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From: J i Moss
Sent: 13 May 2009 08:50
To: Inquiry
Subject: Review of MPs' Expenses

Dear Sirs,

I declare an interest as a Conservative party member on the party's list of approved candidates.

I believe the recent revelations have exposed one fatal flaw at the heart of the current system, namely, that MPs are recompensed up to a set maximum for the costs of a second home, including "repairs and maintenance" and whether this is for chandeliers, security patrols or electrician's bills, it is the excessively wide interpretation of this which has resulted in public outrage. There is also outrage at the profits made by MPs on the rising value of their second homes when their mortgages are paid for by the taxpayer.

These two issues can be addressed by a single, simple remedy. Only rent should be recoverable as an expense, not mortgage interest.

I have previously written suggesting that you clarify the main role of an MP as being their work in Parliament, representing their constituents, holding the Government to account and even serving in Government and that as a consequence they should receive a salary commensurate with Westminster being their main place of work. By doing this, you make it clear that one's "second home" is in one's constituency and in doing that, an allowance for rent paid on a modest flat ought to be the limit of any claim for property. In almost all cases, tenancies require the Landlord to pay for repairs so this element is immediately removed. In addition, the prospect of any capital gain accruing to an MP is removed. It would be necessary to ensure that the rent being paid was a market rent for the constituency and this would mean that a different level of allowance would apply to different MPs, but I believe this would better reflect the true purpose of the allowance, namely to allow an MP to do their job in their constituency.

Should an MP wish to reverse the arrangement, the maximum payable should not change. The saving on a mortgage on a home in the constituency could be used to subsidise a higher rent in London.

I do recognise that there are costs involved in occupying a second home and that local taxes, utility bills and some furnishing is required. It is right that Council Tax and utility bills be covered at their actual cost and would suggest that a single payment of around £5,000 be made at the commencement of a parliament, or every four years, whichever is the longer period, to cover furnishings and other minor consumables like light bulbs.

Those MPs whose constituencies are within a reasonable travel time from Westminster, say, 45 minutes by public transport at 10.30pm, ought not to expect to have second homes. All MPs ought to receive free travel between Westminster and their constituencies. If the house rises after 10.30pm, taxi fares ought to be recoverable.

I strongly urge you to make recommendations to ensure the system is transparent and simple so that it is understandable by all parties and the public and that it is clear what is being paid, what it is being paid for and to whom it is being paid.

Yours Faithfully,

J Moss

22/05/2009