



Goldford

E 59

12th May 2009

Sir Christopher Kelly  
Chairman of Standards in Public Life Committee  
House of Commons

Dear Sir Christopher,

I read that you would welcome comments from voters concerning MPs' remuneration and expenses as you prepare your review and recommendations.

My thoughts are as follows:

It seems perfectly reasonable for an MP to employ a family member to do secretarial work but whoever does it should be employed by Parliament and their hours and terms of employment should be recorded.

Administrative expenses like those for telephone and postage should also be centrally funded. The more conscientious the constituency MPs are the greater will be their expenses as they respond to constituents' queries and concerns.

Travel expenses should be reimbursed because obviously those with distant, sprawling countryside constituencies will have greater travel costs than London MPs.

Perhaps each MP could have an entertainment allowance; I have been amazed to discover recently that my taxes have been used to buy some MPs' food. Voters have to buy their own.

The second home problem is a thorny one because MPs representing distant constituencies must obviously have a London base. I would suggest that either a group of properties is bought by the taxpayer and let out to MPs rather like the forces' married quarters, or if MPs buy their own second homes with support from taxes, then when they are sold, the Treasury gets a share of the profit.

I am as appalled as anyone by the revelations of how the present system has been abused, but I have always thought that MPs' basic salaries were too low to attract people of quality and one can see how this might have allowed carelessness to creep in.

Many MPs overcome that problem by continuing to work at their professions part time, as well as sitting in Parliament. I strongly support that system, because it keeps our representatives in touch with the world for which they are legislating. I should be very disappointed if it became a condition of election that they had to be full time MPs.

It is probably beyond your brief to comment on the number of MPs at Westminster which has not been reduced recently despite the creation of the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament, to say nothing of the European Parliament from which so much of our law now comes, but I do think we have too many, that they work too short a week and have excessively long recesses. More time should be devoted to genuine debate, scrutiny of legislation and holding the government of the day to account.

Lastly, whatever you recommend and whatever is finally decided, MPs should have to produce, like the rest of us, receipts for every item of expenditure for which they wish to claim. Their income and expenses should also be subject to the same scrutiny as we all experience from the Inland Revenue.

I am delighted to read that you refuse to be hurried in your deliberations. There has been too much on the hoof, shallow, sound-bite response - this needs sorting out satisfactorily for the long term.

Best wishes for success in your committee's work,

Yours sincerely,

c.c. to Anne Milton MP and David Cameron MP