

Minutes of a meeting of IPSA's Board

15 June 2022

Board Members: Richard Lloyd (Chair)

Helen Jones

Will Lifford

Lea Paterson

Sir Robert Owen

In attendance: Ian Todd, Chief Executive

Thomas Fitch, Director of Finance

Lee Bridges, Director of Policy and Engagement

Karen Walker, Director of Strategy and Change

Chief of Staff

Head of Communications

Head of Policy

Wellness Working Group Representatives (Item 3)

Compliance Officer (Item 4)

Apologies: Georgia Wilson, Director of MP Services

Status: Submitted for approval at the meeting of the Board on 13 September 2022

1. Welcome and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 The Chair invited attendees to declare any interests not previously recorded. Lea Paterson declared to the Board that she had been appointed as a Commissioner at the Civil Service Commission to chair recruitment competitions for a five-year term from 13 June 2022. The Director of Finance also confirmed that he had been appointed as the IPSA-nominated trustee on the Parliamentary Contributory Pensions Fund. The Board noted and congratulated both upon their respective roles.

2. Minutes and Actions List

- 2.1 The Board meeting minutes of 30 March were approved and actions update noted, including on IPSA's operational approach to end-of-tenancy cleaning claims.
- 2.2 The Director of Strategy and Change outlined data on the average number of logins and time spent on IPSA Online, including regional breakdown across the U.K. The data would be used to target training, as well as the creation of further pop-ups and dynamic forms, whose impact could be plotted on the dataset in due course. It was also noted that the cost of each IPSA department would soon be included on the Board's KPI dashboard as a percentage of operational expenditure, with the Payroll figure reflecting the additional budget support offered by IPSA compared to a standard payroll function.

3. Wellness Working Group

- 3.1 The Board welcomed representatives of the Wellness Working Group (WWG) to the meeting following their recent report and survey into the wellbeing of MPs' staff, which showed significant concern as to their welfare and workload. The WWG noted that their raison d'être of providing peer-to-peer support across MPs' staff intensified during the pandemic and Afghan crisis. Before turning to its recommendations, the WWG thanked the Board for the opportunity to attend, and IPSA for its improved performance, engagement, and collaboration, including in establishing a welfare fund, amalgamating and increasing the staffing budget, and revising its publication policy to protect MPs' staff.
- 3.2 The WWG outlined its recommendations on ringfencing budgets for health and welfare claims; that IPSA boosts its public engagement, in collaboration with the House, on the value of MPs and their staff's work; and that IPSA make claims for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) verification eligible given that MPs' staff deal with vulnerable constituents. It noted, however, that its recommendation for an MP Staff representative to sit on IPSA's Board was not feasible under the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009 and was grateful for the opportunity to attend Board meetings as today.
- 3.3 The Board thanked the WWG for their comments and the report. It noted that it was a priority for IPSA to collaborate proactively with the House on supporting MPs, particularly those newly elected, as employers and that IPSA would explore what it could do in practice to incentivise the uptake of staff wellbeing support via IPSA budgets. It further noted the recommendation on DBS as for the Executive to consider. It restated IPSA's

commitment to work openly with House authorities on the vital matters raised, and for the Board of IPSA to meet the WWG on a regular basis.

4. Compliance Officer's Report

- 4.1 The Compliance Officer introduced her report covering almost two quarters of activities and updated the Board on developments since writing. She also provided further detail on specific investigations in response to Board member queries.
- 4.2 The Board sought the view of the Compliance Officer on whether the new customer relationship management system was enabling her to conduct her duties more efficiently and review correspondence more easily, and whether there was a need to review information-sharing arrangements between her office and that of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.
- 4.3 The Compliance Officer confirmed that there has been an improvement in the quality of recording and confirmed that the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards is notified when an MP is served with an investigation notice or referred to the Police. The Director of Policy and Engagement added that IPSA was in the process of reviewing its data-sharing agreement with the House and clauses would be included to ensure the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards was brought explicitly in scope for the appropriate purposes.
- 4.4 The Board noted the report with thanks.

5. Chief Executive's Report

- 5.1 The Chief Executive introduced the key headlines of his report including the on-time and on-budget rollout of the CRM system as a minimum viable product.
- 5.2 The Chief Executive noted the decision of the Board via written procedure, which the Board formally reiterated and recorded at this meeting, to withdraw HMRC's homeworking allowance for MPs' staff after July, unless on homeworking contracts.
- 5.3 Owing to rail strikes, IPSA would also seek to reschedule its first planned, face-to-face all-people event in the summer, and preparations were underway for IPSA's appearance before the Administration Committee on 4 July on General Election planning and support and services provided to Members before, during, and after the election.
- 5.4 Further to the discussion at the Audit, Risk, and Assurance Committee (ARAC) on financial controls applied to direct supplier relationships administered by IPSA, the Chief Executive recommitted to improving the procurement, management, and validation of such services.
- 5.5 The Speaker had announced a Speaker's Conference into key matters concerning MPs' staff, including their employment and wellbeing. IPSA was committed to playing its part in such discussions and will work collaboratively with House and other stakeholders to this end. The Board welcomed IPSA's engagement in this regard and, given the

complexity of potential employment law, political, constitutional, and practical implications arising from the discussions, sought further clarity from the Executive team on IPSA's approach to such matters. It stressed that IPSA remained committed to collaboration and supporting improvements to staffing conditions and wellbeing within its statutory remit.

- 5.6 The Board noted the report with thanks and asked specific questions on the nature of call and claim demand, discussions with Members Security Support Services (MSSS), and IPSA's office facilities. The Chief Executive confirmed that call and claim volumes had risen as working/travel patterns began to normalise post-lockdown and that, separately, IPSA had received positive engagement from MSSS on the proposed Memorandum of Understanding between the two entities pending the transfer of security arrangements to the House of Commons in 2023/24. IPSA would also shortly meet with MSSS officials to discuss the impact of its fundamental security risk assessment review on IPSA publication policy, but all data had been sent to MPs' offices for verification in the meantime. The Director of Strategy and Change also confirmed that IPSA was actively considering how to improve its hybrid and video-conferencing facilities at 85 Strand.
- 5.7 The Board also considered the question of material provided to the Speaker's Committee for the IPSA during the estimates process and agreed that, whilst content to provide detail on the oversight conducted by the IPSA Board, it was important to ensure that the process was carried out appropriately in line with IPSA's independence as a statutory body.
- 5.8 The Director of Strategy and Change introduced the latest KPI dashboard and clarified that the attrition rate reported was a rolling average, and therefore included some legacy fixed-term contract departures. In line with normal practice, no Finance data was provided at year-end, which the Board noted.
- 5.9 The Director of Strategy and Change further outlined the Transformation Programme status update, with the regulatory review exploratory phase and election readiness planning progressing well. Process improvement would also be advanced, with election processes prioritised.
- 5.10 After receiving assurance on certain queries, the Board noted the KPI and transformation reports with thanks.
- 5.11 The Head of Policy introduced an update on the mileage pilot in advance of the regulatory review. The Board offered comments and outlined its appetite to explore potential technological solutions to the issue within the regulatory review, but confirmed its previous support for continuing the pilot in the meantime.

6. Departing Members

- 6.1 The Director of Policy and Engagement introduced a paper tabled in the context of the boundary review which was expected to be brought before Parliament in Spring 2023. One of the implications for IPSA would be reconsideration of the eligibility rules for the loss-of-office payment (LOOP), currently only available for MPs who stand and lose in their current constituency, and whether MPs whose seats are radically redrawn should be eligible if they choose not to stand in such circumstances. As part of the wider financial treatment of former MPs, the Director of Policy and Engagement also sought a steer from the Board on whether it would be appropriate to reconsider a resettlement type allowance for departing members and noted that the Scheme would require update following the repeal of the Fixed-Term Parliaments Act 2011.
- 6.2 The Board noted the paper and supported reconsideration of the rules applying to circumstances where constituency boundaries may be so significantly redrawn that their seat effectively disappears. It, however, noted that it may be difficult to define 'significant' in this context and ensure that its application is fair, consistent, and well-administered. It welcomed an update that IPSA was consulting the Boundary Commission to this end.
- 6.3 On the wider financial treatment of former MPs, the Board expressed a desire to consider the broader package of issues and to determine its position definitively at its meeting in September. Though MPs are office-holders, the Board noted the importance of considering the redundancy provisions which would ordinarily apply to most individuals, such as MPs' constituents, and the general treatment of individuals who voluntarily choose to step down from their role. This did not and should not, however, preclude IPSA exploring what additional practical, non-financial measures could be sensitively employed to support MPs who lose their seats through a difficult period.

7. All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs)

- 7.1 The Director of Policy and Engagement introduced a paper which followed an inquiry of the Standards Committee into the funding and activities of APPGs. The paper proposed that IPSA plan and conduct internal assurance work on APPGs and to note on its guidance page that the rules on APPG-related claims via IPSA was an area under active consideration for the future. IPSA would re-commit to working closely with the Standards Committee in this regard.
- 7.2 The Board welcomed the paper and the proposed steps to amend IPSA guidance and suggested that the Executive may wish to consider whether an attestation requirement when submitting claims may enhance validation and assurance arrangements.

8. Board Programme of Work and Any Other Business

- 8.1 The draft agenda for the formal meeting of the Board and its Strategy Day in September would be fleshed out over the summer and, in line with usual practice, it was noted that no Financial Position and Management Accounts for April were tabled to the Board.
- 8.2 The Board considered amendments to its standing orders which included the restoration of its quorum to three members (though two for ARAC) following the pandemic, the appointment of Sir Robert Owen as Senior Independent Director until the end of his term, and a formal change to the composition of ARAC such that the Chair of the Board would no longer sit on the Committee. The Board formally approved all changes.
- 8.3 The Chair initiated an open discussion on the Environment, Social, and Governance (ESG) agenda, how the Board would like to consider such issues and how it wishes IPSA to reflect such issues in its activities. The Director of Policy and Engagement outlined some areas in which IPSA was already contributing to ESG, either itself by, for example, paying the London Living Wage and with Green, LGBT+, and race networks, or the social value in resourcing MPs to conduct their parliamentary and constituency business, and how a formal diagnostic of such activity might prove helpful as a starting point. It was also noted that the MP Office Manager Group welcomed IPSA's consideration of ESG, that adopting the language of ESG aligns with our corporate value of 'doing the right thing', and that internal audit could provide useful guidance and scrutiny on these matters.
- 8.4 Exploring the approach of other organisations, and other legislatures, may also prove useful, as well as an explicit consideration of ESG within the regulatory review particularly on questions of central procurement and energy efficient accommodation.
- 8.5 The Board welcomed this approach and the importance of framing IPSA policy-making and its regulatory approach in ESG terms and keeping up with evolving external standards. It further noted the value of ESG in providing stability (when tackling environmental issues), bringing colleagues together behind a social purpose, and in regulating ethically, particularly when procuring centralised services, retaining public trust by staying in tune with social values, or considering, as above, issues of staff wellbeing. It noted, however, that some standards, such as those on sustainability, have proved difficult to agree and may evolve quickly and frequently in future. It was also important for IPSA to focus on improving its own ESG activities. It looked forward to the outcome of and recommendations flowing from the diagnostic proposed.
- 8.6 The Board encouraged the Executive to consider what may be possible within the current model to enhance our approach to ESG, alongside and without prejudice to the wider, more radical, and explicit thinking of ESG within the regulatory review. It encouraged the Executive to consider how ESG could be better reflected in the Chief Executive's Report, the Board paper template, and its external effectiveness review.
- 8.7 The Chair thanked all for their contributions to the meeting and staff for progress made, and it was agreed that further opportunities to discuss issues with external stakeholders at formal meetings would be welcomed by Board members and the wider IPSA team.