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The Chairman
Committee on Standards in Public Life
House of Commons
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Dear Sir or Madam,

MP's Expenses

I enclose my comments, below. This is an extract from a book I have recently written and hope to have published shortly.

Expenses and Allowances

Recently there have been several scandals (as portrayed by The Press) about claims for expenses and allowances by MPs; and the public have become aware of the pensions to which MPs are entitled.

The present position has evolved over a number of years and has not received any publicity. Most people regard it to be grossly unfair – and another example of MPs feathering their own nests. This can only bring Parliament into disrepute; with MPs losing even more respect.

The Problems

In the past, MPs were considered to be 'honourable gentlemen' (when there were no female MPs) so did not need to verify any claims for expenses because "a gentleman's word was his bond". Nowadays, sadly, some of them (of both sexes) have been shown to succumb to the temptation of avarice (as are ordinary citizens) and, so, have been somewhat less than honourable when claiming expenses – relating mainly to travel and secretarial services (sometimes associated with nepotism).

Furthermore, it has become apparent that there is a scale of allowances available to MPs for their second homes in London which is, by any stretch of the imagination, more than generous!

In addition, not only do MPs vote for their own levels of pay, but they have voted themselves a pension package that is far more advantageous (to them) than any other pension scheme available to ordinary mortals – in either the public or private sectors!

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Possible Improvements

MPs are now, in reality, salaried employees of The State. Therefore, they should be subject to the same principles and rules that apply to other public sector employees.

Thus, I would suggest that their pay should be determined by an independent Review Body – similar to those that determine the pay of civil servants, the armed services, teachers, doctors, nurses and others in public service. The findings of the Review Body would *have to be accepted* (by The Government and MPs) except in the most exceptional circumstances due to the state of the economy – when the award could be reduced or *phased* (paid in part at a later date).

As they work in the public sector, they should be supplied with secretaries (and other assistants deemed necessary for them to do their job efficiently) *by Parliament*. And such staff should be paid on an agreed pay scale (similar to secretaries or assistants in other public sector posts).

So far as travel expenses and subsistence allowances are concerned, they, too, should be on the same scales as other public sector employees. And *all* expenses should be subject to verification by receipts.

So far as the allowances for second homes are concerned, I would abolish them. I concede that some MPs (whose constituencies are a considerable distance from London) may need a place to stay when Parliament is sitting. However, this should be covered (far more cost-effectively) by Parliament either having a block booking of a number of rooms in a nearby hotel, or by its owning (or renting) a block of standard sized flats nearby. Those MPs judged to need such accommodation (determined by the distance of their constituency from Parliament) should be provided with it free of charge.

Pensions, too, should be determined on the same principles as others who dedicate their lives to public service – they should be no better and no worse.

These rules should apply to members of both Houses of Parliament. They would be seen to be realistic by the public – and they might make those who live and work in the rarefied atmosphere of 'the Westminster village' more aware of the realities of life faced by their constituents!

I hope you will take them into consideration when making recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

M. Morrison