

Written evidence: IPSA response to the Committee on Standards inquiry into sanctions against MPs (SCT0007)

IPSA is the independent body that regulates and administers the business costs and expenses and decides the pay and pensions of the 650 elected Members of Parliament in the United Kingdom. We were created by the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, as the world's first independent regulator of MPs' financial remuneration.

IPSA has a statutory duty to set and pay MPs' salaries, pensions, staff and business costs, and to assure the public that this public money is well-regulated. We regulate by setting rules that support compliance, and by making independent, fair and transparent decisions in line with our principles. We provide assurance to the public by consulting them on our rules, operating transparently and publishing accessible information about MPs' business costs.

IPSA has a statutory duty under section 5 of the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009 to pay MPs' salaries, subject to action taken by the House of Commons itself in relation to a particular MP in the exercise of its disciplinary powers. Where the House of Commons makes a finding that an MP has breached the House's Code of Conduct and suspends that MP from the House for a period of time, IPSA suspends the payment of that MP's salary for the length of the suspension. For completeness, IPSA does not pay the salaries of any MP who has not taken the Oath in the chamber of the House of Commons.

IPSA does not apply any sanctions, as such, to MPs. However, we do recover any public monies owed by MPs. IPSA can refer a matter to the Compliance Officer if it considers that an MP has been paid an amount that should not have been allowed. The Compliance Officer has the power to investigate the matter and to provide information connected to the investigation to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards where it is relevant to the work of the Commissioner.

IPSA publishes all claims made by MPs. This fulfils our statutory responsibilities to account for the public money spent to support MPs in their parliamentary and constituency roles and provides transparency and assurance to the public. Publication is not a sanction, although some MPs may experience IPSA's refusal to pay sums outside the rules, or to publish claims they have made, as a public sanction.

It may be helpful in this context to set out IPSA's response to the recommendations in the July 2019 Gemma White report, as these included asking IPSA to withhold money from MPs as a potential sanction for MPs that did not attend training. We welcomed the report when it was published; we

take good employment practice and wellbeing in the workplace very seriously and we condemn bullying and harassment.

There were five recommendations for IPSA arising from the report:

1. IPSA should consider amending the wording of the standard confidentiality clause in staff employment contracts to make it clear that it does not prevent employees bringing a claim of bullying and harassment.
2. IPSA could consider making the receipt of staffing allowance for any new staff member conditional on an MP completing the Valuing Everyone training by a certain date
3. IPSA should consider whether there are any conditions which should be imposed for the next edition of the MPs' allowances scheme, in particular a requirement to demonstrate attendance at any particular training
4. IPSA should invite leavers to complete and return exit surveys pending establishment of the new HR department
5. IPSA, pending establishment of the HR department, should collect relevant data in a manner which facilitates monitoring of: equality and diversity; staff turnover; reasons for staff leaving; sickness absence; working hours; pay; appraisals conducted; performance management and disciplinary action

The first recommendation has been implemented. The fourth recommendation has been partially implemented as we have made exit survey templates available for MPs to use when staff leave their employment.

In respect of the fifth recommendation, there are significant data protection issues to address for IPSA to collect, store, process and share information about thousands of MPs' staff. IPSA's Board has therefore resolved that we would not start collecting data until an HR department, that can make use of the information, is established. We are working with House colleagues to put processes in place to collect and share the information lawfully.

Finally, in respect of the second and third recommendations, IPSA's Board considered whether the staffing or other budgets should be withheld from MPs that do not attend the Valuing Others training course, and concluded that this would not be an effective or proportionate response. We have committed to considering other, potentially more effective measures with House officials as they establish the HR department. We would be happy to discuss with the

Committee how IPSA and the House might use its powers in sanctioning MPs.

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