

REVIEW OF MPS' EXPENSES

- 1.21 I feel that it is too limiting to only hold public meetings in London. This government is supposed to represent the whole country, so to hold meetings to which some members of the public cannot attend seems to me to be undemocratic.
- 1.3 It is essential that the decisions on accommodation expenditure are NOT addressed by MPs alone. It must be done by an independent body, acting openly with access and input comments from the public welcomed. This independent body will also be the stage of approval for expenses incurred to ensure that the terms of the new deal are strictly observed by all.

It is certainly not right for MPs to determine levels of income or expenses available; it should be along the lines as awarded to the civil service, but with civil services expenses also subject to independent review as it is also believed that some senior employees enjoy benefits that do not equate to those received within the public sector.

In order to ensure that our Honourable Gentlemen do not find loop-holes within the system arrived at, a system of annual review is to be instituted, with *sign-off* by the independent body and with the details made available to the public by a means to be determined. Perhaps a document widely advertised and readily made available from HMSO at cost price.

- 1.4 See paragraph 1 of section 1.3.
- 1.7 There is no way anybody from the general tax-paying public will accept any adjustment being made to salaries to compensate for a reduction of expenses. Expenses are there to reimburse expenditure made in furtherance of their work as a representative of a constituency. Money claimed illegally MUST not be made up by a salary increase, because it should not have been claimed initially.

The arrangement of MP's pensions needs to be looked at in the light of its generosity as afforded by the taxpayer who also has to fund his own pension. The present contribution of 10% of salary is clearly insufficient, I would estimate the level of contributions required to fund such a pension to be in the order of 40%. If you doubt this I would suggest you contact Watson Wyatt actuaries who I believe rightly or wrongly to be the actuaries concerned with this particular pension. I would suggest that no less than half the total contributions needed to fund the pension should be born by the ultimate recipient. Should under-funding appear at any time. MPs should not be permitted alone to vote on '*topping-up*' the fund with tax-payers money. Some compromise will need to be reached as happened within the private sector. Should this not seem to be acceptable then I suggest that the final salary scheme be abandoned in favour of a 'cash purchase scheme' as is becoming more prevalent within the private sector.

One other factor that appears to be way out of line is the practice of a minister's pension being calculated to add to that received as a back-bencher. It is obvious that awarding a pension of £77,000 annually to a failed 'Speaker', an amount that exceeds the present salary level of an MP is wrong. The higher should apply on its own as within the private sector.

I would doubt if this system even exists within the civil service. As one is promoted, surely only the job salary to which one is promoted, is used to calculate the pension award. If it also exists within the public sector generally, then that too must be the subject of another investigation.

The present level of pension awarded to a retiring Prime Minister is also out of touch with reality. It was based on retirement being the only source of income, but now retired PMs go on a tour or write a book and earn £Millions. Such pension is no longer required on top of a ministerial pension.

The final paragraph of this section is erroneous. Whilst party officials alone put forward a candidate for an election, performance rating will not be worth a carrot. Some people, perhaps political sheep, will vote for a party irrespective of what is offered by way of person or manifesto. Perhaps the U.S.A. system of primaries has some merit worthy of discussion.

- 1.8 The size of the House of Commons should be considered here for a number of reasons. Not least the amount of legislation that is being determined from Europe without (sufficient, my comment) input from Westminster and in addition the formation of regional assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Perhaps Westminster should be sidelined with the creation of an English Assembly so that no national one exists. I would suggest that the boundaries commission looks at this without delay with the ultimate aim of 500 members maximum.
- 1.9 I will leave the House of Lords for now as I know very little about it. Should you care to provide me with full information, I will comment on this also.
- 1.10 This statement is quite correct and I am sure acceptable to the tax-payer. It is this which has been abused as bath plugs, moat cleaning and sets of sheets are not items that were incurred wholly and necessarily in performing their parliamentary duties. My concern here is also why these claims have been approved by the *Fees Office*.

Accountability by overt claims and the outcome of those claims by the independent body is essential. We do expect respect for the fact that the money they spend is not due to them without the safeguards put into place, It is our money as tax-payers, and is to be used solely as directed in the section above.

Where '*value for money*' is used as an excuse for overpayment for goods, the justification is to be provided with the expenses claim as in the public sector, otherwise this will be abused by those members aggrieved with their perceived loss of income with the correcting of expenses rules.

Rules are under discussion again here and that is why I suggested the annual review with the *sign-off* system.

- 1.11 Advertisements need to be placed in the press and perhaps on TV for input from the general public, but I would suggest that only tax-payers should be permitted to comment. Those on a career benefit path have particular reason to want a particular party in office with certain MPs perhaps ex trade Union representatives available to them. This I suggest renders them unavailable to comment on suggested changes.

- 1.14 It is natural to have varying degrees of travel expense claims and some, I suggest those living within 60minutes of commuting time should not be able to have a second home for which expenses can be claimed, nor should travel from a property at such a vicinity be a valid claim for recompense. For travel, if only those expenses actually incurred can be claimed for, the discrepancy is well taken care of. This is why *block-expense* should not be introduced. The only expense here which is difficult to quantify is that of mileage allowance, as no receipts are given for such. However, given the governments claims for a green future, perhaps there is a case to rule out personal car travel in favour of public transport, for which receipts are readily available. MPs cannot expect us to use public transport and they themselves not use it. Sauce for the goose etc.....
- 1.15 This is obvious. It must be seen to be operated along the lines as in the private sector, and then we are all working from the same hymn sheet. MPs are not special people who should have special privileges; they are human and frail like the rest of us. Therefore rather than Orwellian figures they should be seen to act and to be treated like the rest of us. There should be no payment for attendance, their salary covers that. The last thing we need is complaints that so and so was not in the house but claimed his/her allowance. The SISO system as applies in the corrupt European system.
- 1.15.1 We do not need MPs who are more concerned with their salary and expenses running the country. With all the so called errors of judgement and degrees of forgetfulness being shown by the present incumbents, it is no wonder they cannot run either the country or the economy. We need dedicated, intelligent and aware representatives not the greedy grasping shower that we have at present.
- 1.15.2 No an independent body must do this with input as mentioned earlier from those who feel they have something to offer. Nowhere in the private sector do people determine their own conditions or contract of employment. The content of the *Green Book* (and perhaps to ensure the old system soon gets forgotten, we should rename it) should be reviewed annually with the sign off system as mentioned earlier. It needs to be maintained by the senior member of the independent body: incidentally, there is no call for a large body to do this at great cost to the public, two people should be sufficient to monitor the task at hand.
- 1.15.3 I have not seen the *Green Book*, but having listened to MPs themselves and having read newspapers they are too lax. How can you steal money by claiming for a non-existent mortgage and then find that it is within the rules?
- 1.15.4 Evidently not, as claims for non-existent mortgages should not have been paid out, nor should claims for hanging baskets, bath plugs and leather arm chairs as they are not necessary to enable an MP to perform his paid for duties. Again I would wish to know just why the *Fees Office* has settled such claims as there appears to be a case to abolish the office and introduce a different method. Perhaps claims should be approved and paid out by the Independent body, or approved before payment by the *Fees Office*.

My understanding is that they were, in some cases, bullied by their employers the MPs. The body responsible for payments must not be subject to supervision by MPs and they must be strong enough to resist such attempts. The speaker of the house must not be able to tell the payments body not to meddle in MPs affairs.

In order to keep the number of administrators for this duty to a minimum, claims should only be made on a monthly basis, with detailed receipts to keep the work simple.

1.15.5 Of course it is. As in the private sector, expenses are there to reimburse expenditure made in the course and in furtherance of their duties as an MP. If prospective candidates believe that they are applying for the wrong job.

Mortgage interest, if paid should be limited to the price of a reasonable flat or apartment in London. It should NOT be used to enable an MP to make a profit by sale at any time. If money from the public purse is used for this, then the property should be returned to the public when the member no longer is a member. A deal can easily be reached for which no claims can be made like, better value for the taxpayer, for who is going to attempt to verify the statement? If it were the case, then the MP would benefit from the sale, presently that would upset the taxpayer given the level of exploitation experienced. The basis of a rule is to be that whatever is thought to be the case, MPs must NOT benefit from expenses.

1.15.6 There is a case for radical simplification, but the cost of it would have to work out at far less than the present level of expenses as everybody knows the amount of fiddling that has gone on. I need not enlarge on this but will do so if required. It will certainly NOT be acceptable to adjust the basic pay to compensate for this.

1.15.7 All parliamentary offices should be run by and staffed by the House of Commons authority. This would be to ensure that costs (rents and salaries) are in line with public expectation and also with each other. This control will obviate the present practice of employing relatives at exorbitant salaries (*whilst they watch blue movies*). Unfortunately, our members have proved that they cannot all be trusted.

1.15.8 Either by the means described earlier, or by paying hotel expenses (*Not the Ritz or Claridges*) on a limited basis so that hotel costs are kept to an acceptable minimum. Use the type of hotels used by private sector personnel. (It is a while since I did as I am retired so I cannot advise a sensible cost) Such prices to be established by survey and receipts are to be provided. There is a danger here of multiple blank receipts being requested to be filled in later by our honourable gentlemen. I do not know how we should deal with that unless of course the hotels in question are requested to provide consecutively numbered receipts so that practice would be discovered.

1.15.9 No discretion whatsoever. A second home must be deemed to be the one used for work when in Westminster and therefore, given that residents of London are not to be permitted second homes, the one nearest Westminster. MPs living within 60 minutes of London or a predetermined distance away should not be permitted a second home for the purposes of expenses. They should commute on public transport like the general public when we go to work. When members co-habit, only one can claim second home expenses. I hate to use co-habit but marriage is now scorned upon by the present government. The practice that has been called 'Flipping' is to be abolished. (Apparently the government has done this but for how long? This needs documenting in whatever document comes out of this exercise).

1.15.10 Yes but as in 1.15.7. All are to be on P.A.Y.E. and not self employed. To qualify as self-employed, one needs to be able to prove that they are mobile and can work for anybody at any time. Working for one MP fails this test.

- 1.15.11 Yes, but the difficulty of mileage allowance exists. See 1.14.
- 1.15.12 Place ALL detailed expenses claimed on internet as Tories. Once up and running the levels of disclosure provided can be discussed to see whether or not it is adequate. All such claims can be then vetted on a casual basis by anyone interested to ascertain that nothing has in fact been overlooked and to satisfy the general public that the present practices performed by the unscrupulous section of the *House* have at last been ended.
- 1.15.13 Where MPs have second jobs (I see it as acceptable, as some MPs have never worked in industry and as career politicians they need some degree of education about it) the hours required must not interfere with their parliamentary duties. MPs must be expected first and foremost to be available at all times for debates. I watch debates on TV and am amazed that 12 people debate an issue but 600 vote on the outcome. This is not democracy, it is voting as directed by the whip, i.e. a dictatorship. Should a job interfere with such duties the incumbent is to be told to resign from either that job or take the '*Chiltern Hundreds*'.
- 1.15.14 Yes but an annual limit of perhaps £5,000 should be set. MPs should NOT use public money to attempt to keep their jobs when an election is forthcoming. Informatory newsletters about progress within a constituency should be permitted. The present '*Communication Allowance*' should be scrapped.
- 1.16 There is in Westminster, a 'fine wines committee'. This should be abolished. There is no need for people to select high-priced wines to be sold at subsidised prices to their friends and colleagues. Wines should be selected by the bar manager and should be sold at full price. Meals etc. can be subsidised in the works canteen, but without having seen the present level I cannot comment.

The present proposals, put out as you call it, by a joint meeting of the failed *Speaker* and party leaders, has made a good start. Poring over the last four years of expenses claims and making any transgressors repay the money (as long as it based upon the *Seven Principles of Public Life* and not on whatever is deemed to be within the rules) is a good idea. Those who fail to repay must be suspended sine die. Members under suspension should not draw salary nor be permitted to claim for expenses. Removal of a party whip is irrelevant to lay people.

These temporary rule changes need to be considered and incorporated within the new rule book.

- 3.2 No unreasonable.
- 3.3.1 The proposed arrangement for the associating of MPs salaries to the group suggested would have the effect of overpaying them for the duties performed. MPs actually perform very little by way of duties (Unless a minister) and have an extravagant package of perks. The outrageous pension, redundancy (Settlement) terms and holiday entitlement would mean that by aligning them with such professionals who do not enjoy all these perks, would be to place them in a preferentially advantageous financial position.

MPs come from all walks of life and there is no guarantee that their educational background will enable them to perform a satisfactory job. MPs comprise from uneducated labourers to men of high educational attainment. The salary is presently sufficient for the degree of work performed given that some are incapable

of doing anything other than vote as instructed by their respective whips. Take into account the amount of decision making emanating from the European parliament and the work load decreases drastically.

- 3.4 I do not see a need for allowances, all that is needed is a clear set of rules to cover the claiming of expenses. The private sector does not (Unless the company is a privatised service which continues such a practice) have allowances. Just the recompense *for out-of-pocket expenditure*. The only exception to my knowledge is mileage allowance, that being to compensate for wear and tear to the motor car.
- 3.6 The practice of MPs deciding the nature and amount of expenses must cease. This is to be determined by the independent body following input all from contributors as discussed earlier. To make recommendations as to levels and have *'The House'* refuse to accept them is outrageous. MPs must never again set their own conditions. They have been proven unable to do so in a manner that is satisfactory to the public. They have shown that *'en mass'* they are corrupt, hence *The Speaker* acting as a shop steward, as well as spending £thousands on behalf of MPs in opposing the motion for disclosure. Incidentally, I did not notice any dissent!
- 3.7 I have covered that matter elsewhere in this document, including reservations about the degree of control over claims made by the *Fees Office*.
- 3.8 Quite correct and that shows that an awful lot of claims for *'moat cleaning'*, *'non-existent mortgages'*, *'hanging baskets'* and *'bath plugs'* etc should never have been made. It is strange that so many members made so many mistakes, how many other so called mistakes occurred in the past?
- 3.9 As above.
- 3.11 A complete waste of time. Temporary measures only should be introduced to bridge the gap between now and the independent body arriving at the final solution, but with annual review (detailed earlier) to keep a check on the wits of MPs attempting to circumvent them. We need to consider what course of action to take should our Honourable Members choose to reject the proposals.
- 3.12 Detailed receipts for all overnight stops need to be supplied. Second homes suggestions I have made earlier in this document. Having a maximum permitted allowance *WITHOUT RECEIPTS* leads to, and has led to members claiming the maximum amount possible. This needs to be stopped and why is an additional £25 necessary?
- 3.13 There are no possible circumstances under which MPs should be paid an allowance for attendance. Their salary is paid to cover going to and from work and the time between spent on business. This is another example of MPs deciding what is best for them and not for the taxpayer. If this were to be implemented there would be another rebellion against members and their uncalled for power to decide their incomes despite the will to do otherwise.

Additionally there would be a national clamour from union officials for their members to be paid additional sums for turning up for work. Again sauce for the goose.....

- 3.14 A second home must be deemed to be the one used for work when in Westminster and therefore, given that residents of London are not to be permitted second homes, the one nearest Westminster. MPs living within 60 minutes of London or a

predetermined distance away should not be permitted a second home for the purposes of expenses. This should put a stop to the practice of 'flipping'. They should commute on public transport like the general public when we go to work. When members co-habit, only one can claim second home expenses. I hate to use co-habit but marriage is now scorned upon by the present government. The interim practice of the cessation of claims for furniture should be established in the new rule book.

- 3.15 Mortgage interest, if paid should be limited to the price of a reasonable flat or apartment in London. It should NOT be used to enable an MP to make a profit by sale at any time. If money from the public purse is used for this, then the property should be returned to the public when the member no longer is a member. A deal can easily be reached for which no claims can be made by MPs like, 'better value for the taxpayer', for who is going to attempt to verify the statement? If it were the case, then the MP would benefit from the sale, presently that would upset the taxpayer, given the level of exploitation experienced. The basis of a rule is to be that whatever is thought to be the case, MPs must NOT benefit from expenses. Any costs associated with a second home like stamp duty, solicitors' fees and Estate Agents' charges are to be born by the purchaser without recourse to the public purse.
- 3.16 Covered above in 3.15. No MP should benefit financially from the sale of a second home. The mention of the possibility of recording a loss to be absorbed by MPs is a 'red herring'.
- 3.17 It is apparent that MPs have not absorbed any capital increase in the value of a home for sale. Hazel Blears has just volunteered to replace over £13,000 , only because the publication of her expenses in the *Daily Telegraph* brought the matter to light. That amount equates approximately to the Capital Gains Tax that she should have paid. What about the increase in capital value of the furnishings for which she claimed? What about the interest charges that always apply to members of the public with tax demands, even if the amount is extremely small and results from overseas investment dividends which may be charged at a different rate of exchange for say £/\$, which would be an inadvertent error?

No claim should be made for maintenance. Given that the details in 3.15 prefer a flat or apartment, maintenance should be carried out by the incumbent just as we would do in our home. If you are wearing out your second home, your family home is undergoing less wear.

- 3.18 Furnishings should be approved for a new MP but thereafter my suggestion as in above should apply. The interim rules introduced by the party leaders (No furnishings to be booked as an expense) should be incorporated in the new rule book.
- 3.19 A London weighting allowance is acceptable but annual increases to be decided by an independent body, not MPs. Public sector allowances appear to be more generous than those applied in the private sector, this should be addressed in order to satisfy the public.
- 3.20 There should be no choice available. If you live in London you commute and get paid the London weighting allowance. Remember everything should come under the KISS principle. Keep it simple stupid.

- 3.21 Please advise which circumstances make a need to work in two locations other than constituency and Westminster. I can think of none, but then I am a retired engineer, not a career politician with an eye to the main chance.
- 3.22 Why does an office in Westminster need to be manned when all correspondence can be directed via a constituency office. I can see no need for both to be staffed, but if I am wrong, then staff should be employed, maintained and paid as PAYE staff by Westminster staff controllers. Salaries, staffs etc. should be monitored by the independent body to obviate nepotism.
- 3.23 Most junior MPs do not need researchers as they have very little work to do. It seems normal to employ family members for this type of work, but in some cases no actual work is carried out. This section needs a separate review and the amount to be claimed of £104,000 is ludicrous in the extreme. If MPs cannot do the job they are paid for they should not stand as candidates. Presently we get very poor value for money from this allowance. If the expense remains then the maximum permitted amount needs reducing and a maximum salary permitted to be applied to such employees needs determining, again to avoid nepotism. The work is to be subject to PAYE conditions, rather than self-employment, but a contracted sum for specific work, if justified to be value for money and necessary work is satisfactory. The justification for the expense is necessary to ensure value for money from the public purse. MPs cannot be trusted to pay out such money without justification as has been proved in the case of Derek Conway.
- 3.24 The practice of employing relatives should be restricted to the provision of somebody performing secretarial work in a constituency. This equates to the practice in the private sector as far as self-employed persons are concerned; beyond that the accusation of nepotism could be levied. Should the person's salary be such that NI and income tax need to be deducted, the member needs to refer the salary to the independent body for approval of the amount to be paid and he/she also needs to assure the independent office that he/she will take care of the PAYE reporting personally.
- 3.25 The views of the European Parliament are to be ignored. Corruption is so rife that they need to start tightening rules up even more than we do. We need as I have suggested in 3.24 a compromise between the EU model and the Scottish one.
- 3.26 I agree, but my suggestions reduce the numbers employed quite drastically and with my proposal for monitoring, it should be satisfactory only if the MP is able to administer wages under PAYE conditions which would take up quite a lot of time, or if contracted out, a further expense for the taxpayer to pick up.
- 3.27 Please see sections 3.24, 3.25 & 3.26.
- 3.28 Office equipment is required only in approved offices, certainly not in the home. Some system of approval for Westminster offices needs to be created to ensure that prices paid are not exorbitant and to ensure conformity for operating on a *House* network. Claims for PCs, all-in-one printer/fax machines etc are fully justified, but my etc needs clarification from all input. If required I will provide information about equipment used in my home office (before I retired) that I claimed as office expenses against income tax. The list should be sufficient for an MP to perform his/her duties. However, it should be noted that in the private sector, such equipment was never paid for in full, but 25% was written down each financial year.

- 3.29 The amount is an allowance and as mentioned earlier, I am generally against allowances and favour expenses against charges levied. I am however, against travel expenses for employees unless it is essential business in the house which required the secretary to be present.
- 3.30 This is crazy. If a member chooses not to have a constituency office then no claims can be made. If the member chooses to use the main home as an office then that should be deemed to be satisfactory as long as claims for heating and lighting are in proportion to the volume of the house used. I.e 15% volume would permit 15% of the utility bills. This also applies to the self employed who work from home.
- 3.31 Procurement from central sources can be useful, but sometimes the department grows so large (by empire building which is so prevalent in the public sector) as to render the operation not cost effective. Central purchasing can be carried out by a small section somewhere doing similar work already, by naming approved suppliers from who MPs should order their equipment. Invoices, to be approved and paid for centrally.
- 3.32 The abatement limit for working from home is already an approved amount set by the Inland Revenue & Customs. There is no need for members to exceed this amount. All equipment to be purchased used has to be essential to the business under the Seven Principles of Public Life so what else is required?
- 3.33 It seems to me to be totally acceptable that members charge varying amounts for travel, given that some live in Scotland Ireland and Wales and some close to Westminster. The principal mentioned earlier that public transport should be the first option holds good as we are all being taxed *until the pips squeak* for running our cars because of supposedly green concerns. *Sauce for the goose* again. Receipts for travel should be approved before payment, but for those members who fail to take their seats, (Seinfein etc) no expenses should be approved whatsoever.
- 3.34 Families travel costs should not be classed as legitimate claims, it is not permissible in any other walk of life. MPs get paid sufficiently well to fund such travel should they consider it necessary. Taking ones family to London is not essential to the effective operation of a member of parliament. I can see no need for members' staff to travel on business 24 times each year. Surely when a business trip becomes necessary, travel expenses may be submitted to the independent authority for approval. If required, place the maximum at 4 times per year.
- 3.35 Public transport must be the first port of call, and no expenses should be approved if the travel card has not been used. Excessive use of non public transport should be raised by the Fees Office if they feel that it is being under-utilised. Members should not be free to make their own decisions in this regard. What reason could members have for failure to use the travel card when on public transport? Yes, you guessed it!
- 3.36 I can understand the sentiment and agree except for the matter that some members have much further to travel than is normal in the private sector. I have mentioned that those living within 60minutes travel time from Westminster should fund their own travel; such commuting distance is quite normal elsewhere.
- 3.37 This level of subsidy is not required today given the modifications made to the hours of work of members. How often do you see *the house* full? I would remove this expense altogether as members do not travel home on a Friday night, returning

Sunday evening in order to be ready for work on Monday morning! The practice generally seems to be to travel home Friday morning and back on Monday afternoon. Members living in London do not need this facility whatever is agreed in respect of others. In the private sector, employees travel Friday night and Sunday evening, but family are never permitted to stay with them away from home.

- 3.38 I have addressed the legitimate travel needs in other sections. In the private sector, when employees work away from home they generally travel Friday night and Sunday evening, but family are never permitted to either travel or to stay with them away from home. There is no need for different rules for MPs and if they were to travel with them, it would disrupt the members' plans for work on that particular day. Members need to be seen to be working under very similar conditions to their private sector electorate. All men are equal, but are some more equal than others?
- 3.40 The communications allowance was introduced by this government to enable their MPs to better advertise the party in order that they may better be able to retain their seats in parliament and therefore maintain a Labour government. I realise that party advertising is banned but all the other rules have been broken anyway, so why not this one was the call. I suggest this allowance should be abolished. All communications expenditure should be the subject of an expenses claim with a maximum of £2,500 annually. As you mention envelopes etc. are provided *pro bono* in *The House*.
- 3.41 As mentioned above the caveats are genuine.
- 3.42 Given in section 3.40.
- 3.43 The '*Re-settlement Grant*' should be renamed '*Redundancy payment*'. The amount of money awarded here for failed MP is astonishing. Redundancy payments in the private sector rarely reach the levels demonstrated here. I also believe that on top of the redundancy payment, a re-settlement allowance of somewhere around £42,000 is payable. Such practices are not available to members of the general public in the private sector and should not be available here either.

Furthermore, should a member decide to 'stand down, or be de-selected by a party for misdemeanour and therefore denied the chance to stand at the next election, that member should not be entitled to any redundancy payment, or '*Resettlement Grant*' as you call it. The member should be deemed to resign or be dismissed and therefore is not redundant.

- 3.44 As mentioned in 3.43, levels are extraordinary. When prospective members apply for the job of an MP they are totally aware of the terms of business, if they do not like it, they can de-select themselves. They are aware that they have been offered a 5 year contract, the renewal of which is subject to selection and election.

Should de-selection or election fail, then all such applicants, unless they are career politicians, should find no difficulty in finding employment. Many go into the job penniless but all finish up rich people with 2 houses or more. I am afraid I have no sympathy at all. How many ex politicians are presently claiming *Job Seekers allowance*? If you can't stand the heat, keep out of the kitchen.

- 3.45 No resettlement grant should be paid. Members made redundant should be awarded the same levels of payment as recommended by the Treasury for redundancy within the private sector.

- 3.46 I suggested earlier that there should not be any *flat rate allowance*, MPs and ministers are paid their salaries to go to work and to perform their duties. No extra money should be provided for doing that. Therefore the reference to *flat rate allowance* should be deleted.

Those members fortunate enough to be given temporary grace-and-favour homes should be excluded from claiming for any second home expenses should they ever be permitted. Should members refuse to take up the dwelling, then again second home expenses should be denied them as the place still has to be maintained by a staff. The playing of croquet in grace-and-favour homes is to be banned.

- 3.47 If ministers are required to spend more time in London than that should have no bearing on which is their main home. A main home is the family dwelling where they live when not in Westminster, the one designated before they became a minister. If furnishings and all other temporarily '*not permitted*' things remain items for which expenses cannot be claimed, then the roles of houses will not make any difference except in the case of mortgage interest claims. It is likely that mortgage interest, if a mortgage exists, will be higher at what was the main home originally. This idea then was evidently suggested to benefit ministers financially.

- 4.1 **All** claims for money to be extracted from the public purse must be accompanied by a receipt. Such actions as the one to make claims of up to £250 acceptable without a receipt are the kind of things which permit MPs to line their pockets at our expense. Even if they don't, the public will think they are. Given the introduction of such a limit, the thoughts are legitimate.

- 4.2 The MP's code of conduct is flawed. Members are only requested to operate within the rules. It would be preferable if they were to observe the *Seven Principles of Public Life* and in particular, the section on **SELFLESSNESS**.

We have seen time and time again that even claims for non-existent mortgages have been determined to be within the rules. The outcome of this exercise should ensure that there is a set of rules, acceptable to everybody, members and Joe Public, that is to be observed to the letter, whereby profiting by the claiming of expenses from the occupation of a member of parliament is not possible.

The members of staff of *The Fees Office*, (Department of Resources) are all to be trained in how correctly to apply receipts tendered by members of parliament. This is essential as it is evident that claims have been settled that should never have seen the light of day. This is also fraudulent as it has been suggested that the staff have been bullied into paying out such fraudulent claims, with words like '*Do not meddle or you will be looking for another job*'. In order to ensure that no more interference or bullying is experienced, this office needs supervision from another source. The staff must not be answerable to members of parliament or ministers, including *The Speaker*.

- 4.3 It is just as essential that the body to whom appeals against refusal to settle expense claims is made, is not answerable to MPs or ministers. Self regulation never works hence problems with bankers and the police force. Regulation of expenses is no different. MPs have had far too much control over such matters which has offered otherwise honest people too much temptation, to which unfortunately, some have yielded.

There seem to be far too many committees involved in these matters, Estimates Committee, Members Allowance Committee, House Authorities, if a sensible expenses claims system is set up they can all be abolished. All such matters will be dealt with by an independent body.

- 4.5 National Audit Office consists of whom? Are the employees civil servants? If so then they are hardly independent as they are answerable to somebody within the government. The new set up is welcomed I feel sure by myself and the electorate. A full-scope audit is required and I assume that my comments are a part of it. Whatever is agreed at the conclusion, I feel it is necessary that a totally independent (not answerable to any government source) organisation, with members of the public like me involved to make suggestions. At annual audits, (as I suggested earlier are essential, with sign offs to be applied to amendments to rules) the organisation complete with the public members should meet somewhere central to the country, to sort out any anomalies or situations where members have proved they can by-pass some of the rules. This should only take one day so expenses there can be kept to a minimum.

We need a system of electing or accepting volunteers from within the community, (retirees with experience should have both the time and knowledge to facilitate matters) to work alongside the independent organisation by e:mail or post and once a year to review the system and sign it off for another 12 months. I am volunteering myself should the idea be found to be favourable.

- 4.9 The system in place should suffice, (subject to annual review) provided MPs have no input into matters other than to face a challenge to their expenses claims. A new detailed rule book should make matters clearer and should result in sensible decisions, favourable to the public. If a member is to be disciplined for fraudulent claims, his/her party leader must have no input into the penalty to be imposed, otherwise political decisions may be made rather than legal ones. The public pleasure at seeing a system worthy of use would be ruined by the outcome being over-ruled by a party leader.

Presently penalties cannot include dismissal, which is not sensible or proportionate to possible breaches of rules. This needs amending to cover the offence of gross misconduct. I realise that in order for this to be possible and in order to standardise discipline, a *Disciplinary Procedure* needs to be drawn up, as in the private sector to cover penalties set against offences: the most severe penalty, for gross misconduct, being dismissal. Any other punishment deemed necessary by a party leader is to be additional and is not to replace a breach of rules or conduct as covered in the *Disciplinary Procedure*.

In addition a punishment which required solely the repayment of the money claimed would be insufficient to satisfy the public anger at the theft. Any such case of fraudulent claims from the public purse should be referred to the police for investigation.

- 4.11 The implications of security issues is a *red herring*. Most people are well aware of where their MP lives, if as it would seem this is the main spurious issue. The claims against public scrutiny are just another attempt to stop we, the public from knowing what they spend our money on. *Bath plugs, Floating islands, moat cleaning, hanging baskets, stamp duty, solicitors fees, court summonses and resultant fines* to name a few.

All expenses claims should be made available on the internet in a form that everybody can understand. The public will read them and educate themselves on what they want to know and about whom. All MPs claim for the purchase of computers so all will be able to do the necessary work, failing that, they all employ enough people to do it for them. Proportionality doesn't enter into it.

Section 5.1 to 5.5

As I mentioned earlier, I agree with the view that the holding of positions outside of parliament can be a good thing, given that career politicians have very little experience of the real world, hence some of the crass and unwanted regulations foisted upon some industries and some small businesses. However, I also stated that such work must not interfere with that member's representation of his constituents and his parliamentary duties.

Furthermore, the job taken must not give rise to a conflict of interest with either his constituency or parliamentary duties, or his private and public duties. As is already the case, all such interests must be recorded accurately in the Register of Members' Interests.

Should at any time the member's second job be seen to take up time or resources which reduce his/her effective time in the furtherance of parliamentary duties, he/she will be required to resign that position.

- 5.6 Given that we have heard of the *Fine Wines Committee*, it is evident that some members place drinking taxpayer funded wines ahead of parliamentary duties. This committee should be disbanded and the restaurant manager given the power to purchase moderately priced wines to be sold at subsidised prices only if the wine is to be consumed there and then and in the restaurant. Should requests be made for fine wines to be purchased they may be ordered in advance by the manager to be sold at full price. There is no reason why such a commodity should be served at public expense.

Food served in the restaurant may be subsidised to some small extent, as at some private sector company, but that practice is now mostly being abolished in favour of contracting out catering. Perhaps the time has come for the Westminster catering to be contracted out without a subsidy in favour of the gourmets being maintained.

All such prices and subsidies should be in the public domain.

ANNEX A 1 – 7.

I like your suggestions shown in here, particularly your understanding of the need for transparency and for determination of what is legitimate as far as expenses claimable are concerned and for how salaries should be determined. The public perception of the ways and means of Westminster are not ill-founded, as has been shown by the disclosures in the *Daily Telegraph* and the reaction to those disclosures by Members of Parliament. Item 6, falls in line with an earlier suggestion of mine regarding the KISS principle, I used it successfully during my time as a consultant engineer.

8. In order to decide a level of payment to cover 'a reasonable salary for the work they do' it has to be recognised that their work now is far less than it ever was, given the level of dictatorship from the E.U. More than half of things that affect our life emanate from the European Union. Furthermore, it has to be recognised that MPs

rather than ministers need no formal education: the place is open to all from labourers to captains of industry. The present salary level, whatever MPs claim, is adequate. Some of the members from the Labour party started life as shop stewards, graduating through local councils until arriving in *The House* as uneducated, street-wise representatives of the working class. Those who qualify with my description would not earn the kind of salary they receive in parliament, anywhere else in the country. All those would say that they do a good job and they probably do, thereby proving the salary to be adequate for the work performed.

Ministers (and shadow ministers) seem to be drawn from those who are better educated and who have formal qualifications. They draw a much higher salary commensurate with the extra responsibility that comes with their positions, whether or not they perform it well.

Sections 10 – 22.

I totally agree with sections 10 – 17. Section 14 may be opposed because it is difficult to keep track of old receipts. I am retired but still have to maintain my accounts for seven years, including all receipts, as a requirement of the Customs section of the Revenue & Customs for Vat purposes so there need be no distinction here.

ANNEX B

I agree with the amount of involvement as suggested. No Veto must be permitted at all if ever suggested by one or any of those representatives on the committee. If any votes are 'tied' these members votes will be discounted in arriving at a solution. There being three such members, this will achieve a result that can be seen to be independent.

PERSONAL ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Some members have 'stood-down', but naturally maintain their position and salary, which is wrong. This sort of thing angers the public as in the private sector they would have lost their jobs for gross misconduct.

There has to be better punishment, but political factors seem to enter into it. Hazel Blears 'flipped' her main and second homes to be able to profit from the sale without paying capital gains tax on a property improved by the public purse with some £20,000 of improvements booked to expenses (and more surprisingly accepted!!) She saved over £13,000 in capital gains tax but has since said she has repaid it. Her punishment was to be told by the 'Unelected Brown' '*Your behaviour is unacceptable*'. Members of the public who repay tax at a later date and tax which was not avoided but nevertheless due, also have to pay stringent interest penalties. This does not seem to apply to MPs.

Geoff Hoon (called Bufoon by his colleagues, so much for respect) and James Purnell, both ministers like Hazel Blears did exactly the same thing but have refused to repay the savings made in capital gains tax. What is the unelected Brown's punishment meted out to them? '*They have both done nothing wrong*'. Now we can all see that changes have to be made not just in the rules but also in the calibre of men and women who work in Westminster. Years ago, if an honourable member was discovered acting in that manner he would have resigned as per Mr. Gerald Profumo, who did so and spent the rest of his life doing charitable works to atone. Now the fraudulent fiddlers remain in office and face it out.

It should also be noted, that *'flipping'* could be done for another reason, unless I have misunderstood the situation. Should a main residence be determined to be within London, the London weighting allowance is applicable increasing salary by £7,500.

As well then as a new *'Coloured book'* we need a book of rules to cover members behaviour as MPs seem now to be as degenerate themselves as have those career benefit scroungers that the Labour government has created. This *'Code of Behaviour'* should be accompanied by a *'Disciplinary Code'* detailing the procedures to follow in the event of any misdemeanour. The ultimate sanction needs to be dismissal, nothing else will deter this nasty, seedy and grasping kind of person who has been attracted to the political career structure so much like the benefit career structure, but with more instant rewards available.

The career benefit scroungers are so dependent upon their hand-outs that they can and must vote Labour in order to ensure their career progression from *job-seeker*, via promotion to a claimer of *disability allowance* which will then not only provide them with a better standard of living but also a free car, taxed and insured to use on their way to playing football, or refereeing a match in between collecting their taxpayer funded cash via BACCS transfer.

Perhaps a total clear out of these grasping MPs including Hoons, Blears and Purnell with replacements who will command respect and observe the rules and act within the *Seven Principles of Public Life* is the only answer. If this is challenged by the usual statement *'dropping salaries or reducing expenses and allowances will lead to the wrong kind of MPs being elected to The House'*, well the answer is plain to see. At present and under the present rules, we still have the wrong kind of representatives there and the public struggles to see a decent leader with statesman like qualities amongst them.

In conclusion the role of our *Honourable Members* has to be seen by those elected as a public service and not as the ruling classes. The manner in which public funds have been appropriated for expenses claims and also the topping up of holes in pension funds without recourse to those who elected them has been breathtaking. When underfunding becomes apparent in pension funds, both the employer and the employee need to contribute a little more. Where MPs are concerned it is always the employer, the taxpayer who foots the bill.

MPs have to accept this role and need to understand that nothing less will give them the kudos and respect that they feel should go with the position. They are no better than we are, no better educated or qualified to perform the tasks at hand, they have just applied for a different job than we have. We all need to do what we are best at and then work as a team. Some prefer wealth creation for the country and some prefer public service: what this government has been seen to create, is a batch of wealth creators and a set of avaricious masters who love to spend that wealth firstly for themselves and what is left over, can be utilised for the benefit career members, who can keep them in their positions. For a public punishment before any other resultant settlement, they should all be placed in the pool with the same conditions bestowed upon them as Tantallus was forced to accept.

Other political parties have also jumped on the band-wagon (It is not restricted to the government, although in the position they are, they have overseen this seedy squalor without any attempt whatsoever to stop it) as can be seen by the daily exclusives, but fortunately we do have some members who perform a vital, honest and trustworthy role without maximising their expenses. I do hope that their names will be published for their honesty amidst the temptation that appears to have been placed before them. It is grossly

unfair that such people should become tarred with the same brush as those whimpering cheats we see daily on television, trying in vain to justify the unjustifiable.

Finally, I am greatly concerned, that members of the general public are not aware of the existence of this document, nor are they aware that it would appear their comments are being solicited. Because of this lack of public comment, I feel sure that you will have many submissions from MPs, but they will be sent under different signatories and you will need to be aware of this. I guess such spurious letters could easily be spotted by a careful eye and I hope that that will be the case. Taking the few in number general public's responses, should they have been received, will be more likely to meet with general approval throughout the country and should be given a greater weighting when arriving at a conclusion.

If as it would seem a quick decision is necessary, then that gives me cause for concern as to why this document and the public opinions being sought have not been widely advertised in order to get the required responses. Presently it appears that the majority of contributors will be from the public sector and in particular those who work within the parliamentary sphere of activity which would defeat the object of the exercise. The gulf between the private and public sectors, in terms of both terms and conditions of employment and expenses/allowances available, has widened disproportionately in favour of the public sector since Labour took office. This needs to be addressed immediately as another factor in giving respect, credence and confidence to the taxpaying public, in respect of our political system.

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Wirral
