

PINNER

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Sir Christopher Kelly
Committee on Standards in Public Life
35 Great Smith Street
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Dear Sir Christopher Kelly

Review of MPs Expenses – Issues and Questions – April 2009

After considering the questions listed in Issues and Questions – April 2009, section 1.5, please find below my views:

1. Strictly observe the seven principles of public life and be available more often to the public.
2. It is not correct for MPs to determine salary or expenses. Throughout industry each person has a job description by which established values are used to determine value and responsibility. Expenses are examined by the responsible manager who questions unsuitable items as he has an allotted budget. Should his budget exceed his allowance, higher management requires justification – predetermined budget should be the first step.

Green Book should be controlled by non-political accountants, be totally independent and discuss obvious short-comings with Party Leaders. No expenses permitted unless essential to carry out duties of being member of parliament.

3. Current range of expenses are excessive and permit abusive expenditure on items not necessarily required to perform as an MP. The original concept of MPs expenses totally outside real needs. Facilities to carry out MPs duties are: office space, professional assistant, communication facilities, stationery and mobility i.e. car mileage allowance. Longer journeys between Westminster and constituency – use the National Travel Card.

4. Current method of policing expenses totally inappropriate. Approval carried out by the same group of people, who have indicated a gradual slackening of standards intended with original introduction of the expense allowances – completely lost the requirements necessary to observe the seven principles of public life. Independent observation and involvement not apparent. New internal/external audit still too cosy.
5. It is not right that MPs should receive personal financial advantage, either in the short or long term. Mortgage interest is essentially the rent for occupation of a property which belongs to the named person on the deeds. The MP who chooses to purchase a residence eventually sells or has improved capital on that property. So he/she has been subsidised in that purchase/improved asset. When that property is sold or the MP retires, that percentage of expenditure during the purchase should be returned to the public purse. Refer to seven principles. Avoidance could be accommodation supplied by the parliamentary services – the Olympic Village accommodation following the Olympic Games would serve nicely.
6. Justification for increase in level of basic pay, only after job description has been introduced. The public already have an understanding that travel card or any approved similar method. So simplification without increased cost is possible, maybe reduced costs.
7. Costs of running an office is no different to a credit card situation or direct debit account. House authorities can control office supplies and services. Materials despatched direct from supplier under instruction from material controller. Services similarly controlled with advantage of cost comparison at each constituency. No need for MPs to have an additional personal allowance – no need to have access to cash for any reason.
8. Fully utilise government accommodation which is understood does already exist, although at this moment is limited. Later, following the Olympic Games the living space can be utilised. Members of parliament wishing to have alternative arrangements will pay for themselves – just like the rest of the population.
9. The main home should always be at the constituency. Second homes become capital assets supported via mortgage interest payments from the public purse. If the MP chooses to have a second home he/she returns that percentage of realised asset on termination of purchase or MP's period of office. He/she will have been living rent free for that period.
10. Avoid nepotism in any form, it should be against the law for MPs to employ family members, no matter how distantly related or friends. Staff must be qualified to civil service standard – approved or supplied by Westminster. Staff could still work for their regular MP but only with approval.
11. All expenditure not covered by credit card limitations and direct debit – each item will be checked – must have a receipt.

12. Freedom of Information Act should apply in all cases without question. This information could be posted on notice boards in libraries and other public offices. Those people who require this information can easily have access.
13. It is understood that each member works in his/her own way or does not. Their numerous outside rewarding activities leads one to think that MPs are treating the house as a part-time job for petty cash – pocket money of just a rewarding compliment to other activities. We are blessed with the same number of hours in each week – 168. So, if we consider the necessary activities on human beings – sleep – travel - eating etc. It leaves little time to carry out meaningful productive activity. So, how much time is available for parliamentary work? With outside functions/activities, I suggest very little unless somebody else is doing it for them! Commonsense indicates that with other activities, very little time is available for constituency /parliamentary work.

If being a member is not the main occupation, the job is not being done well – so it is not good enough to have additional work. Questions at Prime Ministers Question Time is indicative of the quality resulting from additional occupations. Not a good thing to be out of touch and have a holier than thou attitude.
14. Many questions continue to make themselves apparent, for instance, why do the MPs not make full use of public buildings? The Town Hall, where security exists, is known to the public. Meeting and conference space together with all communication facilities must be available and at a cost, returnable to the council. Regular transport facilities must be an added advantage.

In conclusion, it is not necessary to continue further as with these limited and simple steps the situation would be rectified as a first stage. Further review would be necessary to follow the performances after stage one has been functioning for some time.

I look forward to your response. If you wish to contact me, please call me on my landline as detailed above.

Yours sincerely

T J Jackson