

11/01/10

Dear IPSA

Cope 14

I have three points.

1 I completed your on-line questionnaire in writing on 8 January. I found it frustrating to be restricted to 500 characters in your various "further comments" boxes, and equally frustrating that with some of the questions no such box was provided. May I suggest that, for the benefit of informants who set off on the on-line questionnaire route, you put a prominent flag beside the first few boxes, stating something like the following (but more succinctly): "If you are not able to compress your comments into 500 characters, we offer an alternative way in which you can respond to the consultation document, still on-line and in writing, but without this restriction. To adopt this alternative, you should....."

2 In my own case, the discipline of the limit on length no doubt discouraged verbosity, but in at least one case I felt I was being prevented from saying what I wanted to say. This was in my response to section 7, on the employment of family members. Would you please add the following to the response you have already received from me:

- What you are signalling here is presumably that there are risks of corruption and improper influence where certain sorts of prior relationship exist between an MP and members of his/her office staff. This does not apply only where they belong to the same family. The potential for abuse is just as great where there is a pecuniary relationship, as for instance where the employee is the MP's landlord, or his/her tenant; or owes the MP, or is owed by the MP, a substantial sum of money.
- There is a danger, with your proposals, that the spouse (or other family member) who has an existing employee relationship with the prospective MP (PMP), will earnestly hope (and perhaps act in line with this hope) that the PMP will lose the election, in order that they may keep their job.
- Employer/employee relationships can be transient; family relationships tend to be long-lasting. There are advantages in a system that encourages stable and enduring relationships between an MP and key members of his/her staff.
- Where an MP has several staff, the key position is that of PA/office manager. This person will typically be appointments secretary, to pay bills, to remind of the need for action, and to be privy to all secrets - to mention only some elements of the job. Such a demanding position requires a kind of personal loyalty more likely to be found among family members.

3 I could find no way in which I could download my replies to the on-line questionnaire. Would you please tell how to do this, so that I know what I said in reply to your questions.

Yours sincerely  
Gabriel Newfield