

## 0. Introduction

The ideal of Gender Sensitive Parliaments (GSP) has become an international democratic norm or standard. What a GSP would look like has been clearly articulated in a number of reports, and adopted as a model to aim for by many institutions.<sup>1</sup> However, it remains in most parliaments an aspiration rather than a reality.

In 2020 International Organizations including the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU), the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), and UN Women have all published revised and/or Covid-19 specific GSP documents. The world's parliaments do not want for information about what constitutes a GSP or how to achieve GSP status. There are standards, frameworks, guidelines, primers and checklists a plenty.

Gender Sensitive Parliaments do not just happen: they require much – and importantly sustained – individual and institutional political and administrative will, with associated transformation in formal rules and processes, informal ways of working, organizational capacity and resourcing.

The 2021 WEC GSP inquiry is a welcome opportunity to measure progress towards achieving this ideal in House of Commons practices, processes, and norms and culture. The UK House of Commons has shown itself to be open to change, particularly between 2016-18 in respect of GSP/DSP, and in 2020 as a consequence of the pandemic, it demonstrated that it was more than capable of quickly adapting to new circumstances. Rather than merely reacting to events, however, it is critical for the House to not only determine which of the recent contingent reforms should be maintained, but also to establish a clear GSP/DSP agenda for this Parliament.

A critical review of the various approaches to GSP provides for a revised definition:

**A GSP values and prioritises gender equality as a social, economic and political objective and reorients and transforms a parliament's institutional culture, processes and practices, and outputs towards these objectives.<sup>2</sup>**

This GSP definition works with 4 dimensions (see Box 1 below).<sup>3</sup>

*The Good Parliament* Report advanced a Diversity Sensitive Parliament (DSP) framework, recognizing that women are not the only groups under-represented in the House of Commons.

**It is for WEC in this inquiry to determine whether the House of Commons should shift from a GSP to a DSP; if it decides to stick to GSP it should subscribe to an intersectional definition of GSP.**

### Box 1

#### The Four Dimensions of a Gender-Sensitive Parliament

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<sup>1</sup> See Footnote 1 and IPU (2011, 2012, 2020) <https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/gender-equality/gender-sensitive-parliaments>.

<sup>2</sup> Childs and Palmieri forthcoming. Available from the authors on request.

<sup>3</sup> Palmieri and Childs (2021). Available from the authors on request. The 4 dimensions updates the IPU's seven GSP dimensions and *TGP's* three DSP dimensions.

Dimension	Description
<b>Dimension 1 Equality of participation within parliament</b>	Dimension 1 asks how a diverse group of MPs might be selected for, and elected to, parliament and how, once present, they are enabled to become effective participants across parliament's core activities: representation and interest articulation, legislative scrutiny and executive accountability.
<b>Dimension 2 Accessible parliamentary infrastructure</b>	Dimension 2 takes a critical look at the way in which parliament facilitates the work of members and whether this privileges a particular type of MP – explicitly or implicitly. It covers everything from the buildings and furniture of parliament to the official rules and working practices that underpin the array of members' parliamentary activities.
<b>Dimension 3 Empowering parliamentary culture</b>	Dimension 3 acknowledges that the official, written rules never tell the whole story about how institutions function on the ground – this is what might be thought of as the 'normal way of doing things'. It is, admittedly, frequently hard to pin down informal institutional norms, practices and culture. That said [...] parliamentary culture [...] is not fixed but an evolving phenomenon, subject to change.
<b>Dimension 4 Gender-equality policy/women's substantive representation</b>	Dimension 4 subjects the political work of parliament – its outputs – to gendered analysis. These would include legislation, policy, scrutiny and interest representation. It asks whether parliaments acknowledge the perspectives and addresses the needs and interests of women; whether women's experiences have been taken into account; ensures that gendered differentiated outcomes are not to women's disadvantage and aims for gender equality between women and men. In so doing, such analysis will frequently be analysing a parliament's work in holding a government to account for its gender sensitivity.

**1. How successfully have changes proposed in the past been implemented to make the House of Commons more gender sensitive?**

There are 3 Steps that a parliament embarking on GSP/DSP change should take:

1. **A GSP/DSP audit or review.** The House of Commons IPU-facilitated GSP Audit was undertaken in 2018 and was first reviewed by WEC in 2019.
2. **Evaluation of current Gender (in)Sensitivities.** An audit or review forms the basis for the identification of necessary reforms and the development of a GSP action plan.
3. **Institutionalization.** This involves determining the 'Big P' and 'Small P' politics of GSP/DSP change; identifying administrative and political actors responsible for, and who will lead on the work in, the action plan; and identifying, and if necessary augmenting, institutional and political capacity to meet GSP/DSP standards. Institutionalization questions include:
  - a. How do parliaments need to be organized to achieve GSP/DSP?
  - b. What changes to rules and practices might need to be undertaken?
  - c. Are appropriate resources in place – how might resources need to be better distributed or augmented?
  - d. How do we ensure that advances secured in 'crisis' parliaments are not swiftly forgotten when Covid-19 is less urgent or hopefully over?

The success rate of *The Good Parliament's* Report recommendations - 18 of 43 – has been higher than might have been expected. The following actors, processes and dynamics of reform that account for its impact include:

- **The creation of a shared agenda.** This was represented in the first instance by *TGP* and its later broad endorsement by MPs on the Reference Group and by the Commission.
- **The establishment of *The Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion*.** This took ownership of *TGP's* 'shopping bag of reforms' and turned it into a set of priority

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reforms – an **action plan**. The Group ceased to meet in autumn 2018; the Commons has since suffered from a GSP/DSP institutional deficit. This was keenly and negatively felt during the pandemic period.

- **Gendered parliamentarianism.** This refers to women **MPs working across parties, ‘as’ and ‘for’ women**; it reflected the reality that there were more MPs from all parties in the post 2015 Commons who were gender conscious/feminist, and who experienced and were prepared to call out those aspects of the House’s culture and ways of working which projected a sense of a masculinized, exclusionary institution. Members of the Reference Group - which included the then Chair of WEC, Maria Miller and former whip, Anne Milton, liaised with wider groups of women MPs in the House (e.g. the Women’s PLP, chaired by Jess Phillips, ‘mother MPs’), and took evidence from other parliamentary actors, including party whips and the parliamentary press lobby. They also worked with the Mother of the House, Harriet Harman, and then Leader of the House, Andrea Leadsom, on proxy voting for babyleave.
- **Male allies.** The then Speaker played a critical role in establishing, Chairing, resourcing and advancing the Commons Reference Group’s agenda.
- **Administrative support and resources.** House officials and Clerks were closely involved in the design of a technically appropriate set of recommendations for *TGP*; clerks and officials later supported the work of the Commons Reference Group on a day-to-day basis.

### 2. What additional procedures and working arrangements should be changed. Suggestions can include, but need not be limited to: leave for Members who are parents and carers, proxy voting and virtual attendance?

**Rather than provide a list of individual reforms, either substantive and/or procedural, I would suggest the following:**

- I. **An internal, ‘quick and dirty’ update of *TGP* recommendations.** This should note which are fully implemented and permanent; partially implemented and/or temporary or at risk; and which are as yet unaddressed. This update should also clarify where developments undertaken during hybridity have shown that reforms recommended in *TGP* are now more feasible.
- II. **A consolidation of the *TGP*, CPA, UN Women, IPU and Remotely Representative House’s recommendations/checklists/guidance,** organized by the 4 dimensions of GSP and augmented by organizational and procedural reforms (referenced in these documents by the principle and practice of institutionalization). **I would be happy to prepare this for WEC. This document would provide WEC with a revised set of reforms that could form the basis of any new GSP/DSP body’s action plan.**
- III. **That WEC ask Mr Speaker to confirm whether,** now that Covid-19 restrictions are being relaxed in Parliament, **he is minded to establish a *new* Commons Reference Group,** and/or what other institutional grouping or process he might support. (See Section 4, Table 1 below)
- IV. **I also attach my submission to IPSA consultation on maternity leave as an appendix, which to my knowledge is not yet published (Appendix 1, below).**

### 3. Which individuals or bodies are responsible for taking action?

The House of Commons is a highly complex organization; **there is no one individual or body that is responsible for, or is positioned to act,** on the many and varied reforms that are necessary to achieve a GSP/DSP at Westminster.

**The success of gender and diversity sensitizing efforts since 2016 lay in large part with the explicit strategy of linking specific reforms with particular parliamentary individuals and bodies** on both the administrative and political side of the House. This has been acknowledged by key actors – political and administrative - within and beyond the Commons. It is for this reason that the same approach for *TGP* in 2016 was taken in *The Remotely Representative House* in 2021.

In the development of (i) a new shared GSP/DSP agenda and, most importantly of all, (ii) the new action plan, this strategy should be continued. **Individual reforms *must* be linked with the correct actor, whether administrative or political.**

Over and above the specification of a reform alongside its responsible actor, fundamentally what matters is that there is a formal **process that provides institutional leadership and accountability (political and administrative) over the various individuals and parliamentary actors**, to ensure that reforms and the wider reform process are institutionalized, as outlined in the CPA 2020 GSP Guidelines, and as further discussed below.

**In sum, there needs to be an institutional body – group of MPs and officials - and a permanent process through which they can effectively hold other parliamentary actors to account for the reforms the latter are responsible for.**

#### **4. What and who should drive change on this issue?**

**The Good Parliament (TGP) Report was influenced by international parliamentary best practice** and in a context within which it is widely acknowledge that parliamentary reports can easily be left on the metaphorical shelf. It was for this reason that much effort was oriented towards identifying the means by which the GSP/DSP agenda might be taken forward and implemented.

**Informed by the Swedish Speakers Gender Advisory Group** and having taken advice from the then Clerk and other senior Clerks of the House, it was agreed that the then Speaker would facilitate the creation of a new group of MPs. This became **The Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion**. Discussion was given to the creation of a new select committee or the creation of a subcommittee of an existing committee, but it was agreed at the time that neither of these were appropriate nor viable options.

The new group established by the Speaker, The Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion was **so named, to signal explicitly that it was a House body**. Its membership comprised a small number of Members, male and female, from across the House. Crucially, it was resourced by the Speaker's Office and provided with administrative and clerky support. Ultimately it was chaired by Mr Speaker, although this was not the original design.

The Reference Group was critical for the implementation of many of the TGP's recommendations that were addressed in 2016-18. It was highly unfortunate for the continuation of GSP/DSP change, that the combination of Brexit politics and the fallout from the House's sexual harassment and bullying revelations meant that the Group stopped meeting in the Autumn of 2018.

Its prolonged absence **means that the House of Commons currently lacks political and institutional leadership on GSP/DSP**. Whilst there is some ongoing albeit largely discrete efforts, there is no organized and dedicated parliamentary body currently taking responsibility for gender and diversity sensitizing the House.

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Faced with a GSP/DSP institutional deficit, WEC should urgently recommend the creation of a new body. Options include:

1. The re-establishment of the Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion
2. The creation of a House Diversity Sensitivity Committee
3. The creation of a Women's Caucus
4. The creation of a WEC Subcommittee

Table 1 below outlines the advantages and disadvantages of four possibilities. The first three options would require administrative and clerical resources akin to other House/DS Committees. All should be supported by a designated gender expert. Any new MPs group might also consider including representatives of staff to reflect issues, such as sexual harassment and institutional infrastructure and culture, that cut across the MP/staff divide.

**Table 1**  
**Options for a new GSP/DSP Parliamentary Body**

	<b>Composition</b>	<b>Chair</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
<b>The Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion</b>	Invited by Speaker; mix of MPs, women/men, younger/more experienced, and publicly associated with GSP/DSP efforts	Formally Mr Speaker; In practice may be chaired by Deputy Speaker or a Chair elected by Group members	Formally Chaired by Mr Speaker, but independent, the Group reports to The Commission; Mr Speaker's leadership signals institutional 'buy in' and promotes substantive engagement by MPs, House officials and Clerks, and other related actors; Ensures a group membership comprised of those supportive of, and with wider parliamentary responsibilities for, the GSP/DSP agenda; It has a track record of success in the House. Were the Group to include some previous members institutional memory would be preserved.	Where membership lies with the Speaker this might risk lack of institutional 'buy in' from MPs who are not part of the Group; May risk opposition from a Government and/or backbenchers sensitive to the 'power' of the Speaker	1 <sup>st</sup>
<b>House Diversity Sensitivity Committee</b>	The Mother of the House, the Chairs of party women's parliamentary organizations (e.g. the Women's PLP; Conservative Women's Forum); the Chair and former Chair of WEC; the Chair of the WIP APPG; and representatives, male or female, from other under-represented MPs in the	Formally chaired by the Mother of the House, the group might in practice be chaired by another, elected by its Members.	Ensures a group membership comprised of those supportive of, and with wider parliamentary responsibilities for GSP/DSP agenda; Given that this Group includes some members of the former Reference Group and the Mother of the House it benefits from institutional memory; Formally distances the Group from the Speaker, suggestive of greater independence; If a Deputy Speaker is included, the body indirectly gains political and institutional leadership from the Speaker's Office;	Arguably institutionally less powerful than The Reference Group, as it formally lacks the involvement and support of the Speaker; Relies on the 'good will' of the Speaker and via him the Commission for formal recognition and institutional responsiveness; May receive less support from MPs if perceived as a 'special interest group'.	2 <sup>nd</sup>

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	House (BAME, sexuality, disability, class).				
<b>Women's Caucus</b>	A small number of women MPs from all parties	Formally chaired by the Mother of the House; The group might in practice be chaired by another, elected by its Members.	Ensures a group membership comprised of those supportive of the GSP agenda; Women acquire institutional leadership on the GSP agenda; Creates a formal, women only space/grouping within the House of Commons, within institutional resources and authority (cf WIP APPG) Formally Chaired by the Mother the House, the Caucus would gain additional legitimacy, authority, and greater effectiveness from her title and experience Would meet a key IPU GSP criteria, bringing the UK parliament into international best practice; Formally distanced from the Speaker, it is formally independent of that office.	As a GSP group and not a formally DSP group, inclusivity amongst Members is reduced, even if it adopts an intersectional approach to GSP; Will formally lack the support of the Speaker; Relies on the 'good will' of the Speaker and Commission for formal recognition; If a woman Deputy Speaker was made an honorary Member this would provide for formal Speaker and Commission relations, and all associated legitimacy and authority benefits; May be institutionally less powerful than the Reference Group even if symbolically strong as a women's parliamentary organization; May receive less support and/or face opposition from (male) Members, because of formal exclusion from its membership; Would supplant the WIP APPG, risking a reduction in the effectiveness, or the loss, of the only bicameral women's parliamentary organization at Westminster.	3 <sup>rd</sup>  To to be considered only if the first two options are formally rejected
<b>WEC Sub-committee</b>	Small number of WEC Members	Chair elected amongst sub-committee members	Likely to result in a group membership comprised of those supportive of the DSP agenda; Inherits the formal status and powers of a DSC; Will be institutionally legitimate and authoritative.	May require a change to Standing Orders, and thereby dependent upon majority support in the House (and thus may t be less politically viable); 'Blurs' the boundaries between DSC and House Committees; Increases the workload of WEC members (and WEC staff); Risks capacity for GSP/DSP work, as Members' focus is split between main and sub committee; May weaken the accountability impact of WEC re: its existing remit; Either necessitates an increase in WEC's budget (which may not be forthcoming), or sees this spread more thinly, to the detriment of both the full and subcommittee.	4 <sup>th</sup>  Only to be considered if the first two are formally rejected

**5. How should our Buildings and facilities be changed to support a gender sensitive House of Commons and the opportunities presented by the Restoration & Renewal Programme?**

**Particular TGP recommendations relating to R&R** (Recommendations 33-35 assigned to the Procedure Committee, and 36-39 assigned to any new 'new R&R body) **should be reconsidered as part of the 'consolidation' of the various GSP/DSP reports noted above in Section 2 (II).**

**R&R as process and in terms of outcomes must be fully in line with the principles and practices of GSP/DSP.** GSP/DSP should be central to all considerations and decisions by the R&R body. Put baldly, the restored and renovated Parliament cannot be permitted to be anything other than a GSP/DSP.

**There are serious concerns about the diversity of the eight parliamentary members of the Sponsor Body:** there are currently no female MPs on the Sponsor Body and only one female Peer. Key decisions have and continue to be taken without dedicated input from any woman elected to Parliament.

**The Sponsor body should moreover consult on a regular and formal basis with any new GSP/DSP parliamentary group** (see Section 4 above). **The new GSP/DSP body should produce an annual report judging the GSP/DSP of R&R work.** Where no new GSP/DSP body is created then the R&R body must consult with WEC who will take on the annual evaluations.

**All decant provisions - physical buildings, furniture, procedures, practices and emergent culture - should also be subject to a GSP/DSP audit.** These should take place on an annual basis and must **involve external GSP/DSP experts** working with the new GSP/DSP group. **All associated recommendations should be formally considered by the Sponsor body.**

#### **6. How can a more inclusive culture be adopted in the House of Commons?**

As stated above, GSP/DSP do not just happen; similarly, **GSP/DSP cultures cannot be just hoped for.**

There has been considerable academic debate about the drivers of institutional change, including within parliaments; whether these are external and dramatic, or internal and incremental. There is increasingly agreement that both are in play; those seeking to change institutions need not merely wait for a large-scale event such as a financial crisis or a pandemic, nor conclude that small changes over time cannot add up to transformative change. Academic analysis has also explored the two-way relationships between formal and informal rule change. Reflecting on the experiences - successes and failures – of TGP's individual recommendations, alongside observations of the hybrid House leads me to the conclusion that in the House of Commons, because its traditions, practices and cultures are so strong (e.g. executive/legislative relations and adversarial party politics), formal rule change is frequently necessary to bring about GSP/DSP. As new rules are implemented, new behaviour is required, and overtime new norms should emerge. Such an approach supports the aforementioned 3-Step approach to gender sensitizing a parliament, and the institutionalization of GSP processes and capacities noted above.

Appendix 1



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IPSA

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**Consultation: Funding for MP parental leave cover and staff reservists leave**

**1. Do you agree that a new MP Parental Leave Cover Fund should be created?**

Yes.

As an academic researcher who has published widely on women's political representation in the UK, advises the UK Parliament, the Women and Equalities Committee, political parties, the former Speaker, UN Women, the Commonwealth Parliamentarians Association, and as author of *The Good Parliament* report (2016), who worked directly with the House to introduce proxy voting for babyleave, I fully support the introduction of maternity leave to enable the new parent MP to fulfil their representational and birthing and caring duties.

Democracies cannot be considered fully democratic where women are under-represented; neither should there be a 'motherhood gap'. We have only had data on parents in parliament since 2013, when myself and Prof. Rosie Campbell undertook the first survey. This found a significant gap between women and men MPs' parental status. Making Parliament more gender sensitive was one means to reduce this gap. Between 2016-2020 a number of reforms benefiting the parent MP have been introduced. We updated the parent survey in 2017, finding that new cohorts (2010 and after) had similar rates of parenthood. The presence of younger cohorts of women in today's House of Commons means that the institution has undeniably witnessed a step-change in its composition: there are now not only *more elected women who are mothers* than previously, there are also *more women having babies* whilst sitting as MPs. Seventeen have been born to women MPs since 2010.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> HC Deb 1 February 2018 c1013; HC Deb 1 February 2018 c1016, cited in Kelly, R. (2020).



The following table outlines the key stages in the introduction of proxy voting for babyleave, introduced to allow MPs to be away from the House of Commons but retain their rights to vote in divisions. This move was conceived as critical for MPs to be able to balance their parliamentary and caring work. It was acknowledged that whilst necessary, proxy voting for MPs on babyleave would only deal with only aspect of MPs’ work. I note that in Oct 2017 the I newspaper reported that IPSA had ‘given its support to proposals for 6 months paid maternity leave for MPs ‘in principle’.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letters/parental-leave-stella-creasy-mp-parliament-ipsa-maternity-a8976091.html>~

**Proxy Voting for Babyleave: Agenda for Reform**

Parliamentary Reports, Motions and Orders	
Speaker’s Conference Final Report, 2010	We believe that maternity, paternity and caring leave is an issue which all three main political parliamentary parties have as yet failed to take fully seriously...each parliamentary party should draw up a formal statement of policy (Paragraphs 263-4)
Women In Parliament APPG Improving Parliament Report, 2014	Provide clarification on support available to MPs with primary caring responsibilities within the new expenses system and formalize parental leave to make it more family friendly
EDM 920, 2016 <sup>5</sup>	That this House calls on the Government to bring forward proposals to allow hon. Members on maternity or paternity leave to vote by proxy during their absence from the House; notes that there are no standing orders in place permitting hon. Members to vote whilst caring for young children or newborns; believes that the current rules on voting in Parliament are disenfranchising hon. Members who are away from Westminster for legitimate reasons; further notes that the increase in female hon. Members since 1997 has meant that the total number of hon. Members giving birth has trebled; notes that the House of Commons Modernisation Committee in 1998 suggested viable alternatives to voting in person; expresses concern that hon. Members do not qualify for maternity or paternity leave; further believes that a change to standing orders pertaining to voting would allow hon. Members to continue to represent constituents despite a temporary leave of absence from the House; believes that technological advances can eliminate any risk of fraud in proxy voting; and believes that, through smartcards or fingerprint recognition, a secure system of proxy voting could be available in a short time frame
<i>The Good Parliament Report</i> , 2016	Recommendation 12 (Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion) Produce a ‘House Statement’ on maternity, paternity, parental, adoption and caring leave. For the period of leave, the MP might choose to: (i) Vote remotely (i.e. off the Parliamentary Estate); (ii) Appoint a proxy from amongst fellow party MPs to vote and otherwise act for them in respect of tabling questions, amendments, etc. in Parliament; (iii) Be formally and transparently ‘paired’ so that their absence from Parliament does not affect the balance of party representation in divisions.
Motion 1 Feb 2018	That this House believes that it would be to the benefit of the functioning of parliamentary democracy that honourable Members who have had a baby or

<sup>5</sup> Early Day Motion 920 tabled by Tulip Siddiq.

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	adopted a child should for a period of time be entitled, but not required to discharge their responsibilities to vote in this House by proxy.
UK Gender Sensitive Parliament Audit, Nov 2018	At the time of agreeing our report, the House of Commons had not yet considered a substantive motion to implement its decision in principle to allow new parents to vote in a division by proxy. Such a motion should be brought forward immediately.
Order of 28 January 2019 <sup>1</sup>	(1) A Member may by reason of absence from the precincts of the House for childbirth or care of an infant or newly adopted child, arrange for their vote to be cast in accordance with this order by another Member acting as a proxy (proxy vote) <sup>1</sup> This order is to have effect until 28 January 2020.
Procedure Report	
Order of 23 Sept 2020	(2) That the following Standing Order be made: VOTING BY PROXY (1) A Member eligible under paragraph (2) may arrange for their vote to be cast by one other Member acting as a proxy (proxy vote) under a scheme drawn up by the Speaker in accordance with this order and published by him <b>(2) A Member is eligible for a proxy vote by reason of absence from the precincts of the House for childbirth or care of an infant or newly adopted child,</b> subject to the conditions set out in the scheme published under paragraph (1) of this order.

### Do you have any comments about the proposed rules of eligibility for this funding?

Proxy voting for baby leave provided differential leave for the mother and father MP; for reasons of fairness – and for reasons of role modelling best practice to the UK - IPSA should consider equalizing provision for both the mother and father MP, where the father is the primary carer.

IPSA should ensure that whatever rules these should be sufficiently flexible to allow MPs to return to Parliament earlier than they might have initially intended, and/or to return in an responsive fashion, were events such that they felt that a temporary return might be warranted. In other words, avoid strict ‘keeping in touch’ days.

Any new rules must also not undermine the provision and practice of baby leave proxy voting. This provides MPs with the means to represent their constituents in Parliament whilst they are caring for a new baby. In other words, any new maternity leave scheme should be compatible with this 2020 permanent change to the Standing Orders, rather than be regarded as its replacement. It should be for the individual MP to decide if they wish to use of the new ‘maternity leave’ scheme or whether they prefer the more informal system. I would politely suggest that some may wish to use both, consecutively, during the baby’s first few months/year, and that this should be permitted.

### Is there anything else IPSA should take into account when deciding on its policy in this area?

Whatever IPSA ultimately produces, its rules and regulations should not disadvantage the parent MP in terms of risk of personal reputation. I include the following from The Good Parliament Report:

- (i) *Seek the equitable publication of costs incurred by MPs in respect of their children. That is, like the additional costs incurred for reasons of disability or additional security, these should be published at the aggregate and not individual level*

The additional costs incurred by MPs with children are currently treated inequitably relative to the additional costs incurred by MPs with disabilities, and in relation to additional security costs.<sup>1</sup> This leaves MPs who make claims for legitimate children related costs being perceived as ‘expensive’ in the media, by political opponents, and amongst the public. This is one reason why some MPs do not claim their legitimate expenses; and it is why the least expensive MPs – often valorised by the press – are frequently older men either without children, or with grown up children. Whilst IPSA should of course confirm the legitimacy of all costs associated with MPs’ children, there is no public interest in this information being linked to individual Members. All the latter does is feed critical comment of the parent MP.

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<sup>1</sup> IPSA 2016, 23, 75.

**March 2021**