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Newmarket

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Sir Christopher Kelly
Committee on Standards in Public Life
35 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BQ

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Dear Sir Christopher

About a fortnight ago I stepped down as Independent Chairman of the Standards Committee at Forest Heath District Council. I had been a member of the Standards Committee for 7 years and seen a great many changes. Government regulations have been forced on local government to improve standards, and ethical governance has become the 'buzz' phrase.

I am now so frustrated over the revelations about MP's expenses that I felt I had to write to you. Locally elected councillors have a difficult enough job, with those who shout loudest in the community not prepared to stand for election. The whole saga of MP's expenses makes the public even more sceptical about any form of government.

My husband and I were at the Annual Town Meeting of Newmarket Town Council yesterday evening. The attendance was good, but a loud group within the community dominated the meeting, and it soon became obvious there is no understanding of the responsibilities of the Town Council, District Council and County Council. However, this group felt they had the right to lambaste the elected members of the Town Council and the officers of the District Council.

Regarding MP's expenses, my suggestion is that no MP should own a second home. I have heard many comments about this, and, along with us ordinary folk who work away from home, renting a property is the answer. Rent to a certain limit should be reimbursed, along with council tax and a proportion of utility bills, but certainly no food costs.

I believe an independent body looking at MP's expenses is an excellent idea, but this should be truly independent. With so many independent members on Standards Committees these days, taking a group of people from that group would be a good start. There is an excellent national association of Independent Members (AIMSce), the Chairman of which I am sure would be happy to give advice.

I think we are all tired of hearing 'the claim was within the rules', and at least MP's accept that the rules have to change. Please make sure this is done with true independence.

Many thanks.

Yours sincerely

Mrs K Finney