

to Des Browne - Eng. MP for Kilmarnock - Scotland
House of Commons

11th May, 2009.

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20 MAY 2009

Dear Des,

I am sure you must be fed up with constituents writing and I am sure they say ~~much the~~ same, so please forgive another letter!

One is deeply concerned by the damage done to the Institution. At every social event the conversation centres around the current revelations, irrespective of individual political views and additional contempt and dismay is only further generated.

From a detached view, several principles in whatever solution is finally agreed, may require to be followed to satisfy the tax paying public. Might I suggest:-

1. Total transparency, with details of all expense claims logged on the Internet, and no fudging the issue by hiving the Fees Office into the private sector where expenses may not be subject to the Freedom of Information Act. Given internet exposure, such a requirement would encourage the self-disciplining of claims.
2. Similar tax rules for both MPs and for members of the public. Friends are outraged by the tax free arrangements agreed in 2003. Ironically, the Revenue tried to charge *me, in person*, for benefit in kind on all the company's weekly working-lunch sandwiches and orange juice, on the grounds that I was the only person with the authority to sign expenses chits. It took more than a year of hassle and argument to get out of that situation, where sandwiches etc cost a mere £1.95 per head!
3. Some form of limited travel expenses for those outwith commuting areas, (the same principle as item 2, above). Ditto, for those who really do require accommodation when Parliament is sitting (accommodation either rented or hotel) with some pre-agreed upper limit.
4. All expenses to be backed up by receipts, as is required by all commercial organisations and the Revenue.
5. Exactly the same system is required for the House of Lords as for the Commons who, given their current tax free 'expenses' and day allowances would, if being paid gross to receive the same tax free income, probably come into the Chancellor's proposed tax band of £150,000 p.a. Already there are rumblings about the upper house having to be sorted out once that has been achieved for the Commons. One hears rumours of members signing in and never appearing or attending. I am sure you know who those are.
6. Automatic debarring or unfrocking members of the House of Lords with criminal convictions.

I am sure you will have sufficiently varied opinions to keep you awake at nights. Perhaps the two guiding words in any deliberations might be 'simplicity' and 'transparency'.

Yours sincerely,

R
. Dunlop,