3 The Board noted the report.

6. Governance Review

- 6.1 The Interim Chair summarised progress with IPSA's Governance Review and asked Board members to complete the evaluation questionnaire by the end of January. A report will be submitted to the Board in March.

ACTION: Board members and senior executives to complete the governance review questionnaire by the end of January.

7. Communications & MP Engagement Strategy

- 7.1 The Head of Communications introduced his paper and highlighted the key communications events for IPSA over the year. He noted that, with the Board's approval, IPSA's communications activity had been diverted away from public engagement to stakeholder engagement in 2019-20 in order to support MPs and their staff with familiarising themselves with IPSA Online.
- 7.2 The Head of Communications outlined how IPSA sends information bulletins to MPs and their proxies on a fortnightly cycle, and separate communications to new, departing, and returning MPs following the General Election. Guidance on the end of the financial year was now being sent to all MPs and their staff, and the team will support MPs' offices with regular communications on how to complete and send in accruals forms before the final deadline of 26 April. This was slightly later than in previous years in order to give MPs and their staff extra time to conduct the process on the new system.
- 7.3 The Board sought clarity on performance in executing the Communications Strategy as presented to the Board in 2019, including the balance between internal and external communications. Further discussion of this should form part of the February strategy awayday. The Board strongly supported IPSA's present communications focus on stakeholder engagement, involving users in work which redesigns external communications, and employing internal communications to support the response to the staff survey.
- 7.4 The Board underlined the importance of consulting MPs and their staff as to how they wanted IPSA to communicate with them in terms of timeliness, frequency, format and content. The Head of Communications noted that IPSA's annual user survey provided this feedback, which was generally positive about IPSA's communication in the past. The survey for 2019 would be launched on 30 January, two months later than in previous years due to the December election. This year, the MP Staff User Group has also provided a helpful forum to test out communications, including with representatives of the staff group MAPSA.

- 7.5 The Board discussed whether IPSA should mark its 10th anniversary, and what purpose this might serve. The choice of venue and type of event should depend on what our objectives are, and for whom the event would be. It could be an opportunity to assure the public by reflecting on achievements made ten years on from the MPs' expenses scandal, supporting the new Speaker's objective of restoring respect in the House of Commons.

ACTION: The Head of Communications to put forward a specific suggestion for any anniversary event.

8. IPSA Online Benefits Realisation Report

- 8.1 The Head of Finance and Payroll introduced the report, noting that the methodology is substantially the same as that of the original business case and that the annex covers around three-dozen projected benefits from IPSA Online. Some of these benefits are difficult to quantify, such as very high payroll accuracy, internal and external assurance to the Board and NAO, stronger data security, and richer data quality. The final project cost is £8.45 million and, though IPSA Online implementation has proved challenging, the projected net present value remains at £1.4 million. Maintenance and capital savings, for example, will be realised as a result of having a single, integrated system. He noted that the NAO had considered this assessment at 2018-19 year-end.
- 8.2 The Board sought and received further detail on the assumptions about user self-service. The Chief Executive provided examples of self-service now available that represented tangible savings which have already been realised. The Board also sought and received clarification of the sections relating to FOI requests and website traffic.
- 8.3 The Board requested a breakdown of headcount and responsibilities of all IPSA employees, and contractors, as critical in the planning of organisational design work.

ACTION: The Director of Finance and Corporate Services to provide this.

- 8.4 The Board agreed that it would be proper to draw a line under the programme, subject to further work being conducted on IPSA Online benefits at the end of the financial year to demonstrate which have been realised. This work will also serve as a baseline for the benefits we wish to see from future improvements.

ACTION: A closure report will be submitted to the Board in April.

9. Corporate Plan and Main Estimate

- 9.1 The Interim Chair and Chief Executive updated the Board on the meeting of the Speaker's Committee for the IPSA of 20 January. The Chief Executive recommended an increase to the budget for any necessary policy work that might need to be conducted in response to requests from the House, as well as for additional data capacity, and IT consultancy provision. Some revisions were suggested to the Corporate Plan. In addition, a decision for the Board was due on finalising the sum dedicated to MPs' staff training.
- 9.2 The Board declined to allocate new staffing resources before conducting preliminary organisational design work, since this work would identify where resources are most needed and best used.
- 9.3 The Board supported increasing the budget for IT consultancy in order to improve the user interface to our systems. In advance of the public meeting of SCIPSA, the Board would be further consulted on any changes to the Estimate.
- 9.4 The Board approved the £4,000 recommended training budget for each MP. IPSA should then monitor the average number of staff and salaries in MPs' offices and expenditure on staff training in order to support the retention of high-quality staff. MAPSA and Unite could also be involved.

ACTION: The Head of Communications to advise the Board on the plan for maximising the opportunity presented by communicating the MPs' staff and training budget, as well as handling of MPs' pay.

10. February Strategy Day and Board Programme of Work 19-20

- 10.1 The Board agreed that it would be valuable to invite representatives from the MP Staff User Group to the Board's Strategy Day in February. This would help inform the discussion on what currently works well and what must be improved. Lay members on the Speaker's Committee for the IPSA should also be invited. The Board discussed the forward programme of work, including the need to review outputs from the strategy day at the March meeting.

ACTION: The Chief Executive to revise the draft strategy day agenda.

11. **Any Other Business**

11.1 The Board noted that there was great value in holding Board meetings in IPSA's offices and asked when space constraints may ease. The Board also noted the importance of appropriate meeting room and work-station space for staff wellbeing.

11.2 The next meeting was confirmed as taking place on 25-26 February 2020.