

**Submission to public
consultation on
IPSA's Strategy
2018-2022**

February 2018

Committee on
Standards in
Public Life

The Seven Principles of Public Life

The Principles of public life apply to anyone who works as a public office-holder. This includes all those who are elected or appointed to public office, nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in the civil service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, NDPBs, and in the health, education, social and care services. All public office-holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources. The principles also have application to all those in other sectors delivering public services.

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Background

1. The Committee on Standards in Public Life welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on IPSA's strategy for 2018-2022.
2. This submission outlines the Committee's past positions on IPSA's operation, and, based on this, highlights areas for IPSA to take into account as part of its strategy.

Intimidation in Public Life

3. In *Intimidation in Public Life*, published in December 2017, the Committee welcomed the fact that IPSA take personal security considerations into account in its publication policy, and stated that IPSA should remain alert to these considerations.
4. The Committee welcomes IPSA's commitment in its draft strategy in relation to the security of sensitive information about MPs, their staff and families.
5. As part of its strategic aim to work in partnership, IPSA should regularly engage with MPs in order to understand how its policies impact their day-to-day work, especially those from particular groups such as female MPs or those with families, in order to ensure that IPSA's policies do not unintentionally put MPs in a vulnerable position.

MPs Allowances and Expenses

6. In *MPs expenses and allowances*, published in December 2009, the Committee stated that "there is widespread agreement that openness and transparency ought to be key principles which underpin the new scheme of expenses".¹
7. The principles of openness (acting in an open and transparent manner) and accountability (submitting to public scrutiny) are mutually reinforcing. MPs are held more effectively to account where there is greater openness and transparency.
8. The Committee therefore welcomes IPSA's commitment to transparency as one of its strategic aims for 2018-2022, and its intention to make data on MPs' spending more visibly accessible.
9. The Committee also outlined three core responsibilities for IPSA:
 - Confirm compliance with the systems, processes and standards.
 - Ensure that breaches of control are identified and rectified promptly.
 - Assure the public that the expenses system is being used as intended.²
10. The Committee therefore welcomes IPSA's commitment to maintain a strong and supportive regulatory environment. We would note that, whilst the strategy commits to monitoring the operation of the scheme, a system of assurance must also ensure there are processes in place to rectify breaches quickly and efficiently if they occur.

Striking the Balance

¹ *MPs' allowances and expenses*, 14.40

² *MPs' allowances and expenses*, 14.3

11. In *Striking the Balance*, published in September 2016, the Committee stated that it was best practice for regulators to “actively engage with those they regulate and take a leadership role by encouraging positive attitudes towards compliance”³. The Committee identified “growing evidence that regulatory effectiveness is maximised by a collaborative approach that actively promotes compliance as enlightened self-interest rather than a reliance upon deterrence and punishment”⁴.
12. We welcome IPSA’s intention to simplify aspects of the system for claiming expenses.
13. The regulatory framework for MPs business costs and expenses should rightly set a high standard; but compliance with the rules should not be unnecessarily burdensome. We recommend that IPSA look for further opportunities to simplify processes in order to make compliance with the rules less burdensome, and, by doing so, seek to encourage positive attitudes towards compliance.

Conclusion

14. The Committee welcomes IPSA’s strategy for 2018-22. We welcome IPSA’s commitment to take personal security considerations into account in framing its policies. Regular engagement with MPs, to understand how IPSA’s policies affect their day-to-day work, will be needed to make sure that IPSA remain alert to these considerations. Transparency and a strong and supportive regulatory environment are crucial to maintaining public trust in the system. This must be backed up not just by active monitoring, but also by ensuring processes are in place to rectify breaches if they occur. Regulators have a leadership role to play in encouraging positive attitudes towards compliance. IPSA should also look for further opportunities to simplify processes to make compliance with the rules less burdensome.

³ *Striking the Balance*, para 30

⁴ *Striking the Balance*, para 30

Annex A: About the Committee

The Committee on Standards in Public Life monitors, reports and makes recommendations on all issues relating to standards in public life.

Our remit

On 25 October 1994, the then Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. John Major, announced the establishment of the Committee on Standards in Public Life with the following terms of reference:

'To examine current concerns about standards of conduct of all holders of public office, including arrangements relating to financial and commercial activities, and make recommendations as to any changes in present arrangements which might be required to ensure the highest standards of propriety in public life'.

'For these purposes, public office should include: Ministers, civil servants and advisers; Members of Parliament and UK Members of the European Parliament; Members and senior officers of all non-departmental public bodies and of national health service bodies; non-ministerial office holders; members and other senior officers of other bodies discharging publicly-funded functions; and elected members and senior officers of local authorities'.⁵

On 12 November 1997, the Committee's terms of reference were extended by the then Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair:

'To review issues in relation to the funding of political parties, and to make recommendations as to any changes in present arrangements'.⁶

On 5 February 2013, the Minister for the Cabinet Office clarified the Committee's terms of reference in two respects:

'...in future the Committee should not inquire into matters relating to the devolved legislatures and governments except with the agreement of those bodies.'

'...the Committee's remit to examine 'standards of conduct of all holders of public office' [encompasses] all those involved in the delivery of public services, not solely those appointed or elected to public office.'⁷

The current members of the Committee are: Lord (Paul) Bew, Chairman, Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP (Labour), Simon Hart MP (Conservative), Dr Jane Martin CBE, Jane Ramsey, Monisha Shah and Rt Hon Lord (Andrew) Stunell OBE (Liberal Democrat).

⁵ Hansard (HC) 25 October 1994, col 758

⁶ Hansard (HC) 12 November 1997, col 899

⁷ Hansard (HC) 5 February 2013, col 7WS

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