Commonwealth Parliamentary Association: Governance

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide Members with requested background on CPA governance issues.

2. Regional sensitivities and other tensions began back in 2005, as a result of a contractual dispute involving the former Secretary-General. The former Secretary-General was awarded a six figure sum following the CPA International Executive Committee’s (known as EXCO) decision not to extend his 5-year contract. Under UK employment law, the former Secretary-General had certain rights which CPA did not uphold.

3. This situation led to further tensions resulting in perceptions that members of EXCO were voting on issues along regional lines. This view was formed by Members who attended CPA Annual and Regional conferences – they regularly reported back on seemingly increasing animosity between some branches of the CPA, EXCO and the CPA Secretariat.

4. The Scottish delegates who attended the regional meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 2008 also raised some concerns and urged CPA Scotland Branch to work closely with other BIMR Branches, including the UK Branch and the CPA Secretariat, to ensure that CPA remained united and to pursue and support any efforts to strengthen the organisation. Main concerns expressed included mis-presentation of facts to Members on a number of issues such as travel costs by CPA staff and the handling of the election of the chairperson.

5. At the AGM in Guernsey in 2009, Wales and Isle of Man Branches produced papers to begin a discussion on how governance and internal audit with CPA could be improved. Scotland Branch raised concerns over wording in the Wales Paper (a critique commissioned by the Clerk of the Assembly and written by a Wrexham University academic) which was circulated in error before the meeting.

6. The Scottish delegation made the point that given the domination of current political debate in the UK by the public demand for transparency and accountability in matters of public spending, that it would be appropriate for the CPA, like all publicly funded bodies, to review its governance mechanisms to ensure they are of the robustness required. The discussion opened by Wales and Isle of Man CPA Branches was therefore timely, given that the “expenses” political fallout in the UK was happening around the same time. The Scottish delegation supported the establishment of an internal audit committee but raised concerns about the approach. A proposal was subsequently put forward by the
chairperson that a working group comprising representatives from Wales, Isle of Man, Malta, Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands Branches should be established to draft a fresh proposal on how this matter might be taken forward for discussion at the regional meetings in Tanzania in October 2009 and finally at the Annual Conference in Kenya in 2010.

7. In September 2009, Janet Ryder (Wales Branch) was nominated by the BIMR to represent the region as a member of the CPA Working Party which was established to re-examine the CPA. The aim of the Working Party was to ensure a continued, strong and vital organisation as it entered its second century.

8. Ms Ryder attended a meeting of the Working Party in Nairobi in September 2010. At this meeting the remit of the Working Party was agreed and members compiled an Issues Paper. A copy is attached at Annex A. Each member was asked to canvas branches within their region for comments by January 2011. In November 2011, Janet Ryder met here with Members of Scotland Branch Executive Committee to discuss issues and to answer questions from Members.

9. A special meeting of representatives from each of the BIMR Branches was held in London in January 2011 to reach consensus on the view from the BIMR. A copy of the report is attached at Annex B.

10. At the BIMR special meeting in January 2011, CPA Scotland Branch, along with some other Branches in the region, raised concerns about CPA UK Branch representing the region at meetings with either little or no prior consultation (e.g. a draft submission to the Eminent Persons Group which they hoped would be endorsed by all BIMR branches, had little consultation).

11. Jamie Stone often referred to the “ambassadorial” role provided to the CPA Scotland Branch by its membership of EXCO (October 2005-October 2007) saying that this was a role which brought great credit to the Branch and to Scotland. Scotland Branch has continued to take this position on all matters relating to CPA governance matters. Offering advice, guidance and solutions at meetings within the region and injecting objectivity into discussions.

12. A new Chairperson was elected at the CPA Annual Conference in July 2011. The Chairperson, a member of CPA UK Branch, was elected on a platform of unity, reforms and equality. It will be for the new Chairperson to align and shape CPA strategic priorities to reflect other changes to Commonwealth institutions due to be discussed in Perth, Australia at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in October 2011.

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