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Saddledworth

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

Dear Sir Christopher

I understand that your Committee is currently reviewing the payment of expenses to Members of Parliament, and in the process hope to restore public confidence in the integrity of Parliament and its elected representatives. Whatever new administrative and auditing procedures are introduced to improve transparency and accountability, there is a strong possibility that public confidence will not be restored by the introduction of a new system in which the public would be effectively excluded from the process. A revamped or renamed fees office based in, and administered from Westminster is hardly likely to inspire confidence in the electorate.

I believe that the restoration of public confidence in parliamentary democracy is perhaps your most difficult task that you currently face. I am aware of the many demands on the Committee's time but should be grateful if you would consider the merits of returning the problem of expenses and accountability to the electorate themselves. By making each constituency directly responsible for funding their member, his or her expenses, and their allowances there would be a much greater involvement of the general public in the process of government and respect for its institutions. The relationships between constituencies and their elected members would be improved by the transparent accountability of the member to their electorate, and that accountability would not be just financial, perhaps there would be a much greater focus on the priorities and time management of members. For those

members who are already committing all their time and available resources to representing their constituencies, then a genuinely non partisan constituency management group could provide valuable support and guidance on priorities to their elected member. As financial incentives may have influenced the development of many of the existing problems then perhaps similar financial incentives may also provide a solution.

If each constituency was to be allocated a fixed amount of capital each year, the amount to be graded by distance from Westminster the total to fund member's salaries expenses allowances and staffing, then the constituency would be seen to be paying for its own representation. If the initial allocation of capital was seen as adequate even slightly generous then as long as the control and accountability of funding was seen to be being managed at local rather than Westminster level then public support is likely to be enhanced. However if in addition it was agreed that any savings on the annual capital sum awarded for representation to a constituency could be used in the support of local charities based within or nominated by the constituency then the measure is likely to command public support, and encourage much greater interest in, and hopefully respect for parliamentary representation.

Undoubtedly there would be many problems in establishing such local oversight and accountability, not least how the local non partisan management group might be chosen by the constituency. As the proposal is intended to restore faith in local representation ministerial salaries should not be included in the constituency allocation which would presumably encourage much greater debate within the constituency about the demands of central government and the implications for local representation.

I hope you find time to consider the proposal and find merit in its content.

Yours Sincerely

D Buckley