

Withington,
Hereford,

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21st May 2009

Dear Sir,

No doubt the Committee is inundated with proposals for dealing with the problems of MPs expenses. It is to be hoped that the Committee will resist all suggestions for merely modifying or adjusting the current framework; rather what is clearly needed is a root and branch change and simplification based on allowances - no receipts required and with minimal differences between MPs in what is considered a cost that needs to be reimbursed.

I hope the Committee will give serious consideration to a system based on standard allowances like that described in the attached paper.

Yours sincerely,

G Harrington

The Secretary, Committee on Standards in Public Life;
C Bill Wiggin MP
C Paul Keetch MP

A SIMPLE SYSTEM FOR MEETING MPs COSTS NECESSARILY INCURRED IN CARRYING OUT THEIR FUNCTIONS, BASED ON ALLOWANCES

The basic model is surely as follows:

1. The MP lives in or very close to his/her Constituency in a dwelling financed from his/her income - as he/she would do with any other job (his/her "home").
2. Those living away from London travel to and from Central London once a week - travel cost reimbursed.
3. These MPs are assumed to stay while in London in a well-furnished, heated, one-bedroom flat. He/she receives a standard allowance to cover the cost of such a flat (assumed within walking distance of the House) based on known costs of such a facility in this area, but is free to spend this "flat" allowance how he/she wishes (renting or buying, sharing, using hotels etc) and is not required to justify the expenditure.
4. The MP is presumed to commute to the House from this flat at his/her expense, just as others in employment have to meet their own commuting costs. (Those able and willing to commute daily from a home further away from the House may, by agreement, claim such travel expenses instead of the flat allowance).
5. If it is decided that MPs need secretarial support, then each would receive the same second allowance for this purpose (based on model needs and costings); again he/she can choose to deploy this allowance how he/she finds convenient without being required to justify the expenditure.
6. The MP needs to be available to meet individual constituents; this is usually arranged at periodic surgeries at different points in the Constituency. The costs of travel and room hire will vary greatly with Constituency geography. A Constituency Contact allowance should be negotiated in advance by the MP with the Commons authorities using as a basis appropriate models.
7. It is for discussion whether the role of MP requires provision of any other facility (for communication, for example, ie a laptop or other equipment) but if it is all would receive the same allowance and, again, could deploy as they wish.
8. The only claims for expenses required by this system would be

- (a) weekly travel from home/Constituency to Central London and return for those taking the flat allowance
 - (b) travel on required days from home to the House for those by agreement not taking the flat allowance,
 - (c) the costs of attending or participating in any approved meeting or event (taking care to differentiate between House activities (expense allowed) and Party activities (expense not-allowed)) approved in advance.
9. The allowances for a Central London living facility, for secretarial support, for Constituency Contact and for communication (if adopted) would not be taxed but their scale would be under continuous monitoring.

If it is argued that restriction of expenses in this way will cause the right people to reject the role of MP, it is suggested that the attraction of the job should be dealt with through the basic salary and facilities available, not through the generosity or otherwise of expenses which should be essentially the same for every MP.

It is appreciated that some aspects of this regime (advance approval etc) will be seen as demeaning and incompatible with the Culture. This is the penalty of misuse of the current arrangements. Key features of the above system are low administration costs and equal treatment of all MPs subject only to necessary differences due to distance between Constituency and the House and to Constituency geography.

21/05/09.