

Submission to the Committee on Standards in Public Life
(MPs' expenses)

General statement

In my opinion, so many MPs have proved themselves to be untrustworthy when handling public money that they should be left with nothing to play with other than their salary. The public, however, has to accept its responsibility in this sorry state of affairs, as our complacency has allowed it to happen. Though beyond the scope of this enquiry, I think society as a whole has to question the values it has been living by. MPs are not, contrary to what many people might think, a breed apart. We have all been driven by selfishness and greed. It's about time we started working towards a system of economics that's built on justice rather than gluttony.

Answers to questions posed in 'Issues and Questions' April 2009

1. The public needs to know how its money is being spent and MPs need to honour the Seven Principles of Public Life to the letter.
2. Most definitely not!!! The expenses and allowances should be abolished. The Green Book should be abolished. The Fees Office should be abolished.
3. Most definitely not!!! I can't think of any other body in the country that can buy and furnish a home at taxpayers' expense. How does the purchase of fripperies allow an MP to perform their duties more effectively? At the very least, they should be subject to the same rules as the Civil Service, rather than ones of their own making.
4. Most definitely not!!! It is fairly obvious that there was no policing until the Freedom of Information Act and the Daily Telegraph made their presence felt. The only acceptable form of auditing is for MPs to publish any costs incurred regularly and in a timely fashion on the internet, for public inspection. They should be scrutinised by a panel of ordinary electors, not professionals or members of a quango for whom expenses are a way of life. It is noticeable that HMRC, normally so rigorous where the rest of the population is concerned, also failed to act. I hope hope they are now taking an interest in the 'anomalies' that have come to light.
5. Allowances for mortgage interest or rent should be abolished. Some flats, a hall of residence, former barracks, a boat on the Thames or similar should be purchased by the State, furnished simply and allocated to MPs whose constituencies necessitate overnight stays in London some nights a week. Failing that, the State should make block bookings of modest (not more than 3 star) hotel rooms when needed. If MPs choose not to take the accommodation available, they then must fund their own arrangements. Two-years' grace could be given to existing MPs to put their affairs in order. New MPs should not be able to fund second homes from public money. Any profits arising from the sale of second homes should go to the country, not into MPs' pockets. We should also reclaim the furniture they've paid for with our money.
6. Most definitely not!!! They get paid more than enough already and recent events have shown they have no concept of how most people manage to live on a fraction of their pay. MPs' salaries should be linked to the national average wage, say twice the national

average for MPs and three times for senior Ministers. That way, if the country prospers, so do they. If it doesn't, they share the pain. I would also introduce the performance-related pay they are so fond of inflicting on the rest of the public service, but bonuses would not just be linked to economic growth. Their bonuses would also depend on improvement in the level of happiness, greater civil liberties and a cleaner environment. I would also propose a bonus for, say, the 100 MPs with the most modest expenditure each year. Finally, I would require MPs to forego their salary one month of the year and replace it with Jobseeker's Allowance (currently £64.30 a week) with no access to any other money. Whilst living on Jobseeker's Allowance, they would undertake community service – working in care homes, hospices, environmental task forces and the like. Getting their hands dirty in this way (as opposed to sitting on the board of a multinational corporation) would keep them in touch with the people they represent. High visibility jackets would be compulsory for those MPs who have milked the expenses and allowances system.

7. The cost of running an office should be run directly by a competent body. Whether the House authorities are a competent body is difficult to judge. The performance of the Fees Office does not inspire confidence.

8. As in the Civil Service, all expenses should be approved in advance and receipts provided for EVERYTHING.

9. Second homes should be abolished. The system has been abused by too many MPs. They are meant to be public servants, not property speculators.

10. Most definitely not!!! Parliament should provide the staff. MPs should have no say on who works for them. We've had enough of nepotism. This is the 21st century!

11. EVERYTHING should be receipted.

12. EVERYTHING should be available for public scrutiny at all times. There should be no need to have to resort to the Freedom of Information Act. They have to realise that they are the servants and the public is the master. The only way that will happen is if we turn the tables on them and scrutinise every decision and every purchase they make.

13. No, it is not acceptable. I don't agree that it 'keeps them in touch with the world outside.' How does being on the Board of a big company keep you in touch with the vast majority of people in this country? Any earnings they make from other sources should be docked, pound for pound – as happens with Social Security benefits.

14. Most definitely not!!!! Abolish the Communications Allowance immediately – it's a propaganda allowance. No-one believes what politicians say so why waste money in this way?

Finally, I think the final decision on MPs' expenses and allowances should be taken out of their hands. They have never voted for a diminution in their conditions before, so why should we trust them to do so this time? I think the matter should be put to the country, either in the form of a referendum or a general election. After all, it's our money. I think we're entitled to have the final decision on how it's spent.

Mr Mason
Exeter