

# DAVID HAMILTON MP

Member of Parliament for Midlothian



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA



Sir Christopher Kelly  
The Committee on Standards in Public Life  
35 Great Smith Street  
London  
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RECEIVED  
23 JUN 2009

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19 June 2009

Dear Sir Christopher

I apologise for writing to you after the deadline for the evidence into the inquiry into MPs expenses, however I hope that you can appreciate that this is a fast-moving issue and environment and I wish to bring up an issues that has recently come to my attention.

I notice the press reports from your evidence with Harriet Harman focused on the issue of MPs employing family members. I currently employ my wife, Jean, as Office Manager in my Midlothian constituency. I have done this since I was first elected in 2001 and I have been open and honest about this situation from the outset. I wish to express my concerns about the suggestion that MPs should be barred from employing a family member. I understand that this is a particular concern for the public, with the notable cases of Derek Conway making this a high concern with the legitimacy of the system. I wish to state why I believe the practice of employing family members should not be banned, but also set out some changes and improvements in the rules which could restore legitimacy to the system.

I believe that members should retain the right to employ family members. This is for a number of reasons. A MPs office is a very small and personal affair, normally consisting of no more than 4 people. Many organisations of similar size in the private sector will be family businesses and therefore by definition will encourage the employment of family members. I believe that this is a point that is lost when we talk about MPs as a group. I also believe that employing family members has some added benefits for MPs. Not just can family members provide the personal loyalty that is needed in politics, but it also helps to ensure that I can have continuous support. MPs are required to work long hours, often until 11pm on a Monday and Tuesday. Whilst my staff is happy to work out-of hours I am not prepared to call on them late at night as a matter of routine. The nature of the fusion between personal and professional relationships with my wife removes this problem and I am able to call upon 24/7 support.



However I accept that the system needs to change if we are to restore public confidence. In order to achieve this I believe that the House should increase the scrutiny of the qualifications and experience of MPs employees as well as checks on the duties, locations and hours of staff related to MPs. I believe that my staff is all fully qualified for the jobs that they do. However at no point have any questions been asked of me regarding the suitability of an employee for their job. If there is concern about MPs employing staff then why can't we introduce some form of scrutiny of these staff, perhaps only for those who are registered as a relative of the MP.

The second issue is monitoring the work that is done by MPs staff. It is right and essential that an MP retains control and responsibility for managing their staff, balancing workloads and setting responsibilities. Therefore there cannot be someone else acting as a line-manager for MPs staff. However I believe a system of scrutiny or *spot-checks* could be introduced to monitor the work done by staff registered as being related to a member. This could be a simple form of scrutiny (for example a two minute trawl through my wives e-mail account would verify the validity of her work) or a requirement for a greater amount of information about tasks, responsibilities and timekeeping.

I would like to raise one more point on the issue of staffing; which is the need and right for MPs to select people of their own political persuasion. As I have said before an MP needs a high degree of loyalty from their staff, I also believe that they need like minded people who can emotionally commit to the work we do. Politics is an emotive area and raises passions in people. I believe that MPs must be able to screen candidates' party and political opinions when appointing.

Finally I would like to raise a suggestion with you regarding the process by which MPs claim expenses. I believe that the introduction of the Travel Card for members has been a huge success. Having a credit card has removed the need for a large amount of paper-chasing, both for MPs and the House authorities. The Credit Card system removes the need for claims and receipts and allows for complete accountability. I believe that, in line with other parts of the public and private sector, we should look into a credit card system for member's expenses.

I hope that you have found this helpful. I am willing to make myself available if you require any further information from me on this subject.

Best wishes

DAVID HAMILTON MP