

IPSA IMPLEMENTATION PANEL
Minutes of first meeting, 10am Monday 26th October 2009
111 Buckingham Palace Road

Present:

Daniel Leighton (Demos)
Maurice Frankel (Campaign for Freedom of Information)
Dr Ruth Fox (Hansard Society)
Alexandra Runswick (Unlock Democracy)
Mark Wallace (Taxpayers Alliance)
Michael Kenny (IPPR)
Andrew McDonald (interim Chief Executive, IPSA) – Chairman of meeting
James Gerard (IPSA Implementation team)
Sam Reed (Secretariat, IPSA Panel)

WELCOME

1. Andrew McDonald opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and introducing himself. He then provided background on the establishment of IPSA, its role and the timescales involved.

ROLE OF THE PANEL

2. Sam Reed began to discuss the role of the panel by leading a conversation on the aim of the meetings. Ruth Fox noted a concern with the wording of one of the aims as it might be interpreted as suggesting that the panel was assisting IPSA in designing the policies and endorsing IPSA decisions and this is not the case. Sam Reed agreed to revise the language in the aim to clarify that this was not the case.
3. Sam Reed then went on to set out the proposed approach to be taken in these meetings. Mark Wallace suggested it might be helpful to have meetings sooner than 6 weeks apart. Sam Reed explained that as the next month was particularly busy for the programme, we propose holding the next meeting in a month's time. However, going forward, 6 weeks felt like the right amount of time to be able to develop some of the ideas discussed.
4. The panel discussed the publication of minutes. Everyone agreed that the minutes should be in line with IPSA's open and transparent ethos, and that a full minute should be published.

PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED & UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC OPINION

5. Daniel Leighton started by introducing the citizens convention Demos hosted in June 2009. He highlighted three root causes of the wider problem as: distrust in Government and politics; a centralisation of

power; and parliamentary sovereignty. He suggested a regular consultation process within IPSA was required to engage with the public.

6. He then outlined some of the results of the convention. He summarised by saying there was an underlying sense in the public that the political class are living 'another life' not connected to the real world. One suggestion for addressing this accusation was to keep expenses completely separate from allowances, which would help to clarify what exactly the money was being used for.
7. On the issue of trust – Alexandra Runswick explained that more openness over the years has not had the desired effect of increasing trust. What was needed was a much better understanding of the whole political system as well as expenses. The Scottish Parliament was mentioned as better practice, partly because it was quick to publish expenses and was clear in doing so. Alex suggested that IPSA's role must be to provide a system that is easy for people to understand.
8. Mark Wallace said that transparency is essential and suggested that a key problem was a perceived lack of parity, and that MP's were refusing to live by the laws they had passed. He agreed it was important to separate expenses and allowances.
9. Michael Kenny suggested that one of the key problems was a lack of accountability to the public. Key to this was how IPSA manages its public interface. Maurice Frankel suggested IPSA is well placed to open a new book on openness by having a complaints function. Also, it was important to note that MPs do have unique jobs and demands and it wasn't helpful to compare MPs lifestyles to our own.
10. Ruth Fox mentioned that the Audit of Political Engagement consistently demonstrates low levels of public knowledge and understanding about the role of MPs and how the political process works. Increasing knowledge and information would be key. Ruth referred to research carried out in the summer of 2008, which showed that just 19% of people polled thought Parliament was working for them. The problem was far more deeply rooted than just expenses.
11. Ruth also suggested that the language used in relation to expenses and allowances contributed to some of the problems for both MPs and the public. She suggested, for example, that the term second 'home' instead of alternative 'accommodation' implied a level of parity between constituency and London homes that was not intended within the rules but was utilised by MPs to their benefit. The term second 'home' should be scrapped and a lot of thought given to the terminology used for the new system.
12. Andrew McDonald asked for views on what else IPSA should be considering. Mark Wallace said it was important to think about how the

public will view IPSA, and suggested a good searchable website was essential. He also suggested the public will be happy if IPSA is seen to be a strong Authority, which may mean it upsets some MPs.

13. Daniel Leighton stressed the importance of consulting with members of the public outside of the 'Westminster village' and find a way of bringing them into the decision-making process. Alexandra Runswick agreed that it was important for accountability to provide a structural involvement for members of the public. Otherwise there is a risk that IPSA will be labelled as 'another quango in Westminster'. She added that when considering public engagement it was crucial to be clear on what the purpose of it was and what would happen to the recommendations. Michael Kenny added that it was important for IPSA to be seen and understood in cities other than London.
14. Maurice Frankel highlighted the challenge faced on drafting a robust policy in the short time available. He commented that Legg had let the real offenders off in his initial findings and that finding the right balance for policy with limited resources available would be difficult.

IPSA PRINCIPLES

15. James Gerard introduced the draft IPSA principles and commented that he wanted the panel to challenge these and identify additional principles. He highlighted some key discussion points such as transparency vs data security, and independence vs supporting MPs. Mark Wallace suggested that the current fees office had been compromised and that key to maintaining independence was from designing a robust policy at the start.
16. James Gerard raised the question of to what extent IPSA needs to command the confidence of the public and MPs. Daniel Leighton suggested that the confidence of MPs would be partly commanded through basic competence – ie that MPs are paid on time and the process is effective. Maurice Frankel suggested that MPs need confidence that the rules are fairly applied and that it is deemed to be a fair system. On the issue of fairness, he went on to say that IPSA needed to do what was right, which would not necessarily be what was popular. Michael Kenny agreed that fairness should be incorporated into the principles. He also suggested that it might be helpful to distinguish between over-arching principles and operational principles.
17. Andrew McDonald suggested that accountability alone would not eradicate all of the legacy issues people had identified – there was a definite need for a strong management culture. Ruth Fox queried the arrangements for the transfer of some staff to IPSA and the sensitive nature of this given the desire to develop a strong management culture which was clearly different to that in place under the old system. Andrew McDonald replied that some staff would be moving over to IPSA, but we were not yet in a position to indicate how many.

18. James Gerard raised the issue of transparency, and asked what panel members thought IPSA should publish, and when? Maurice Frankel suggested that it was important to publish the claim as well as the payment, though this need not be done until after the claim had been approved or rejected, which would allow the decision to be seen in context. Andrew McDonald said he would provide a bulletin for the next panel meeting outlining progress on all areas of the programme.

FUTURE TOPICS & MEMBERSHIP

19. It was agreed that topics for future agendas would need to be considered in light of the publication of the CSPL report on 4th November. Two topics that would need to be discussed shortly, however, were IPSA's approach to transparency and methods for consultation.
20. The panel suggested various names for additional members. Andrew asked that any further ideas be fed into Sam.
21. It was agreed that the next panel would meet in approximately 1 month's time.

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