



Frinton,

Sir Christopher Kelly & Committee - MP's Expenses

8th July 2009

Dear Sirs

In August 2008, following extensive research amongst voters, we submitted a summary of policy proposals to a local (Conservative) Member of Parliament.

One section was devoted to the subject of 'How Parliament should work' which contained issues we believe relevant to the scope of your committee.

We attach that section as it was based on the collective thoughts of not only ourselves but a wide range of Essex voters.

We hope this will be of interest and value to you in your invaluable deliberations.

Kind regards

B Dyke
ESSEX VOTERS VOICE

HOW PARLIAMENT SHOULD WORK

Members of Parliament

The current review of salary and expenses should be made wider in the interests of members as well as public scrutiny. We recommend the following principles apply:

- * That the notion of an MP and his office as an 'independent family-run business centre' be dispelled. Whilst some non-parliamentary employment and remuneration is acceptable - and beneficial even - there is public resentment of well-paid directorships and consultancies (which should be restricted but not necessarily banned) and some family appointments.

- * The public feels entitled to know how much time a MP is allowed to allocate to interests other than those of his electorate. Also how he is allowed to spend his non-Westminster time and what are the parameters for overseas visits using the public purse? We see no reason why an MP should not have some form of published Job Specification without restricting his flexibility in dealing with the needs of the moment in properly representing his constituents. We also see no necessity for much of the 'fact finding' overseas trips in this day of internet, email and telephone conferencing. A presentation by the travelling MPs to his colleagues and the utilisation of private blogsites should generally suffice. The Speaker must play no part in the system.

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- * The rules must be greatly tightened on former members, notably ministers, taking private sector jobs offered because of specific 'insider' knowledge and networking ability. A 5-year or even indefinite exclusion clause would not be inappropriate after high office of state. Similar consideration should be given to political memoirs.

* The London accommodation allowance and the so-called John Lewis list have no part in our concept. Expenses paid from the public purse are not for capital items or capital gain. They are reimbursement for legitimate expenditure in connection with a MP's work. Part of that is to cover accommodation when there's a business necessity to be in London or elsewhere overnight. On those nights, and those nights only, it is reasonable to reimburse the cost of somewhere comfortable to stay - say at a 3-star level. Should an MP decide to invest in a conveniently located property he/she should be able to claim the equivalent sum. How he furnishes his property is his concern alone and clearly he cannot claim for expenditure of that kind. This is perfectly well understood in commerce and should be by MPs. In summary MPs are employees of the public and all expenditure within their offices should be paid directly from the public purse and is therefore subject to public controls and scrutiny. However as with senior business executives a degree of initiative and trust is essential rather than a bureaucracy routinely and expensively examining the fine detail.

* An MP's salary should be in the order of £75,000 per annum given that his expense claims and any non-legitimate employment of family members are not an additional net income stream. However where a family member is the employee best suited, say, to run the MP's office at an agreed pay rate this is to be encouraged.

The sectors of government

There is widespread public confusion over the responsibilities and inter-connection between the different forms of government - Central, Council, District, Town & Parish. The confusion over council tax and who should be held accountable for the incessant increases is a prime example.

An explanation of each sector's role and the ways they should be made to work together for the common good would be applauded and surely be beneficial.

Financial Competence & Business acumen

Given the relative business inexperience of many if not most ministers we believe that ministers should be vetted and cleared before they handle multi-billion government budgets.

Constituency Offices

Advantage should be taken of the allowance, recently announced, to refurbish offices to present a more modern professional appearance to the public and a place to which they can comfortably visit to seek advice when the need arises.

Quangos

Successive governments have initially said they will limit the scope and expense of these non-elected bodies; Labour, despite Gordon Brown's promises, have done the reverse to a disgraceful extent.

We believe Qangos should be limited by their cost to the public purse with each body given a budget of 50% of their current expenditure. After 12 months their performance and contribution to the nation's well being would be reviewed and their futures decided accordingly.

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