

# Minute

## Minutes of a meeting of IPSA's Board

Thursday 11 February 2020

By video conference call

**Board Members:** Richard Lloyd (Interim Chair)  
Will Lifford

**In attendance:** Helen Jones, Board member designate  
Sir Robert Owen, Board member designate  
Ian Todd, Chief Executive  
Alastair Bridges, Director of Finance and Corporate Services  
Lee Bridges, Director of Policy and Engagement  
Karen Walker, Director of Strategy and Change  
Georgia Wilson, Director of MP Support Services  
Head of Communications  
Head of Policy  
Head of Data, Publication and Validation  
Senior Policy Adviser  
Policy and Research Officer  
Executive Assistant and Board Support Officer  
Tracy Hawkings, Compliance Officer

**Apologies:** None

**Status:** Submitted for approval at the meeting of the Board on 14 April 2021.

### 1. Welcome and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 Helen Jones was introduced as a new Board member, fulfilling the requirement for the Board to include a former MP. Sir Robert Owen has been re-appointed for another term as the Board's member who has held high judicial office. Until the Royal Warrants are sealed, all formal decisions made by the Board were to be made by Richard Lloyd and Will Lifford only, with the meeting quorate on that basis.
- 1.2 Will Lifford declared that he had been appointed to the Board of The Charity Commission for England and Wales. Helen Jones declared that she was a member of the Labour Party and that her husband had his details published during an IPSA data breach of 2017.

## **2. Minutes and Actions List**

- 2.1 The minutes of the additional Board meeting of 2 December 2020 and 16 December 2020 were approved.
- 2.2 All actions were reviewed and updated. Completion due dates were noted.

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

- 3.1 The Chief Executive explained the plan to revert back to the original 90 day term for MPs making claims, from the 120 day limit put in place to deal with coronavirus. Data showed that the extended period was now rarely used and more prone to errors. The Board approved this change.
- 3.2 The Director of Policy and Engagement summarised a programme of collaborative work the House, including a newly created forum that had been established involving key individuals from IPSA and the House. The Board were advised that this forum would facilitate IPSA and the House in resolving members' issues that crossed between work boundaries. The Board supported this initiative and asked to be provided with regular updates.
- 3.3 A summary of IPSA's position on paying volunteer expenses was given.
- 3.4 The Chief Executive informed the Board of the many ways in which IPSA was enhancing its engagement with MPs and their staff, including conducting interviews. A stakeholder engagement plan had already been started and these plans included shadowing MPs and their staff. The Board were assured that stakeholder engagement will not be reliant on surveys alone.
- 3.5 The Board discussed the planned upgrade to the IPSA Online system which will be timed to include comprehensive testing cycles, requiring time and people resources to ensure success. Users will be fully engaged before the planned roll-out of the upgraded system. The March 2021 Change and Oversight Committee will review the plan.
- 3.6 The Board discussed Payment Card Debt and queried the meaning of certain categories of debt. The Director of MPs' Services highlighted to the Board that there were some MPs who have not been able to retrieve evidence/receipts from their offices due to lockdown restrictions and that discussions on how IPSA will manage this were underway.
- 3.7 The Board welcomed the improvements made to IPSA's public facing website and found it to be clear, user friendly and direct on what IPSA does.

## **4. Compliance Officer's Report**

- 4.1 The Compliance Officer introduced her quarterly report to the Board, with an overview of the proposed changes to the complaints and reviews procedures. The Board were advised that the suggested changes would provide more clarity on the reasons why an investigation may not be progressed. One proposed change would

mean a reduction to the lead-time given to IPSA's people or MPs for providing responses and information.

- 4.2 The Board were also asked for the procedures to be amended to allow the Compliance Officer the flexibility to publish a brief report, rather than the full Compliance Officer's report. She also requested the flexibility not to impose fixed penalties in certain circumstances.
- 4.3 The Board discussed the process for handling complaints made against the Compliance Officer. The Compliance Officer will inform the Board of these and where appropriate the Board will appoint an independent person to review the complaint and set the terms of reference.
- 4.4 The Board approved the suggested changes to the investigative procedures, as proposed in the paper, subject to consultation, which will be carried out before the next meeting.

## **5. Pay and Pensions**

- 5.1 Automatic Changes to Staff Pay. The Head of Policy Proposal informed the Board that there had been many positive responses to the consultation received from MPs' staff. Responses indicated that opt-out arrangements will be necessary.
- 5.2 The Board approved the paper's proposals and timescales, effective from 1 April 2021. IPSA will work with House Members' Services on the guidance that will accompany the opt out option to assist MPs to do so appropriately.
- 5.3 Pensions. Following discussion, the Board agreed to address unfairness in the transition to the CARE Scheme for MPs and to consult accordingly.
- 5.4 MPs' salaries. The Board reviewed alternative approaches to determining MPs' salaries, drawing on lessons learned from the recent consultation. It was agreed to publish the 2021/22 determination as planned, with a synthesis of the consultation, and to further review and consult on the overall approach in 2021.

## **6. Paid leave for MPs' Staff**

- 6.1 Parental Leave: a two week consultation on the creation of a specific parental leave absence policy and budget was proposed in order to allow the time needed to incorporate this into the Scheme, if approved, in time for new financial year.
- 6.2 The Board requested clear guidance on what the policy will have in scope. Board members suggested that IPSA refer to this as 'parental support' or 'parental absence' as the MPs, as office holders, cannot take leave.
- 6.3 The proposal to launch an immediate consultation via a formal letter from the Chair to key stakeholders was agreed.
- 6.4 Reservists: The Director of Policy and Engagement summarised the current position and the proposal that IPSA fund periods of absence due to mandatory training

obligations, whilst the MOD continued to fund periods of absence where the reservists are deployed.

- 6.5 The Board requested that issues regarding the presentation of the fund in Publication were considered further.
- 6.6 The Board agreed to launch an immediate two week consultation via a formal letter from the Chair to key stakeholders.

## **7. MPs' Office Accommodation: emerging thinking**

- 7.1 The executive had carried out preliminary research into how IPSA could change its processes to better support MPs with sourcing and managing suitable office accommodation, including analysis of arrangements in Australia. The emerging thinking identified alternative options for IPSA to run a pilot towards the end of this year. It was proposed that further investigation be conducted into what MPs want before a decision is made, including how value for money on security measures could be better managed.
- 7.2 The Board discussed the practical issues raised by the paper, but recognised the benefit of IPSA providing MPs as a minimum with formal advice on leases, perhaps via a third party.
- 7.3 The Board approved further detailed investigation and informal consultations to establish what demand might be and for the issue, including pilot proposals, to return to the Board.

## **8. Annual Surveys of users and IPSA's people**

- 8.1 The Staff and User Survey results were presented, including the headline finding that 34.8% of users reported a satisfaction rating of good or very good, up from 25% on the previous year. The service issues identified were discussed, and the implications of a very low response rate for statistical validity of the findings.
- 8.2 The Transformation Programme was confirmed as being aligned to areas identified for improvement by the survey results. In addition, the Engagement Strategy will also consider the survey results, merged with a plan of 'personal engagement' that is focussed on speaking to people and users.
- 8.3 On the staff survey, significantly positive feedback was received in the area of support given to staff in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Results indicated that IPSA had supported diversity and inclusion well and with above average ratings.
- 8.4 The Director of Strategy and Change shared with the Board the next steps for promoting cultural change and employee engagement.
- 8.5 The Board noted both reports, and sign off for the user survey publication was delegated to the Chair.

## **9. 2021-22 Financial Estimate**

- 9.1 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services introduced the Financial Estimate papers. The provision for Covid-related expenditure will continue into 2021-22,

assuming SCIPSA's approval and sign-off, before a return to more normal working arrangements can be put into place.

- 9.2 The Board discussed operational resilience and whether the technology budget had been sufficiently provided for. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services explained that a more substantial cost is likely in following years when IPSA moves towards a more digital way of working. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services, along with the Director of Strategy and Change, assured the Board that there was enough funding for technology and that it just could not be seen in a single budget area.
- 9.3 The propose Estimate was approved for scrutiny by SCIPSA.

## **10. Debt Policy**

- 10.1 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services sought initial views from the Board on a draft Debt Policy before this is returned to the Board for final approval. The policy proposed reflecting on a proportionate approach to debt management.
- 10.2 The Director of Finance and Corporate Services provided the Board with further clarity on which type of debts are proposed to be passed to a third party and at what stage. Each case would be looked at individually to ensure that this course of action is sensible and correct. The position of MPs who have unexpectedly left parliament or are facing financial hardship would be considered on a case-by-case basis before the next steps on chasing debts are taken.
- 10.3 The Board supported the direction of travel, with some areas for clarification. It was agreed that debts due to IPSA errors should be written off, where it is reasonable to do so and that debts arising from MPs not following the correct process and timescales for communicating and submitting evidence to IPSA, e.g. staff leaver forms, were an acceptable category of debt to be passed to a third party to recover.

## **11. Financial Position and Management Accounts**

- 11.1 The monthly report is summarised by the Director of Finance and Corporate Services and key points shared with the Board. The Board noted the report.

## **12. Annual Publication – lessons to learn**

- 12.1 The Director of Policy and Engagement presented the Board with an overview of the issues identified in preparing and publishing the Annual Publication and shared the lessons learnt. Some of these issues had already been addressed, others are planned.
- 12.2 The external impact of the publication is mostly centred on reputational damage to MPs from local media, but this year the publication had raised very little media interest.
- 12.3 It was agreed that the Director of Policy and Engagement will provide the Board with a plan for change in this area. The plan should include the setting of a fixed deadline point when the audit accounts must be closed for reporting. The plan should also include conducting advance work in identifying MPs who are likely to find Year End

and Publication deadlines challenging, in order to contact, support and guide them in advance of the cut-off date.

### **13. Any Other Business**

- 13.1 The Director of Policy and Engagement highlighted an unintended error in the last set of changes to the MPs pension scheme, relating to the benefits arising to dependents from the death of a serving MP. The Board noted the issue and agreed that the proposed changes should be made administratively.

**END**