

Email

30 April 2009

Sir Christopher Kelly KCB,
 Committee on Standards in Public Life
 35 Great Smith Street
 London
 SW1P 3 BQ

Derby**Tel**

Dear Sir Christopher,

Everyone agrees that Parliament is held in very low esteem; indeed this is so profound as to amount to deep contempt amongst a large body of public opinion. The method of payment of members of parliament, their pensions, perquisites and expenses have all contributed to this perception and are in need of radical reform, if trust is to be restored.

So I wish to propose a very simple principle. Return the responsibility for funding members of parliament directly to their electors. In ancient times, some boroughs used to pay those they sent to Parliament, at any rate for their expenses. There is no reason why this principle should not be restored and regularised on a uniform basis across the country.

Instead of being paid by out of general taxation, MP s should be funded by the Council Tax payers in their own constituencies. An outline of the proposal would work like this.

1. Parliament, perhaps on the advice of an independent body, would decide a maximum budget per constituency.
2. Elected MP s would decide for themselves how much of this maximum they required and how they would apportion it to-
 - (i) their own wage or salary
 - (ii) contribution to their own pension, bought on the open market.
 - (iii) living, lodging and travel expenses wholly and necessarily incurred in their duties.
 - (iv) staff salaries, office and other expenses.
3. Candidates could, of course, propose their budgets for approval by the electors as part of their election manifestos, if they wished.
4. Each year the elected MP would submit an extract of audited accounts to their electors which would be included with the Council Tax bill. Copies of the audited accounts would be presented on the internet and electors could examine the books and vouchers upon reasonable request.
5. Gross divergencies from published budgets would be reason for electors to be able to demand a by-election, if such a demand was supported by a reasonable proportion of electors. Similar "recall" procedures apply in some states of America when a representative has lost public trust and confidence and might be made more generally available. This would answer some of the complaints of the Chartists about the arrogance of those elected for long terms but without the need for annual Parliamentary general elections.

Combined with a locally/internet-available register of member's interests, this proposal would provide complete transparency without the need for the interposition of an official intermediary. It would also make absolutely clear to members and electors alike who the employers are. To borrow from an existing website "They work for you".

Outside the "Westminster bubble" and the official and political classes generally, nobody has any confidence in so-called independent, official regulators. They are seen as part of the same conspiracy and recent official and government enquiries have added to this perception.

So keep things simple. Keep Westminster and Whitehall out of it. Keep the lines between people and their representatives short and clear and keep them immune from higher official interference, obfuscation and cover-up.

This modest proposal would, I believe, go a long way towards restoring confidence to the public and proper responsibility by members of Parliament to their electors.

Yours sincerely,

E Spalton