

Independent Offices -

E305

From:
Sent: 26 May 2009 10:00
To: Inquiry
Subject: evidence proposal

Sir

the attached file are my proposals for the reform of the expenses system, yours H Bell

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Sir Christopher Kelly

Dear Sir

As a member of the general public I too have been totally astounded by the revelations aired by the media in relation to the mostly outlandish expense accounts of the majority of members of the house of commons. Personally I wouldn't trust a politician ever again. Their defence of that it was "within the rules" is possibly the worst statement that could ever have been made by those that make the rules themselves, in my opinion, those who should know better.

After reading through the evidence statements by several MP's only one issue is really brought to the fore, this is that reform is required, but, that reform proposed by all MP's apart from Chris Mullin basically is a simple juggling act of the system in place now, by which I mean these same MP's still want to retain these extra benefits but to disguise these as London living allowance etc etc. This in no way will restore the public's faith in this institution.

Expenses should be just that. No food or beverage expenses, we all eat and drink every day of our lives but we don't expect someone else to pay for this and a wage of £64000 annually is more than ample to cover these costs, billing the taxpayer is just pure greed. In fact amounts for anything unrelated to their parliamentary duties should be scrapped altogether, no dinner services costing hundreds of pounds, toilet rolls/seats, kitchens, furniture, TV's etc should be claimed for, these costs are incurred by many working class people who work away from home, (usually in London too) who earn far less of a wage than any MP or indeed an EO in the civil service for that matter.

My answers to the listed questions are as follow

1. What are the necessary elements of a system which both supports MPs properly in the performance of their important and demanding role and commands public confidence?

A1

Firstly, openness and honesty, no trying to deceive the public on any issue regarding monetary gain. Involvement of the public regarding major issues, immigration, capital punishment, Europe, all require referendum, let the people decide, we want to make our own decisions, through our representatives, (MP's) not have the EU foist ill judged opinions on this nation, quit Europe and make our own laws, we did before and were considered "Great" for doing so. Thirty years of European rule have turned this country into the "nanny" state it is today at the detriment of the British Public, its time to out. This alone will restore public confidence and trust will follow.

2. Is it right that the House of Commons should be in a position to determine the nature and size of its own expenses scheme? If not, what are the alternatives? Who should be responsible for approving the content of the Green Book which sets out the basic rules?

A2

Not at all, a team of independent accountants would be able to work out relevant expense for offices, staffing, travel etc. Responsibility for approving the green book should lie with a competent solicitor or a tax lawyer but definitely not an MP.

3. Are the range of expenses which are currently reimbursable correct? Are the correct judgements being made about the resources MPs need to perform their jobs effectively?

A3

No, they've proven that where money is concerned their judgement is clouded by human error, greed. Second home allowance discontinued for any MP living within fifty miles of Westminster also reduced from the present figure to £16000, an ample allowance for any home. Communications allowance scrapped and a set figure of £2000 for all stationary, electronic mail is free and net access is everywhere, VOIP communication on all but sensitive issues should be used. IT should also only be claimed 4 yearly and set at £1500 till 2012, order PC equipment from local small business, £1500 will buy a top range system at these outlets. Those within the 50 mile radius will be recompensed at the going rate for a railcard or mileage allowance for vehicle use.

4. Are the arrangements for policing the expenses system adequate? If not, how should they be reinforced? Is there adequate independent involvement? Are the new arrangements for internal and external audit introduced at the beginning of this financial year adequate?

A4

External audit only.

5. If it is the right principle that MPs should not expect any element of personal financial advantage through the claiming of personal expenses, what approach should be taken in situations such as the support of mortgage interest which does offer the possibility of such advantage but which may nevertheless provide better value for money to the tax payer?

A5

MP's whose distance from parliament necessitates second homes in and around the capital should have suitable accommodation provided by government, these will not be the property of the MP but will be for their use when attending duties or any other time during their term in office, guests will be allowed but only on a temporary basis and only members of the MP's immediate family can live with the MP in this accommodation, no subletting, there will be no costs incurred by the MP for council

tax, rent, however utilities expenses will be funded to approx half of these costs. Redecoration expense will be met by parliament up to £200 per room.

6. However logical the approach to reimbursement of expenses, is it possible that its implementation throws up so many difficulties, including difficulties of explanation to the wider public, that there is a case for considering a radical simplification which costs the same or less than the current arrangements? Would it be acceptable for some increase in the level of basic pay to form part of that?

A6

No, as we've seen, regardless of the amount of wages received expenses are manipulated to suit the member's greed, take the expenses claims from the equation and remove temptation altogether.

7. Where reimbursement is made in respect of expenses such as the cost of running an office, should this payment continue to be made as an additional personal expenses allowance to MPs? Or could the payment be made directly by the House authorities or in some other way? Is there a case for more centralised procurement through the House of Commons authorities? If so in which areas might such procurement take place?

A7

Office expenditure varies according to area and should remain with the MP, modest offices should be rented and charged by the MP with extensive/extortionate expense claims for these offices investigated thoroughly before payments are agreed.

8. What is the best way of providing recompense to those MPs who inevitably have to spend time away from their main home on Parliamentary business?

A8

The main home has to be in the constituency they represent, refer to answer 5 for time spent in London, any time spent on parliamentary business elsewhere to be funded through expenses, lavish claims for luxury accommodation to be rejected and no claim above £100 daily considered, overnight stay in London when required by those within the 50 mile radius will be met up to the same amount.

9. How much discretion should the system allow about issues like the designation of second homes?

A9

None, refer to answer 5

10. Is it acceptable that MPs should be able to employ spouses or other family members? If so, what safeguards are necessary?

A10

Family members can be employed but only if qualified to do the tasks required, NVQ's or other legitimate qualifications accepted, wages at the going rate for the job, IE, Cleaning = NMW, Secretarial = rated as per qualifications etc etc

11. Should receipts be required to support all claims for reimbursable expenditure?

A11

Yes, claims without paperwork should not be honoured.

12. What level of detail of expenses claims should be routinely available to the public without the need to make Freedom of Information Act requests for it?

A12

All expense claims publicly available without exception

13. Is it acceptable or desirable that MPs should be able to receive remuneration for activities outside Parliament? If so, should that be reflected in any way in the treatment of their Parliamentary pay and expenses? Is there a need for further regulation or guidance on these activities?

A13

MP's can hold other positions unless it becomes detrimental to parliamentary duty, normal parliamentary pay and expenses not to be affected but taxation to be assessed on total income from all activities.

14. Should MPs be reimbursed for expenditure incurred on newsletters and other material designed to inform the public about their work?

A14

Yes, but limited based upon the numbers in the MP's constituency, all newsletters to be simple text with no fancy design budget included, electronic newsletters/PDF's can be included on MP's web space in downloadable form.

These are my ideas on reformation of the expenses system, I have made these proposals with fairness in mind, no MP should be out of pocket while undertaking parliamentary duties but misappropriation of public funds should cease forthwith. A committee gathered from all walks of life should be selected from interested parties to make the rules to be abided by, a simple television advertisement to be used for recruitment of this committee would suffice, names selected randomly and appointments held for the term of office, 5 years, with nominal remuneration and expenses paid. To be seen as a public duty.

Furthermore a law should be drafted to ensure everyone of voting age present in the country at times of election of MP's or government must vote, only those proving severe illness, injury or overseas allowed to abstain.

Submitted by H Bell

