

COPE 83

Dear Sir Ian,

**Re: IPSA MPs' Expenses Consultation**

I will be publishing a pamphlet called *A Crisis of Trust*, which further sets out my opinions on the expenses scandal. I am sorry that that will happen only on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of this month, but will send you a copy then. As part of your consultation process, I would be interested in finding out IPSA's response to the points raised below.

There has been very uneven disclosure of past expenses by sitting members. The information revealed by *The Daily Telegraph* only covers a four year period. What is the attitude of IPSA towards this partial release of information? What is the case against the public knowing in full what MPs did? Will IPSA have an opinion on this?

You say that you are independent of any 'vested interest'. Are you independent of the public? Are their views on what their elected representatives should be paid of no concern to you? Clearly this is an issue which will be relevant long after this brief consultation process.

You lay claim to being 'independent' of both MPs and the government, but your chair and board members were all selected by the current Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow. How does this amount to meaningful independence?

Why, as detailed in your Implementation Board minutes, are you so far behind schedule with your own 'business processes'? Why are your costs so opaque? Why has IPSA not made it a cardinal principle of its own activity to openly, and in detail, set out its own costs? What have you cost so far? What are your own predictions about what your likely average annual cost is going to be? Have you made such estimates? You state that you will provide 'rigorous scrutiny' of MPs' expenses: do you agree that if you are neither scrutinised nor rigorous yourself, it is very difficult to place confidence in IPSA?

You say: 'the next Parliament should start with a completely new system, independently designed and independently administered, and thus untarnished by association with what has gone before' [Consultation: 3]. You obviously appreciate that the next parliament will contain a great many MPs directly implicated in the expenses scandal. What does IPSA, as currently constituted, propose to do to encourage the public to have confidence in such members?

You have interpreted your mandate from parliament to mean, 'MPs will not be able to enter into long-term arrangements to spend significant quantities of public money without prior approval. Two examples of this might be entering into a contract on office accommodation, or taking on a new member of staff' [Consultation: 9]. Can it possibly be right that IPSA should have such sway over whom MPs employ to perform their duties as members? Does IPSA reject entirely the concept of the 'private member'?

Why do the transitional arrangements for expenses include the provision that many mortgage interest payments will be met in the new parliament? No sitting member is guaranteed a place in the next parliament. Any member currently with a mortgage met in part by the public stands again for election knowing that he or she might be defeated. It follows that it is entirely their choice whether they wish to re-enter the House of Commons, and therefore accept its new expenses regime.

Why is IPSA concerned with the composition of the House of Commons? You say: 'In a representative assembly, it is hugely important that the membership reflects the diverse views and experiences of those who are represented. Our arrangements must not unduly deter representatives from any group in society' [Consultation: 16]. Should you really hold such politicised, corporate opinions? Does doing so not cut directly across your primary responsibility for fairly discharging the regulatory functions you have been given?

Finally, I noticed that IPSA only listed a contact telephone for members of the public during the last day of your consultation process. Can you see why this does not inspire confidence in your basic commitment to transparency, or serving the public?

Yours sincerely

**Stuart Wheeler**