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STEWART JACKSON MP
SHADOW MINISTER FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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

7th April 2009

Dear Sir Christopher,

Review of Member of Parliament's Allowances

I am writing with regard to the ongoing review that your Committee is undertaking with respect to MP's allowances.

I believe that it is important for the committee to receive a wide variety of viewpoints and I write as a relatively new Member of Parliament, having been elected in May 2005.

At the outset, I would like to make it clear that I completely understand the public concern and outrage at the egregious misuse of Parliamentary allowances by a minority of MPs and believe that reform is both desirable and inevitable. However, any changes must be advanced on the basis of fairness and should be evidence-based - rather than in response to any media firestorm, such as that which will be likely when the details of Members' receipts in respect of Additional Costs Allowance, are published in July.

I would like to make the following points briefly:

- 1. I believe that the new Green Book regime - in operation from April 1st 2009 - is a step forward and should be allowed time to succeed and for there to be a reasonable period allowed for it to operate, prior to any further major revisions.*

2. A significant number of MPs (around 130 as I recollect from a recent Parliamentary Question, including myself), maintain their main residence in London and claim their second home allowance in their constituency. The much touted catch all panacea of some kind of boarding house for MPs in London is simply not applicable for these Members. I have lived in the same part of London for 20 years, have worked in London throughout that time, was a local councillor and my daughter is predominantly educated in London and my wife also works full time in London.

That said, it does not preclude us from wishing to have a strong and settled base (i.e. a family home rather than a "lock up and leave" flat, for instance) in my constituency, especially when the House is not sitting, such as in the Summer recess.

A draconian and retrospective abolition of the second home allowance would make that next to impossible - not only would it be unfair to those of us who have (some time ago) taken out mortgages on our constituency properties; but it would mean that it would have the effect of making Members such as myself materially worse off and less able and likely to spend "quality" time in our constituencies.

3. *I support the abolition of second home allowances for Members in the Greater London area.*

4. *I believe that in order to repair some of the damage to the reputation of the House of Commons and to be seen to be earning our salaries as MPs, that the House should sit in September and should give up the half term recesses. Furthermore, we need to alter the sitting hours of the House on a Tuesday, in order to sit earlier - as a 2.30pm sitting cannot be justified any longer to constituents.*

5. *I believe that Ministers who receive accommodation which is fully funded by the taxpayer for the purpose of fulfilling their Ministerial duties (i.e. "grace and favour" accommodation) should be precluded from being able to claim a second home allowance.*

6. *I believe that the Communications Allowance should be abolished and is a gratuitous misuse of public funds.*

7. I believe that the staffing budget should be disaggregated from Members' allowances - and should henceforth fall within the remit of the House of Commons Department of Resources. Recruitment, salary and other related matters should remain within the locus of individual MPs.

8. Finally, I think it is sensible to restrict the scope of the new Personal Additional Accommodation Expenditure away from the so-called John Lewis list (sic) and focus on subsistence allowance and property-related expenditure (e.g. mortgage, utilities, maintenance and related costs) - which is what our constituents would rightly expect.

I trust that you will give careful consideration to my views in your deliberations and I look forward to reading your review when published in due course.

Yours sincerely

Stewart Jackson MP

Copies to: Oliver Heald Esq., MP
Sir Michael Spicer MP, Chairman 1922 Committee

