



IPSA

Independent Parliamentary
Standards Authority

Funding for MP parental leave and staff reservist leave: Consultation responses

Prepared for additional Board meeting on 3 March 2021

Presented by: [REDACTED]

Summary of responses

- 2,619 responses in total, including:
 - 10 MPs
 - 10 staff members
 - 1 union (Unite)
 - 1 academic [REDACTED]
 - 2,594 members of the public (mostly using the Pregnant Then Screwed standard response)
 - 3 other organisations (UK Women's Budget Group, Centenary Action Group, Fawcett Society)
- The vast majority of responses focussed solely or primarily on questions about MP parental leave cover.
- Only 17 responses addressed the questions on reservists leave
- All responses were supportive of the broad proposals, but some suggested additional considerations.



MP parental leave cover

Themes from responses

- **Misunderstanding about the scope of the proposals:** Many (especially members of the public) referred to the need for MPs to have ‘paid maternity leave’.
- **Leave for fathers and secondary carers considered too short:** Many responses from members of the public and other organisations stated that leave for fathers and secondary carers should be longer; 2 weeks is too short to bond with a baby, and has an impact on whether the mother can return to work sooner. [REDACTED] also recommended equalising the funding available for mothers and fathers.
- **Ensure sufficient flexibility:** [REDACTED] emphasised that the funding should not be automatic; and that a blanket ‘one-size-fits-all’ policy is not appropriate. Concern that the reference to ‘keeping in touch days’ would mean MPs having to seek permission to do work during their leave. Similar comments in the response from [REDACTED] recommended allowing MPs to return temporarily and for periods of proxy voting and cover to be taken at different times.
- **‘Locum’ MP role:** Responses from [REDACTED] continue to reference the so-called ‘locum’ role [REDACTED] importance of having a job title that signals the delegated authority of the person in the role, thereby allowing the MP to take genuine leave.

MP parental leave cover

Themes from responses (cont'd)

- **Maternity provision for MPs' staff members:** A few responses referenced maternity provision for staff members, particularly where staff members have lost their entitlement to occupational maternity pay due to redundancy (e.g. at an election) or due to a break in service where they move to employment with a different MP.
- **Practical issues:** Unite raised the practical issues where recruitment might need to be fast-tracked if the MP goes on leave sooner than expected; and encouraged IPSA to work with the House authorities to ensure access to parliamentary email, etc.
- **Links to more general issues around maternity rights and pay:** Many responses from members of the public and other organisations linked to more general issues including reports that mothers are more likely to have been treated unfairly by employers during Covid pandemic.

Recommendations

MP parental leave cover

On the basis of the consultation responses, **we recommend:**

- That the Board should agree to implement a change in the Scheme to provide for an MP parental leave cover fund, along the lines of the proposal consulted on
- That the Scheme rules should set out a maximum of 7 months' cover funding, but should not specify a maximum amount of time before/after birth, and that guidance should make clear that cover can be applied in blocks, rather than continuously
- That guidance and other comms should be clear about the scope of the new provisions; i.e. that they cover the funding that will be provided by IPSA and do not restrict the amount of time or the reasons for which an MP may take leave, which is for the MP alone to determine.
- That further consideration can be given to how funding for parental leave cover should be published, as part of the planned review of the publication policy.

Recommendations

MP parental leave cover (cont'd)

The Board **may wish to consider:**

- Whether the time period relating to cover for fathers/partners/secondary adopters should be extended?
- The proposed time periods align with what is available in the proxy voting scheme. It does not restrict the amount of time an MP can take as parental leave, but reflects the amount of funding that will normally be available (while longer periods can be agreed on a case-by-case basis).
- There are risks with IPSA being seen to put provisions in place for MP parental leave that go beyond what the House itself has done. Any move for example to equalise leave between mothers and fathers may also be seen as political.
- We therefore recommend that the proposed time periods related to cover funding (7 months for mothers/primary adopters and 2 weeks for fathers/partners/secondary adopters) should be implemented. In communication we can also explain that as a further phase of work we will consider whether adjustments to eligibility should be made in future.

Draft rules

MP parental leave cover fund

- 10.12 MPs who wish to take time off after the birth or adoption of a child may request funding in order to provide cover for their office during their absence. This will be paid from the MP parental leave cover fund.
- 10.13 Such funding for cover will normally be provided for a maximum period of seven months for the biological mother or primary adopter, and two weeks for the biological father, partner or second adopter. Longer periods may be agreed on a case-by-case basis.
- 10.14 MPs who request funding for cover during a period of parental leave must either provide IPSA with a MATB1 or a matching certificate from an adoption agency; or have an agreed proxy voting arrangement for parental leave in place.
- 10.15 MPs may choose how to arrange cover during a period of parental leave. The use of IPSA funding for this purpose is subject to the normal rules on staffing costs set out in Chapter 7, including the requirements for staff to be employed on a standard IPSA contract and job description and to be paid within the standard salary range for their job role.

Draft rules

7.15 The following costs will be met centrally from a staff absence budget and will not be deducted from MPs' staffing budgets:

- a. costs of staff who are on maternity, paternity or adoptive leave;

