

IPSA's COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE DOCUMENT

1. Commitment to good complaints handling

At IPSA all complaints are taken seriously and we work with the complainant to address all issues raised, conduct any remedial action as necessary and provide reassurance that measures have been put in place to prevent the occurrence from happening again.

2. Scope of Policy

This Policy is intended to apply to any complaint, regardless of who makes it, including members of the public or MPs and their staff, provided that the complaint does not fall within the excluded categories listed below.

We welcome feedback concerning our organisation, our service delivery, our staff, our volunteers, our contracted service providers or anyone else acting on our behalf. Where an MP, MP's staff or member of the public feels that remedial action may be appropriate they should submit a formal complaint.

A complaint may be made by a person to whom we, or, a person acting on our behalf, deliver services or by a person who is affected by our services.

3. Complaints that fall outside the scope of this policy

There are certain types of complaints that will either fall outside the scope of what we can investigate or where there are other mechanisms in place for seeking review or decision. If these mechanisms have not proved satisfactory, a formal complaint should be submitted. Our external guidance makes clear what types of complaints IPSA will investigate and the procedure for any complaints that fall outside the scope of this policy.

There are three main areas that IPSA will not investigate under the formal complaints procedure and these are outlined below:

1. Compliance Officer

The Compliance Officer's remit is defined in statute and is to:

- conduct an investigation if he has reason to believe that an MP may have been paid an amount under the *MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses* (the Scheme) that should not have been allowed; and
- at the request of an MP, review a determination by IPSA to refuse reimbursement for an expense claim, in whole or in part.

Complaints that an MP has claimed, and been paid by IPSA, something to which they were not entitled under The MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses should be handled by the Compliance Officer. Such complaints should ordinarily be addressed to the Compliance Officer, but such complaints sent to IPSA should be identified and passed to the Compliance Officer as soon as is reasonably practicable.

Such complaints will then be dealt with under the Compliance Officer's Investigative Procedures. More information can be found on the Compliance Officer's website: <http://www.parliamentarycompliance.org.uk>.

2. The MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses

Comments and complaints about the rules set out in the *MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses* (the Scheme) will be considered as part of our regular review process. IPSA reviews the Scheme usually on an annual basis and, as part of that process, conducts a public consultation to seek views on any changes to the rules. More information on this consultation process can be found on our website at: <http://parliamentarystandards.org.uk/transparency/Pages/Consultations.aspx>.

3. Freedom of Information

The Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs' Code of Practice on the discharge of public authorities' functions under Part I of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000 requires public authorities to have a procedure in place for dealing with complaints regarding requests made under the FOIA.

Any written reply from the applicant expressing dissatisfaction with IPSA's response to a request for information will not be treated as a complaint under this policy, nor should any written communication from a person who considers that the authority is not complying with its publication scheme. Such expressions of dissatisfaction will be dealt with under the FOI Internal Review procedure, a copy of which can be found at the following address: <http://parliamentarystandards.org.uk/transparency/Pages/Freedom%20of%20information-requests-and-Responses.aspx>

4. Publicising this Policy

Our Complaints Policy and Procedure guidance will be published on our website where complainants can find information about how to make a complaint and what to expect once a complaint has been submitted.

Our MP Support team is also available to provide advice and support if further guidance is required.

5. Time limits for making a complaint

- A complaint must be made no later than 12 months after:
 - the date the event occurred or, if later,
 - the date the event came to the notice of the complainant.
- The time limit will not apply if IPSA is satisfied that:
 - the complainant can give a good reason for not making the complaint within that time limit, and

6. Anonymous complaints

Any complaints submitted anonymously will be investigated and logged in accordance with our procedure outlined in section 8 below. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, remedial

work will be carried out to ensure continuous improvement and to provide management with the assurance that the same problem does not occur again.

7. How a formal complaint is made

A formal complaint is made by email to info@parliamentarystandards.org.uk with the subject heading "formal complaint."

Any complaint that is received through an alternative method to those stated, will be redirected and handled using the procedures outlined in this policy.

8. How we will handle a formal complaint

Below is an outline of our Formal Complaints Procedure:

(a) Recording complaint and assigning to a Case Owner

- All formal complaints will be logged as a case recorded in our central communication database and a case owner will be assigned. Initially, this will be the Head of Operations or in their absence the appointed Team Leader. Each case will receive a unique case ID number which will be communicated to the complainant when making initial contact.
- The Head of Operations will send the complainant a first acknowledgement email to confirm that the complaint has been received and how it will be processed, including details of the timescales involved.
- The Head of Operations will then grade the complaint and assign a case to an appropriate person in IPSA to manage. There are three grades of complaint depending on the impact and complexity of the complaint. This may include the impact that the complaint will have on the organisation, the severity of the complaint and the level of investigation required which may span numerous teams and departments.

Below are the three complaint grades and the role the case should be assigned to:

(a) High/Head of Operations – The impact on the complainant is high and/or is a complex matter and therefore requires senior oversight and careful management.

(b) Medium/Team Leader – The complaint could potentially result in having a high impact on the complainant. The matter may also be complex and/or sensitive.

(c) Low/Non-Manager – This is a straight forward case that can be resolved at first response and doesn't require a long investigation.

(b) Confirming complaint status

- The case owner will carry out an initial assessment to decide whether the complaint should be upheld or rejected. As part of this process the case owner may contact the complainant to gather more information in order to make sure the nature of the complaint is fully understood.

- If a complaint is rejected, the case owner will write to the complainant to explain the reasons why the complaint has been rejected and where the complainant can go for further information, such as our website.
- If there is a complaint to be answered, the case owner will write to the complainant to confirm that the complaint will be taken forward and investigated. They will provide guidance on how the complaint will be handled and advise of the relevant timescales.
- In order to create a single point of contact for the complainant at the time of writing mentioned in the point above, the case owner will also inform the complainant of their name, as the case owner investigating the matter, and the Case ID for future reference.

(c) Investigation

- An investigation will be carried out by the case owner. As part of the investigation the case owner may contact the complainant and arrange a meeting to go through the details of the complaint so that an accurate outcome can be achieved.
- The case owner will keep the complainant up to date on the progress of the case and will provide direct contact details so that the complainant can reach the case owner if required without delay.
- Should there be any risk of delay in communicating the outcome of the investigation, the case owner will contact the complainant to inform them of the delay and provide reasons why the delay has occurred and what is being done to ensure the matter is resolved as efficiently as possible.
- Any investigation will be conducted without contravening any other internal procedures.

(d) Outcome

- Once the investigation is complete the case owner will liaise with the Head of Operations or in their absence the appointed Team Leader to discuss the outcome of the investigation and any remedial action required.
- They case owner will then write to the complainant to confirm the outcome of the investigation together with an explanation of the below areas:
 - Detailed explanation of how the complaint has been considered
 - The conclusions reached, including any remedial action undertaken,
 - Confirmation that any action needed has either already been taken or, if not yet taken, the proposed timescale when such action will be completed.
 - Steps taken to ensure the same problems does not occur in the future; and
 - Details on how to appeal against the outcome of the investigation including relevant timeframes.

(e) Appealing against the outcome of initial investigation

- If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation they can lodge an appeal by replying to the email informing the case owner of the outcome and stating they would like to make an appeal.
- The original case owner will receive notification of the appeal request and report this to the Head of Operations who will subsequently assign the case to a member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) for consideration.
- The member of the SMT who has been assigned the case will contact the complainant to acknowledge the appeal and provide information on how the appeal will be handled and the timescales involved.
- The SMT member will carry out an independent investigation on how the complaint was handled by the initial case owner including how the complaint was conducted and whether all evidence and information was correctly collated.
- Once all investigations have been completed, the outcome of the appeal will be communicated to the complainant together with details of what actions have been taken to resolve the issue.
- If the appeal is unsuccessful, the complainant will be informed of the reasons why it was unsuccessful.

9. Our timeframes

Below is an outline of the timeframe for processing a formal complaint:

Complaint acknowledgement and status

- **Acknowledge complaint by Head of Operations within two working days** – When a formal complaint is received The Head of Operations or in their absence the appointed Team Leader will send an initial acknowledgement within two working days of receiving the complaint.
- **Case owner** – as soon as the case is assigned, the case owner will contact the complainant to confirm whether the complaint is upheld or rejected together with details of their name and case reference number. The case owner will also provide details of the investigation timescales and procedure.

Investigation

- **Commence investigation** – An investigation will commence as soon as possible after receiving the complaint and will be concluded within 10 working days. Should there be any delay in meeting this deadline the case owner will inform the complainant and provide reasons for the delay.

Outcome

- **Outcome of investigation communicated to complainant** – As soon as possible after concluding the investigation, the case owner will write to the complainant to confirm the outcome.

Appealing against the outcome of initial investigation

- **Making an appeal** – From the date of notifying the outcome of the investigation the complainant has 10 working days to submit an appeal. If no appeal is lodged the case owner will resolve the case.
- **Appeal made** – If an appeal is submitted by the complainant, the original case owner will inform the Head of Operations who will subsequently assign the case to a member of SMT on the day the appeal is received.
- **Acknowledge appeal within two working days** – The member of SMT who has been assigned the case will write to acknowledge the appeal within two working days of receiving the appeal and provide guidance on how the appeal will be handled together with timescales.
- **Commence appeal investigation** – A further investigation will commence as soon as possible after receiving the appeal and will be concluded within 10 working days. Should there be any delay in meeting this deadline the appeal case owner will inform the complainant and provide reasons for the delay.
- **Outcome of appeal investigation communicated to complainant** – As soon as possible after the investigation period has expired, the appeal case owner will write to the complainant to confirm the outcome of the appeal.
- **Case resolved** – Once the outcome of the appeal is communicated the case owner will resolve the case.

10. Confidentiality

While any data and information we receive will be treated as confidential in line with our data security policy, any information we hold is subject to any Freedom of Information or Subject Access request.

11. Reporting about complaints

The Head of Operations will be responsible for providing the Senior Management Team with an overview on a monthly basis of all complaints received that have been upheld, the area the complaint fell into and details of the resolution plan for each case.

12. Continuous improvement

A designated person in IPSA who is responsible for overlooking IPSA processes and introducing improvement will either be directly involved in carrying out remedial work to

prevent future occurrences or will feed into any discussions on the best approach for resolving matter raised by the complainant.

A monthly review of all upheld complaints will be carried out by the designated person to monitor effectiveness of any remedial work and introduce any further improvement if necessary.