

Sir Christopher Kelly
Review of MPs' Expenses
The Committee on Standards in Public Life
35 Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BQ

June 2009

Dear Sir Christopher

Thank you for your recent letter, inviting the PLP to give oral evidence to your Committee's Review of MPs' Expenses.

I am aware that the PLP Women's Committee, the Government and the Labour Party are all likely to make submissions to your committee, but I hope a distinct contribution from the PLP itself may also be useful to you in your deliberations.

I thought the Committee might find it helpful if I set out a series of broad principles, rather than setting out detailed proposals. For your information, all Labour MPs have been encouraged to make submissions to your Review with their own ideas, and I know a number of my colleagues have already done so.

As politicians we believe passionately in the power of politics and parliamentary democracy to change the world for the better. This issue and the current climate, with the myriad allegations of impropriety, is devastating to politics. This matter is also causing distress among Members – particularly when the allegations relate to Members' partners and families.

In terms of broad principles, I want to make clear that Labour MPs support fully the need for significant changes in the system. The changes that come forward will need to be straightforward, transparent and will need to command the respect of the public. We overwhelmingly support the suggestion that MPs need to be removed from the process of setting their salaries and allowances. I welcome your role in this and look forward to discussing the separation of allowances and expenses when we meet.

Also, we do ask for some recognition that MPs overwhelmingly have no other income than their salary. We also believe that the job of a Member of Parliament is a full time job and that our constituents believe they are voting for someone to be their full time MP.

We believe it is of absolute importance that, whatever changes come forward, we recognise that people from all backgrounds, incomes and family arrangements should have the opportunity to serve as MPs.

We further believe that reasonable accommodation is required to do this and will discuss this matter further with the Committee.

We also reflect that the demands on members have changed immeasurably in recent years, with changes in society and changes in technology. We believe fundamentally that MPs need to be able to provide an efficient, resourced and professional service to constituents, and that the link between and MP and their constituency is critical. We believe furthermore that politicians have the resources required to communicate with their constituents and inform them of the work they undertake.

We believe in principle and in practice that MPs' staff need to be respected, trained and paid appropriately for doing their jobs, and we are happy to discuss the practicalities of this with the Committee.

One final comment: as we look to make significant changes to the system there will need to be some consideration of temporary transition arrangements, as I believe was the case in the Scottish Parliament when they underwent a similar process. In this regard we believe that where people have abided by the letter and spirit of the rules at that time, and where you recommend these rules should change – that change should only be effective from the moment of adoption and not retrospectively.

I look forward to meeting you and colleagues on your committee to expand on these opening principles.

Yours sincerely

Tony Lloyd MP
PLP Chair

Co-signatories:

The elected backbench Commons membership of the PLP Parliamentary Committee:

Ann Cryer MP
Don Touhig MP
Anne Snelgrove MP
Clive Efford MP
Jim Sheridan MP

Sharon Hodgson MP