

## Minutes of a meeting of IPSA's Board

Wednesday 08 May 2019

**Board Members:** Ruth Evans, Chairman

Rt. Hon Jenny Willott

Will Lifford

**Guest Speaker:** Sir John Holmes, Chair of The Electoral Commission (Agenda Item 2)  
Executive Assistant to Sir John Holmes (Observer)

**In attendance:** Marcial Boo, Chief Executive

Georgia Wilson, Director of Improvement and MP Support

Alastair Bridges, Director of Finance and Corporate Services

Head of Policy and Assurance

Head of Communications

Head of Internal Audit

Assurance Analyst (Agenda Item 7)

Publication and Validation Lead (Agenda Item 9)

Public Engagement Manager

Executive Assistant and Board Secretary (Minutes)

Executive Assistant and Board Secretary (Observer)

MP Support Team Member (Observer)

MP Support Team Member (Observer)

**Apologies:** Richard Lloyd, Board Member  
Sir Robert Owen, Board Member  
Vicky Fox, Director of Regulation and Insight

**Status:** Submitted for approval at the meeting of the Board on 27 June 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 Chair welcomed and introduced Sir John Holmes, Chair of the Electoral Commission.

## **2. External Speaker – Sir John Holmes, Chair of the Electoral Commission**

- 2.1 Sir John introduced the work of the Electoral Commission, noting that, like IPSA, it is an independent body that reports to Parliament. Also like IPSA, it works across the United Kingdom, including with the devolved administrations, and is transparent in its work. While it works with political parties rather than MPs, it can also impose sanctions, including fines. Like IPSA, the Electoral Commission can refer people to the police if it suspects wrongdoing or fraud.
- 2.2 Sir John noted that the Electoral Commission is working to improve electoral processes and electoral law, in part as a response to recent technological developments. But some of these changes require legislation, which is not likely to be passed by Parliament with its current focus on Brexit.
- 2.3 IPSA's Chair and Chief Executive thanked Sir John for his presentation, and for the collaborative working relationship between our two organisations. Liaison was particularly effective during the period of General Elections. The Chair looked forward to that continuing under the Electoral Commission's new chief executive.

## **3. Minutes and Actions List**

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 14 March 2019 were approved as a correct record.

#### Actions arising from the previous meeting

All but two actions due from the previous meeting had been completed. The two outstanding actions, involving bringing forward implementation dates in two assurance reports, were in progress.

#### **4. Chief Executive's Report**

- 4.1 The Chief Executive introduced his report to the Board. He noted particularly the launch of the **new IPSA Online system**. Overall, this had gone well, notwithstanding some initial teething issues. The first payroll on the new system was successfully completed at the end of April. Of all 650 MPs' offices, only 21 had not accessed the new system in the first month. Many MPs and their staff had been positive about the system. But many had also found the change hard. Some had complained.
- 4.2 The launch of IPSA Online had resulted in a significant increase in workload for IPSA staff as external users familiarise themselves with the new system. High volumes of users have contacted IPSA for technical advice. Some calls have lasted 45 minutes. This has been very time-consuming and put a strain on resources. There has been much weekend working both before and after the new system had gone live. Staff were under pressure, but committed to meeting our commitments to MPs and their staff, and to make payments as quickly as possible. On the whole, this was happening. But we had decided close the phone lines for one day a month for training purposes and to allow staff to take forward actions.
- 4.3 There had also been an increase in call volumes resulting from the end of the financial year. Several MPs had missed the earlier-than-usual deadline for the submission of timesheets, leading to some difficult calls. We have offered immediate CHAPS payments where necessary.
- 4.4 The Board asked whether IPSA had underestimated the additional workload generated by the launch of IPSA Online. The Chief Executive explained that IPSA had planned for the increased work around the time of the launch by training MPs and their staff on the new system in advance. Two-thirds of MPs' offices had been trained before the launch. Training had gone well with positive feedback, as had the presence of IPSA staff at Portcullis House to talk to MPs one to one. But IPSA had not anticipated 45-minute phone calls with MPs wanting IPSA to support them as they actually made claims online. We were now considering offering 'webinars' to MPs and their staff, and were in contact with the Cabinet Office so that they could deploy their 'surge team' to support us if the call volumes continued. We were offering further training to MPs and their staff, and would continue to be present at Portcullis House.

- 4.5 The Chief Executive concluded that we remained in the initial **post-go-live phase**. IPSA is focussing on resolving snagging issues, and on embedding the system and the new processes involved, both internally and externally. IPSA was also beginning to move to business-as-usual processes so that we could prioritise and manage future change requests. An internal audit report and lessons learned report were being produced so that the organisation could learn from what had gone well and what had not.
- 4.6 Sir Robert Owen, although absent from the meeting, asked that the following message be recorded in the minutes: "I would ask that the meeting ... record my appreciation to the staff for all that has been achieved in recent months. It has been a remarkable achievement successfully to launch IPSA Online, to mount the International Parliamentary Regulator's conference, which was plainly a major success, and to manage the move of our premises all within a short time span, without any adverse impact on the performance of IPSA's core work. It speaks volumes both for the ability and commitment of all of our staff, and of the outstanding leadership provided by the senior management team. The performance of the Chief Executive and his senior managers has been all the more impressive given the disruption that has inevitably been caused by the need to address the cause of the risk to the organisation first identified at our December meeting. We are fortunate that IPSA's executive function is discharged by so conspicuously able a team. I suggest that my comments are be relayed to the meeting and minuted under Item 4, the Chief Executive's report."
- 4.7 In respect of data management, the Board asked about progress on the claim against IPSA in respect of the March 2017 Data Breach. IPSA's Director of Finance and Corporate Services confirmed that 189 members of MPs' staff had been in contact with the solicitors who were bringing claims against IPSA. Following legal advice, IPSA had written to the claimants' solicitors to rebut their claims, and there has been no further response
- 4.8 The Board were informed that an experienced candidate had been appointed to become IPSA's next Head of HR. She would start on 17 June.

## **5 Readiness for Brexit**

- 5.1 The Chief Executive Officer summarised the Board paper on IPSA's readiness for the UK to leave the European Union.
- 5.2 The Board asked whether IPSA had enough time to revise MEPs' resettlement payments as part of the relevant pension scheme. The Head of Policy and Assurance informed the Board that the MEP Resettlement Scheme of 2014 can be applied in its current form given the lack of time to conduct a formal consultation on any changes. Payments to MEPs in IPSA's scheme were less generous than those to other outgoing

MEPs. The Board accepted this recommendation.

## **6 Consultation report on minor changes to the Scheme**

- 6.1 The Head of Policy and Assurance introduced the report. She noted, in response to a Board query, that it is MPs' responsibility to ensure that they follow the rules in the Scheme, including making repayments to IPSA for the use of their IT equipment during the period of a General Election.
- 6.2 The Board thanked the Head of Policy and Assurance for a well written paper and agreed to its publication.

## **7 Funding of MPs' Security Measures;**

## **8 Policy Response to Internal Audit Report**

- 8.1 The Chair asked that the funding of security measures for MPs should be considered by the IPSA's Board when all its members were present and able to contribute to the discussion. The next opportunity for this is the Board meeting in July 2019. The Chief Executive should consider if any changes need to be made quickly and report back to the Board.

## **9 Data Strategy**

- 9.1 IPSA's Head of Publication and Validation and Data Protection Officer updated the Board on the implementation of IPSA's data strategy and the steps being taken to make IPSA a data-driven regulator, as agreed in its corporate strategy. The Board was informed that all the relevant foundations were now in place. This included the identification of best practice, strategic risks and appropriate mitigations against them. An ethical framework for the handling of data had also been produced. Further impact statements would be prepared over the course of the strategy.
- 9.2 Following questions from the Board, IPSA's Head of Publication and Validation and Data Protection Officer explained that they had involved MPs in the project, and that they had made privacy and protection of data a main objective. MPs would be suitably involved throughout the development and implementation of the data strategy.
- 9.3 The Board thanked the Executive for their work and approved the continuation of the implementation of the data strategy.

## **10 International Parliamentary Regulators Conference & IPSA's video.**

- 10.1 The Public Engagement Manager presented a video to the Board on IPSA's work and informed them that it would shortly be uploaded to IPSA's website. This was part of the public engagement plan that IPSA's Board approved in November 2018. It had been first shown at the successful International Parliamentary Regulators' Conference, hosted by IPSA in March 2019.
- 10.2 The Chief Executive added that, since that conference, IPSA had welcomed Kenyan and Ugandan delegations to discuss and compare practice, and that IPSA's Director of Regulation and Insight was building an international network to share data and good practice.
- 10.3 The Board noted the work, and the video, with approval.

## **11 Finance work at IPSA presentation**

- 11.1 This item was deferred for discussion at the next Board meeting due in June, due to time constraints.

## **12 Financial Position**

- 12.1 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services presented his paper and highlighted that IPSA's financial position for March 2019 is good and on budget'. The figure for dilapidations had been updated as the figure has been agreed with the landlords at Millbank. All figures were nonetheless subject to the year-end audit.
- 12.2 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services noted that provisions for the cost of the March 2017 data breach might need to be added to the budget, but that there is no clear position on the final numbers or whether any claims would be successful. This will be reviewed when finalising our audited accounts.
- 12.3 The Board thanked the Director of Finance and Corporate Services and noted his report with approval.

## **13 The Board's Programme of Work for 2019-20**

- 13.1 The Board had already agreed to defer the finance presentation to its June meeting and a further substantive discussion on MP's security at its July meeting. The Board's forward programme of work should be amended accordingly.
- 13.2 Georgina Kester from MAPSA would be invited to the next Board meeting in June.

## **14 Any Other Business**

- 14.1 The Board discussed the recent Daily Telegraph articles. They noted that the articles had been misleading and inaccurate. The article published about an FOI request for the number of times MPs' payment cards had been suspended, referred to Sir Robert Owen, but did not identify him as an IPSA Board member, so readers had been led to believe that IPSA was ordered to follow an instruction by an external High Court judge. The Chief Executive reported that he had submitted a formal complaint to the Telegraph about this article. He would keep the Board updated on its progress.
- 14.2 The Chair thanked the Board and Executive for their attendance and for their work since the last meeting, bringing proceedings to a close.
- 14.3 The date of the next Board meeting was confirmed as 27 June 2019.

**END**