

# IPSA

Independent Parliamentary  
Standards Authority

# How can IPSA best support Women MPs?

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IPSA

# Background

## **IPSA have discussed this regularly**

**In July 2019, The Board considered parental leave and decided that:**

- IPSA should keep funding any cover for MPs' parental leave from our contingency fund, pending the conclusion of the House of Commons proxy voting pilot
- We should streamline the contingency process for parental leave by pre-approving applications and offering a single senior point of contact to MPs considering making an application
- We should continue to publish contingency applications in accordance with IPSA's current publication policy

# Where are we now

**We remain fully supportive of proxy voting and other measures that support new parents**

In September 2020, the Board considered whether to:

- Consult on setting up a separate fund within IPSA for MP parental leave cover
- Conduct this consultation before the House concludes its report on the proxy voting pilot
- Undertake a data protection impact assessment before considering whether to retain our current policy to publish funding given to individual MPs for parental leave cover or make a change to it

**The Board concluded that it should await the outcome of Parliament's decision on making proxy voting a permanent feature of its practice and that IPSA should engage with a broad group of stakeholders over the coming months.**

# What we support now

## The Scheme

- MPs are independent office holders, not employees and therefore have no statutory rights to maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave
- Although in practice, MPs who are new parents have taken time away from Parliament on the arrival of a child, there are no formal arrangements in place – they agree this with their party whips and the House
- IPSA pays all MPs a monthly salary regardless of whether they are on parental (or other) leave and MPs offices can continue to make claims for eligible costs under the scheme
- MPs continue to have full access to all budgets that support their work such as office, accommodation, staffing and travel costs and can receive funding for additional staff to cover their absence
- IPSA also provides funding for MPs spouses/partners and dependants to travel between the constituency and Westminster to support MPs in arranging their personal and family lives across two locations (uncapped since 2017)
- Since July 2019, 2 MPs have applied to our contingency fund to cover leave and other MPs have enquired about support available

# Proxy voting

29 MPs have used proxy voting to date – 12 new mothers and 17 new fathers

**29 Jan 19 – proxy  
voting pilot  
implemented for  
MPs absent for  
mat/pat leave**

**Pilot extended twice –  
GE 2019 and Covid-19**

**23 Sept 2020  
Proxy voting made  
permanent**

**All new mothers, fathers,  
adoptive parents eligible  
for proxy voting on  
production of medical or  
matching certificate**

**The MP must choose a  
nominated proxy (MP)**

**Proxy voting lasts 6m for  
biological  
mother/primary adopter  
or 2 weeks for biological  
father, partner or  
secondary adopter**

# IPSA wants to...

## Fully support Parliament with family friendly measures

- A fundamental principle of the scheme is to take account of MPs diverse working arrangements and treat MPs fairly so they are not disadvantaged or advantaged financially because of the scheme
- IPSA has consistently voices its support for family friendly measures in Parliament and via the Scheme
- We have always understood that formal recognition of parental leave would be led by the House but no body within Parliament responsible
- IPSA will consider reviewing our Scheme rules and is making some immediate short term operational improvements:-
  - Single point of contact to induct, train and support cover and to assist handover back to MP
  - Keep In Touch days with a named IPSA contact whilst MP on leave
  - Specific Keep In Touch emails for MPs that summarise and provide updates in addition to bulletins
  - Guidance on website about how to apply for cover whilst on parental leave
- Medium term...
  - Review selected MP staff job descriptions and titles to ensure appropriate job description and title for covering staff
  - System changes to provide greater flexibility for MPs Proxies and delegation responsibilities
  - Diversity and Equality audit
  - Single point of contact for MPs considering taking a period of absence, in partnership with the House

# Funding

## Financial support

- Using the Contingency Fund has been effective in meeting needs of MPs for parental leave BUT we have faced criticism for using the fund designed for unexpected or unusual events for parental leave
- There are benefits of creating a separate fund – that Parental Leave is fully recognised within the Scheme and supported by IPSA
- A dedicated fund leads to conditions of entitlement – proof, spending caps, maximum leave entitlement and a registration process to cover compliance with the Scheme, appropriate office cover, job description and salary ranges
- And a risk of public criticism that the scheme is more advantageous than statutory provision
- Continuing to fund through the Contingency Fund has benefits – MPs receive full pay and can apply for cover (no change to scheme) but no explicit recognition of parental leave

# Considerations

- We have begun discussing with MPs what more we might do
- Appetite is mixed – some want full locum cover and formal recognition, others do not favour prominence or explicit recognition
- IPSA's remit allows us to pay MPs staff to support MPs in carrying out their Parliamentary functions but not to perform party political or campaigning activity - only Parliament can agree a proxy role for an elected representative
- There are likely to be increased requests for parental leave over time – 24 babies born to women MPs between 2010 and 2018 (no data on new fathers and adopted children)
- There's no explicit requirement for MPs to tell IPSA (and others) they're going on leave – perhaps there should be (safeguards)
- Training for staff covering, training for MP taking leave, budget view, unusual activity checks



# Recommendations

## What's next?

- Now the House has confirmed its commitment to proxy voting, we will consider what further changes are needed to our rules and how they're applied whilst continuing to fund support for MPs with caring responsibilities
- We will engage further with our stakeholders before deciding whether to consult on a separate fund for parental leave cover
- We want to send a clear signal of support to MPs with families and to recognise family life as a normal life cycle event
- We address MP concerns of being seen as 'big spenders' via publication as we publish parental leave as expenditure and a legitimate business cost
- Publishing costs individually rather than aggregate assures the public that taxpayer money is well spent (care – privacy issue!)
- If the Board decides to consult, we recommend that we assess the data privacy issue and ask the question in the consultation document to gather stakeholder views