

- Standards Committee -

From: e
Sent: 11 May 2009 18:32
To: Inquiry
Subject: Review of MPs' expenses

I would like to submit the following points to the Committee in its review of MPs' expenses, having the following credentials:

- I first worked in the Parliamentary Press Gallery as a journalist in 1958.
- I later became a BBC political correspondent.
- Parliamentary Press Officer to the Conservative Party, 1967-70, based in the Opposition Chief Whip's Office.
- First Parliamentary Adviser to the Confederation of British Industry (the CBI), 1977-80.

General comment

When I first entered the Parliamentary Press Gallery 51 years ago, it was the realisation of a long ambition - not so much because of my direct interest in politics, but because of my admiration for Parliament itself.

- I no longer admire Parliament or Members of the House of Commons - on either side of the Chamber.
- I am struggling to convince myself that it is worth voting at the next general election.

MPs' second homes

The fact that this is the area which seems to have attracted the maximum opprobrium outside Parliament confirms that it merits vigorous root-and-branch reform.

- Why do Members need public finance for 12 months of the year, when the House of Commons sits for only about 165 days a year?
- Any second homes allowance, when justified, should be confined to the sitting days of the House.
- But some MPs (like my own in Eastbourne) claim for a second home when they could return to the constituency by train - and even though the House of Commons normally only sits until 10.30 p.m. on two days of the week, Mondays and Tuesdays (including the 30-minute adjournment debate, which most Members do not attend).
- During the current session, the Commons are only due to meet on 13 Fridays (see www.parliament.uk).
- In those circumstances, why cannot such homes be rented as furnished properties when justified (instead of purchased and furnished at public expense) - at the most - from the start of each Parliamentary session, usually in October, to the following Summer Recess, usually in July?
- No Member should be allowed to make a Capital Gain from the sale of a second home supported by public finance.

Senior Salaries Review Body

I do not believe that the SSRB is an appropriate body to be reviewing MPs salaries.

- MPs are not comparable with the senior civil service, senior military personnel and the judiciary.

At best, those senior salaries are only comparable with Cabinet Ministers, not rank-and-file MPs, many of whom - in my experience - would find it difficult to earn a salary outside Parliament equal to their current salaries.

Similarly, MPs' pensions should not be a matter for the SSRB, for similar reasons. Their current pensions are regarded as outrageous by many taxpayers.

Other issues and questions

The House of Commons should not under any circumstances be "in a position to determine the scope and size of its own expenses scheme". It has proved itself unworthy to do so.

- It is essential that all such matters are determined independently by a body outside Parliament's control - and that its conclusions should be mandatory.

No other course would be acceptable to the general public after the evidence of how many MPs have abused the system - and the Speaker's attempts to limit public disclosure.

If had not been for publication by *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph* of details based on knowledge of MPs' addresses (which the House has attempted to conceal) the taxpayer would have been deprived of knowledge of unacceptable behaviour such as "switching" of homes eligible for public finance.

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