

Ian Todd
Chief Executive & Accounting Officer



**Independent Parliamentary
Standards Authority**

Rt. Hon Karen Bradley MP
Chair, Procedure Committee
House of Commons, London
SW1A 0AA

By email

Ref: CEO-2022-010

21 March 2022

Dear Karen,

I am writing to you as Chair of the Procedure Committee in response to your meeting of 9 March on the presence of babies in the Chamber and Westminster Hall. Whilst the subject of the inquiry is outside IPSA's remit and a matter for the House, we were cited within the evidence session, and I thought that it would be helpful to provide you and Committee members with an outline of the support which IPSA provides and clarify any potential for misunderstanding of our position.

IPSA has been providing funding for MPs requiring staffing cover when taking parental leave since 2019. Though the Equalities and Human Rights Commission had no concerns with our previous system of pre-approved contingency fund applications and a single point of senior contact for such matters, we decided to implement a bespoke fund for such cover, which is now included in our Scheme of MPs' Business Costs following public consultation. Since then, we have sought to be flexible in providing support to MPs recognising that, as was clear from the 2,600 consultation responses, a one size fits all approach would not be appropriate given the various ways MPs may choose to set up their offices during a period of absence and more generally. Throughout, we ensured that we liaised closely with the House to take steps in parallel with the proxy voting scheme.

Later in 2021, we expanded support in two ways: first by creating a new framework job description for a senior 'MP Representative' role professionally benchmarked at a pro-rated salary of £60,000 per annum (plus on-costs) and second, by extending the eligibility of this funding for MPs requiring extended absence for reasons other than maternity, paternity, adoption, or surrogacy, such as illness, hospitalisation, or caring responsibilities. We have now formalised this extension and have recently published [new guidance](#) on how MPs can quickly access support. A number of MPs have now accessed this funding in different ways and for different reasons. As such, IPSA has not and does not reject applications for extended absence cover within the general staffing rules of the Scheme and the funding envelope above, recognising the diversity of MPs' circumstances by providing a flexible framework within which MPs can employ this funding as they see fit. Importantly too, any costs under this fund will be published as an aggregate across all MPs and not at an individual level.

We have also been very clear that we are open to piloting new approaches within our legal and constitutional authority and have inbuilt discretion to extend funding on a case-by-case basis.

In the session, the concept of a locum MP was also raised. As you will appreciate, it is a matter far outside IPSA's jurisdiction to determine or establish this concept. We note the finding of the Women and Equalities Select Committee's inquiry into a gender sensitive House of Commons that the notion of a locum MP is "constitutionally difficult and potentially legally problematic... [as] only MPs, as elected public officeholders, are permitted to take part in House of Commons proceedings on behalf of their constituents". It is also not clear how, even if IPSA were to recognise such a position, this would have any impact on a Minister wishing to discuss issues with MPs only given that the 'locum' would remain a staff member both contractually and constitutionally, and IPSA has no locus nor influence in how Ministers engage with MPs' offices. It is also not within IPSA's remit to comment on the proxy voting scheme and its compatibility with 'keep in touch days' perhaps undertaken in parallel. As such, and in line with benchmarking referenced above, we were not able to offer a 'locum MP' position nor match an MP's salary given the very clear responsibilities which only an MP can undertake in Parliament. This is not to understate the vital constituency work which MPs conduct for their constituents and which we have always recognised. In providing the more senior MP Representative role with significant levels of authority, autonomy, and decision-making, we hope to have struck a balance between providing further flexibility and support whilst recognising the constitutional reality that only MPs can physically participate in Commons' proceedings.

I hope that this letter provides you and Committee members with assurance that IPSA takes its responsibilities very seriously and has worked to improve the support we offer to MPs requiring extended absence within the bounds of our legal and constitutional authority. It should also be read in the context of other IPSA funding provision, such as the dependant uplift, dependant travel, and travel claims by MP spouses/partners. Whilst there is more to do, we welcome the Women and Equalities Select Committee's report into a gender sensitive House of Commons and its conclusion that IPSA has taken a "major step forward" in seeking to provide funding cover for MPs on extended absence. We will engage thoroughly with its recommendations, many of which we have already implemented or are planned in future, before responding formally to them in due course.

As I mentioned, we are keen to explore how we may refine the support available and pilot new approaches to extended absence. In this vein, we will shortly engage further with MPs, staff, House services, and subject matter experts. Further to my letter of 11 February, we are keen to engage with you as Chair of the Procedure Committee and to discuss this further if this would be of interest.

For any queries, please contact my Chief of Staff, who is in contact with the Committee secretariat.

With very best wishes,



Ian Todd
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