

Review of a determination by IPSA and subsequent appeal decision

Review conducted at the request of Ann Davies MP

Member of Parliament for Caerfyrddin

Author and Review Officer

Matt Walker

Compliance Officer for IPSA

## Introduction

1. This review has been conducted following a request made by Ann Davies MP

## Background and timeline

2. Ann Davies was elected as Member of Parliament for Caerfyrddin on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024. Ms Davies has not previously been an MP.
3. During December 2024, Ms Davies employed the services of a printing company to produce a bi-lingual information sheet to go out to all constituents. 35,000 copies were ordered for printing at a cost of £3795, and an order placed with Royal Mail for them to deliver these at a cost of £2346.88.
4. In January 2025, the MP or Proxy Office Manager (POM – appointed by the MP to act on her behalf for financial matters with IPSA) uploaded these claims online to IPSA.
5. On 24<sup>th</sup> January 2025, IPSA rejected these claims on the basis that they are: i) Party-political, ii) self-promotional, iii) newsletters. All these being not permitted where the finance for such is provided by IPSA.
6. On 27<sup>th</sup> January 2025, Ms Davies appealed this decision with IPSA. The matter was passed to IPSA Policy team for consideration. The IPSA appeal upheld IPSA's decision.
7. On 24<sup>th</sup> February 2025, the POM, on behalf of the MP requested that the Compliance Officer for IPSA conducts a review of IPSA determination.

## The Scheme

8. The 17<sup>th</sup> edition of The Scheme of MPs Staffing and Business Costs is the relevant scheme for the purpose of this review.
9. Under the Scheme, there are four fundamental principles which MPs must consider in all their claims. These are set out as below:
  - i. **Parliamentary:** MPs may only claim for expenditure for parliamentary purposes.
  - ii. **Value for money:** MPs must have regard to value for money when making claims.
  - iii. **Accountability:** MPs are legally responsible for all money claimed and for managing their budgets and their staff.
  - iv. **Probity:** When making claims, MPs must adhere to the MPs' code of conduct, including the seven principles in public life.

## Actions undertaken

10. To consider this case, I requested from the MP full details as to why wish me to review this decision, to provide me with any supportive information which may not have been

previously supplied to IPSA, and to inform me why they consider the IPSA decision to be wrong.

11. The information required from MPs when requesting a review is set out in the 'Procedures for Investigations by the Compliance Officer for IPSA'

[Amended Procedures for Investigations Fourth Edition.pdf](#)

12. I requested full disclosure from IPSA for the details relating to this decision, specifically asking for:

*· Details of any correspondence / discussions held between IPSA and the MP / MP proxy regarding the wording of this information leaflet. This correspondence needs to include any discussions regarding the creation of the document, anything regarding postage costs, and in particular details around any advice regarding wording / format.*

*· Details of correspondence held with the MP / proxy regarding the funding for this being declined.*

*· Details of how IPSA have managed the decision making, from initial decision making to handling the internal appeal considered by IPSA. This to include details of who has made the decisions and any written rationale as to why this was declined.*

13. The MPs POM provided me with the information on behalf of the MP. Their justification for creating the leaflet is that the purpose was to reach out to constituents. The MP, recognising that she was newly elected that year, wished to ensure everyone had her contact information, to advise constituents as to the type of work the MP was and had been doing, and what sort of things she can raise in Parliament. The MP and POM did not at this point set out the reasons why they say the IPSA decision was incorrect.

14. IPSA have provided the full details as to the handling of this case, who made the decision to not reimburse this claim and who has considered the appeal. The information includes the fact that neither the MP nor any member of her team had prior to contact with IPSA to establish if the wording on the leaflet was appropriate and within the scheme of MPs staffing and business costs.

15. I note from the document return, that the rejection and appeal was only in relation to the printing costs. The Royal Mail costs were not subject to the appeal. I am satisfied though that the MP review request is for both parts (printing and postage) and I am content that one review can cover both.

16. To consider this matter, I am breaking the leaflet down into its parts, to look at each element in accordance with the scheme. The leaflet is bi-lingual. I am making the assumption that the Welsh version is a direct translation of the English version. I base my comments and findings on the English version in the absence of anything to indicate they differ.

The leaflet is of a green background with the MPs name in yellow bold font. The Plaid Cymru logo is of a green background with a yellow daffodil emblem. There are therefore similarities, however, the

political party is not mentioned in the leaflet other than in the social media links which show Instagram contact as @anndaviesplaid. The other social media links do not name the party.

The leaflet is a 'welcome to 2025', and names Ann Davies as Serving you in Westminster. There is a pie-chart which sets out the cases the MP has dealt with since being elected. This pie-chart is parliamentary in nature.

Under the heading of Key issues I'm fighting for . . . the MP has listed 6 points. The first says "**Agricultural Property Relief (APR)** – Opposing Labour's changes to APR which threatens family farms and rural communities!". This statement is party political as it refers to a government policy decision naming this as a Labour Party decision. The second point is "**Winter Fuel Payments** – fighting the Government's cruel cuts for elderly constituents". This statement is party political as a challenge to government. Point 4 is "**Employer National Insurance** contributions – opposing the budget's burden on local businesses". This statement states a challenge to a government budget decision however this is not party political.

The further parts of the key issues name some issues the MP states she has been advocating for, including raising one issue at PMQs. The MP refers to herself as being Caerfyrddin's voice in Westminster. The MP states she will continue to fight for Caerfyrddin. This wording could be construed as being self-promoting although is factual.

17. In reviewing this case, I have asked the MP for her narrative as to how this expenditure can be construed as being value for money (IPSA fundamental principle). The MP has provided information that she made the decision to conduct some targeted communications and had sufficient budget to facilitate this. They obtained a quote from Royal Mail for full printing and distribution, but this estimate (c£13,000) was double the amount subject to this review and the MP deemed this not to be cost-effective nor appropriate stewardship of public funds. The MP decided instead to support a local printing company for the production of the leaflets and to use a mail service provided by Royal Mail.
18. Furthermore, I asked the MP to identify how they specifically targeted demographics and geographic areas in the distribution of this newsletter. The MP has provided detailed breakdown of the postcodes chosen for targeted mailshot, and those where a decision was made not to mailshot with this newsletter.
19. To assist in this review, I have reviewed the information available to MPs provided by IPSA which is there to ensure the MPs only spend money in accordance with the scheme. There is the information in the scheme, with additional information on IPSA online. The following link relates to advertising and newsletters [ipsaonline.org.uk/guidance/rules-and-eligibility#what-types-of-advertising-and-publications-can-you-claim-](https://ipsaonline.org.uk/guidance/rules-and-eligibility#what-types-of-advertising-and-publications-can-you-claim-).

## Newsletters

20. The 17<sup>th</sup> edition of 'the scheme' is the relevant issue for my review. This is the scheme rules which were in place at the time the MP made this claim. I find it important to specifically provide narrative on the point of newsletters.

21. Up to and including the 17<sup>th</sup> edition, newsletters, or 'multi-issue' publications have not been permitted (except for example where an MP is writing to an individual to address their multi-issues raised with them). From the 18<sup>th</sup> edition, newsletters are now permitted, however they must be carefully drafted so as not to be party-political, self-promoting or provide a campaigning advantage. In light of the change to the 18<sup>th</sup> edition, I consider it would be disproportionate to take action on a multi-issue communication where this restriction has now been lifted.

#### Political party manifesto issues

22. In reviewing this case, I have overlaid the issues in the newsletter subject to this review with Plaid Cymru manifesto issues. I find the following links:
- i) HS2 – the party is fighting for more money for Wales as HS2 is an England only project. (HS2 is an issue in the newsletter).
  - ii) Pylons – the party manifesto includes them fighting to preserve Wales' natural landscape and makes reference to the natural landscape. (Pylons is an issue in the newsletter).
23. Notwithstanding the above, both pylons and HS2 are important issues for the constituency regardless of political position on these. In their publication subject of this review, the MP has provided factual information as to how they have represented their constituents in this.

#### Parliamentary Standards Act 2009

24. Paragraph 6A PSA 2009 sets out the legal requirement on me as Compliance Officer. My duty is set out in Para 6 (2) The Compliance Officer must –
- (a) Consider whether the determination (or altered determination) is the determination that should have been made, and
  - (b) In light of that consideration, decide whether or not to confirm or alter it.

#### Procedures for investigations by the Compliance Officer for IPSA

25. Page 12 of the procedures sets out how as Compliance Officer I must handle the review.

#### The basis of the review from Ann Davies MP

26. Ann Davies MP wanted to reach out to her constituents, to ensure all had details as to how she could be contacted regardless of their digital access, to inform constituents as to the work she has done since starting as their MP and raising awareness of the types of issue she can raise in Parliament. The POM has stated that the leaflet worked, as, since distribution, they have seen a notable increase in calls and visits from constituents who otherwise may not have known how to get in touch.

27. Ann Davies MP obtained a quote for an alternative supplier which was deemed too expensive. The MP chose to support a local printing company by giving them this business and using Royal Mail for the distribution. The MP is satisfied that this provided value for money.

#### Mitigating factors

28. This was a new constituency with new boundaries.
29. The MP is new and had not produced a general publication before.
30. The publication achieved its objective of reaching out to harder to reach people and provide them with the range of means of contacting their MP. This may not have been as successful without producing a mailshot.
31. The MP has not deliberately broken the scheme rules.
32. The newsletter does not state these are the party views / issues, the MP makes it clear these are the things she is working on. There is no party line being referred to.

#### Findings

33. I find that IPSA applied the policy correctly in declining to pay for the printing and distribution of this leaflet.
34. I find that IPSA took into account the information provided by Ann Davies MP to consider their appeal, and that the information Ann Davies MP provided to me as review officer when lodging their review request had no fundamental difference to that she provided to IPSA.
35. Therefore – in accordance with PSA 2009 Para 6A (2)(a) my first finding is that the determination made by IPSA is the determination that should have been made.

#### Conclusion

36. This matter comes down to one fundamental point: Was this newsletter (which Ann Davies MP had produced and distributed) suitable to be funded by the IPSA?
37. When the MP provided me with detailed information as to the purpose of the information sheet, how they had selected how it would be distributed to and by what means, I find that

the MP applied the principles of **Value for Money, Accountability** and **Probity**. The key principle therefore under which I make my conclusions is that of **Parliamentary Purpose**.

38. If any one of the fundamental principles has not been met, then the expenditure would not be allowed under the scheme.

39. I make these observations:

- i) The publication was a newsletter, however this rule under the scheme has since changed within weeks of this publication and therefore I am not considering this element as a breach for which the MP cannot claim.
- ii) The newsletter was party-political in nature in that it specifically named opposing Labour Party policy and government decisions.
- iii) The newsletter represented value for money. The MP initially looked into sending out a constituency-wide circulation of this publication, however considered this to be excessive as the purpose was to reach those persons with limited e-connectivity. The MP has provided me with the breakdown of the postcodes they specifically targeted. The MP has advised that to mailshot every household in their constituency was quoted at a cost of c£13,000.
- iv) The MP has stated that the purpose of the newsletter was to inform constituents of what they have been dealing with, to highlight key things they have been fighting for and to provide contact information for people who might not have online connectivity. The newsletter achieves this.

40. Having reviewed the content of the leaflet in great detail and considered it against the scheme rules and the purpose provided by the MP of the leaflet, my view is that this was not a deliberate attempt by the MP to have IPSA pay to publish and distribute party political and self-promoting material, but naivety in how to achieve their purpose.

41. There is no provision under the scheme for jointly funding newsletters, there should be a distinct difference between party-political mail and that where the MP is ensuring their constituents know how to contact her and some of the issues and caseload facts.

42. Only a few words in the leaflet made elements party-political. The rest is acceptable within the rules of the scheme.

### Decision

43. In accordance with PSA Para 6A (2)(a), my decision is, that I consider that the determination made by IPSA is the determination that should have been made. Para 6A (2)(b) in light of this consideration, my decision is to alter it.

44. In the knowledge of detailed supportive information provided by the MP and their Proxy which was not known to the IPSA at the time of considering the appeal, I partially uphold the

decision made by IPSA to reject this claim in part. Under PSA Para 6A(2)(b) I alter that decision.

45. Taking into account my conclusions, I can see that the MP had a Parliamentary Purpose to reach out to their constituents but applied the rules incorrectly and that the Member has incorrectly asked IPSA to cover the cost of this newsletter with party-political and self-promotional elements which are not permitted. IPSA should not bear the full cost of this, but equally, the MP should not have to fund all of this herself.
46. Taking into consideration my conclusions, I consider that it would be appropriate for 50% of the cost of this leaflet to be met by the IPSA, and the MP or their political party to cover the remainder of the cost.
47. I make this finding at Para 46 in the knowledge that had the MP sought IPSAs advice as to the wording of this publication, that a joint funding would not have been allowed, however, had the wording been deemed appropriate for an amended document, IPSA would have then met the full cost.
48. My decision is not a precedent and cannot be used to seek future joint funding by this MP or any Member of Parliament.
49. PSA 2009 Para 6A (6) provides that an MP requesting a review may appeal the decision of the Compliance Officer made under subsection (2)(b) to the First-tier Tribunal. (7) the appeal must be brought before the end of the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which notice of the decision is sent to the member (unless the Tribunal directs that it may be brought after the end of that period).
50. In accordance with the Guidance on the Conduct of Reviews by the Compliance Officer for IPSA, para 13, the details of this review will be published in such a manner as the Compliance Officer sees fit.

Matt Walker  
Compliance Officer  
10<sup>th</sup> June 2025