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The Committee has encouraged members of the public to state their concerns on the MPs expenses issue. I submit mine below.

Role of the press:

Role of government:

Use of language in relation to trust:

I am dismayed and angered and want a fundamental change in how politics is done in our democracy. Unfortunately, given the way our politicians frequently use and misuse the English language, we have reached a stage where nobody can believe a word an MP says unless that person has reason not to disbelieve it. Regrettably in these circumstances, phrases such as "independent monitoring" fall to the same lack of trust. I can understand people wanting to cover their backs if only to hide their lack of spine but there is nothing so worthy as the honesty of plain speaking. Civilisation is based upon it.

Role of the general public:

I am encouraged that there has been an outcry from the general public. I have always been impressed and thankful on those occasions when I have served on juries, at just how sensible and thorough a random group of people is when given a serious responsibility. Those salutary experiences showing the capacity of ordinary members of the general public to show understanding and judgement, lead me to believe that openness with the general public is key to enforcing standards in public life and that the opposite is true – hiding from the public any aspect of the way our political system works can only create the conditions for and encourage the growth of sleaze or downright corruption.

Far greater responsibility needs to be given to the general public to oversee its representatives and the first necessary step is to enable access by the general public to all aspects of political processes. It is now shown to be intolerable that parliament should be sheltered from such inspection. Full details of expenses claims, (receipts and supporting argument), should be available online within a couple of months of their being paid or refused.

It is my firm belief that the general public wants and needs its representatives and that they should truly represent their constituents interests. Removing the expenses and allowances problem would be of great assistance in delivering democracy.

Changes to the rules:

I believe the new rules for expenses and allowances should follow the spirit of the Seven Principles of Public Life and that no expenses or allowances should be available to MPs where there is the possibility of "interpretation" such that the system can be undermined by a generous interpretation of the rules. Far better that the rules are closely drawn and watertight in the hope and expectation that the system can be trusted not to offer the possibility of enrichment to MPs at the taxpayer's expense.

Pay MPs necessary expenses by all means, for they should not be expected to fund their own researchers and secretarial support or their necessary travel on the business of being an MP. However, I understand MPs may claim first class rail travel. Why? They are paid by taxpayers to look after the general public's interests. Let them travel like the majority, standing in overcrowded trains if necessary, and get a reality check on what they are achieving by their actions in parliament. I would suggest this be an additional principle for the conduct of MPs – that they experience, as do members of the general public, the fall out from government.

However, subsistence and communications are much more difficult areas and I favour a tight approach to criteria on these issues and less generous maximum payments than under the present system. I see no reason, for instance, why I, as a taxpayer, should contribute in addition to the MP's salary, his or her daily bread. A subsidised canteen in parliament, very possibly, but no more than that.

Who makes the rules?

MPs should not determine the rules themselves, though I agree with the government's proposal that the constituency home should be designated the main home in all cases, including Ministers if, in future, allowances of any sort are to be permitted for second homes.

Better, however, that MPs be offered reasonably comfortable accommodation owned by the state and that we do not have the complexity and inevitable problems that arise from an MP's ownership of a second home part-funded by the taxpayer and from which the MP makes a profit. This should be halted forthwith. The variables involved in assessing expenses for second homes under the present system open the system to abuse.

The expense of an MP's second home should be regarded as wholly related to the needs of the MP as a working Member of Parliament. A cap should be placed on the value of a second home if it is to be wholly maintained by the taxpayer, although the MP may wish to spend more and should not be prevented from so doing at his or her own expense.

Furnishings and fittings should be excluded from a maintenance budget. A modest setting-up allowance should be available to MPs when taking a second home if this system is allowed to persist. The allowance should be payable only when supported by receipts.

The system must ensure that an MP does not gain financially from the sale of the second home *whatever its value*. In other words, if an MP wished to spend on the purchase of a second home twice the amount supported by the taxpayer for a second home, when the second home is disposed of *none* of the profit would accrue to the MP.

My preference is for a system whereby an MP living sufficiently far from the House of Commons – and much further away than presently considered appropriate – may choose a pied à terre either in London or the constituency. This would belong to the country, not to the MP, and would be available during the time parliament is in session. At other times the accommodation could be rented out to the MP or to others – very comparably with some student accommodation.

MPs and tax:

MPs should be taxed as other persons domiciled in the UK.

MPs' staff:

MPs should not employ family members unless the post has been advertised, shortlisted and interviewed by a panel to ensure the job goes to the best candidate. In principle, I think it is undesirable for an MP to employ a family member for the usual reasons of nepotism. I believe there will always be suitably qualified applicants whose appointment will give an MP a better standing in the community than making it a family affair. Family members would, of course, continue to support MPs and be valuable to MPs in the discharge of their duties but in unpaid capacities. I think it is inappropriate for an MP to run an office from home. Constituents should not feel they are encroaching on a family when they wish to consult their MP. An MP should run a high street surgery paid for, if necessary, by the state.

MPs' pensions etc.:

On an MP's leaving parliament, I am content that an MP should receive the type of pension package that obtains today, with the exception of MPs who have outside employment during their time in Parliament. Those MPs should have their package reduced by at least the amount of their other earnings.

MPs clocking in:

I am wholly opposed to a flat rate attendance allowance for MPs and for Members of the House of Lords. However, there should be oversight of how much time MPs spend in parliament and their salaries should be reduced on a sliding scale for failure to attend.

Ministers:

Ministers should be reimbursed for expenses in the same way as MPs. Their higher salaries deal with any higher expenditure they may incur.

Arrangements for Northern Ireland:

Northern Ireland MPs are in no different a position from those from Scotland or elsewhere. No special expenses are appropriate. And see MPs clocking in, above.

Paragraph 4.9. of the Committee's Issues and Questions paper states, "The Committee is keen to hear views on how the arrangements for administering and enforcing the system of support and expenses might be strengthened":

I suggest two means by which enforcement may be effective: by ensuring the rules are wholly within spirit of the Seven Principles, and that they are unambiguous and inescapable, even if this means MPs may suffer less support for what might be argued as genuine costs in performing their duties to their constituents; secondly, by ensuring all details of MPs claims are swiftly and comprehensively available online to constituents, a fail safe device as MPs must put themselves up for re-election. It should not be that MPs are free to redact any personal information they choose. Receipts should be available to the public unaltered. MPs arguments put to those determining the reimbursements should be available to the public unaltered. Unfortunately, the behaviour of many MPs has made these requirements necessary. All information submitted by MPs for consideration by those determining whether to make a reimbursement should be made publicly available. MPs have made themselves unworthy of trust and I am more than sceptical about giving MPs latitude.

I am in favour of independent bodies resolving MPs' and Ministers' pay and dealing with the expenses they incur. However, "independent" is an abused and suspect term and I believe that the general public requires a system that allows verification of such independent bodies' activities. Transparency here, also, is of the greatest importance in re-establishing some of the trust MPs have thrown away.

In respect of outside interests, outside work above a certain level, such as 5 hours per week, should impact negatively on MPs' pay and conditions. Many people are employed part time and receive pay and pension entitlement pro rata. MPs' outside interests should be declared and made available online in sufficient detail for them to be assessed for openness and accuracy.

Miscellaneous support should be fully revealed to the general public.

I have a few further comments that probably fall outside the remit of the Committee. However, I wish to state them.

Given the sorry state of party control over MPs in relation to expenses and a perception that many MPs are in thrall to the prime minister of the day and to his or her patronage, I am opposed to proportional representation. This objection to PR outweighs for me the benefits of PR. In the light of what has been going on in recent years I have a horror of yet greater party control and of party lists of preferred potential MPs to be called to parliament following an election. I value above all things my knowledge that it is a particular MP chosen by the voters in my constituency who will be returned to parliament for my constituency. I do not wish to vote for a pecking order of men and women the party of my choice may have drawn up. PR flies against the kind of personal accountability to voters that is so needed at present and in the future.

I am unhappy that the legislature has ceded so much to the executive, and that the executive has neutered local councils in their responsibilities – so making more work

of a local nature when MPs should be focused on legislation and national matters. This is a criticism of MPs who seem to enter parliament to sustain a career rather than for the general good, and the general public has lost interest in politics as a result. The legislature needs greater control over the government of the day to save the precious system of democracy.

I support the present House of Lords, for all its failings, because it has often in recent times shown more guts and quality of debate than the Members of the House of Commons and has acted as a brake on the executive where that task should have fallen to MPs. The quality of MPs will not improved by making their conditions more financially rewarding – quite the opposite, I suspect.

It seems to me that MPs pay is about right and should not be increased to offset any loss some Members may suffer as a result of new rules on expenses. There are other, honourable MPs who will not suffer financial loss from a change in the rules. Let us honour them.

Yours faithfully,

R. W. Hull

1st June 2009