
From: - on behalf of public@standards.x.gsi.gov.uk
Sent: 03 June 2009 08:47
To: Inquiry
Subject: FW: Committee on Standards in Public Life

E407

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From:
Sent: 02 June 2009 12:29
To: public@standards.x.gsi.gov.uk
Subject: Committee on Standards in Public Life

Dear Committee Members,

While I am not in a position to make any detailed submission on your paper I thought you might find it useful if I passed comment on some of the questions you have set out to answer. I am a British citizen aged 62 and have voted in all elections since I qualified to vote.

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?

It is certainly the correct principle that MPs should not gain any personal pecuniary advantage above their wages. I would go further and extend this to members of the MPs family and friends.

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?

I think this is a bit of a cop out. The public is not exercised in this matter now because it does not understand the question of the reimbursement of expenses. The point is they understand the situation all too well. Many publics in Britain have experience of expenses systems. What we are agitated about is the cavalier attitude many MPs, at all levels, have to their expense claims. Many of the instances quoted so far in the press would lead the employees in other walks of life, if there actions were replicated there, into disciplinary procedures and in some cases outright sacking.

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?

I think this area could be tidied up. I don't see what running an office has to do with 'personal expenses.' This is to equate the MP with the someone running a small business.

They are agents of the state and as such should be paid by the state and not as if they are some freelance intermediary which seems to be the current mode. This also connects to Question 10.

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?

It is not clear what the point is here? MPs receive a salary. They know what the job is before they stand for election. What are they being reimbursed for? If any 'hardship' or 'working away from home' allowance is necessary it should be paid in the salary and based upon the distance between the constituency and Westminster.

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

This is such a vexed issue and at present one so open to opportunistic profiteering that I don't think this should be a discretionary system in the future.

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

I don't think this is acceptable. The MPs should be subject to the same employment legislation as everybody else. Once again they are not running a small business but are elected officers of the state.

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

That you have to ask this question is a measure of how far the House has sunk in the public's estimation. I am afraid that MPs have shown themselves incapable of policing their own behaviour and I suggest that all claims in future be supported by receipts.

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?

All levels of expenditure should be open to public scrutiny.

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?

We might ask the question 'Which constituencies knowingly vote for a part time MP?' I don't think there is a good case for part time MPs under the present system. This is all part of the amateur into freelance/small business professional, history of the House of Commons. A modern legislature would rededicate itself to public service and that alone.

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

This can be a useful way of letting the public know what their MP is doing. I suggest it should not be left to individual MP's. This is far too expensive and an incoherent response [I'm talking in the general sense here] to the public's need to know. I suggest it can be produced and distributed by the House without any distinction being made between the political parties in style. In fact it could be one way of contributing to a raising of awareness about the job of MPs in the constituencies and have a positive role in not only helping to

educate and engage the public in the work of MPs but in promoting the House of Commons and the nature of our democracy.

I hope you find these comments useful. The best of luck with your deliberations. Your sincerely,

P. Sky

Penarth,

02/06/09

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