

Dear Sir Christopher,

I was grateful for the invitation to make a submission to your review of MPs' expenses.

The starting position must be a system that is fully transparent, externally audited and regulated, that costs less than the current one and can command the confidence of the public.

I would not be in favour of consolidating all or most of the current ACA into salary. The system should reflect the genuinely different costs involved in representing different constituencies. The system should also be one that reimburses MPs for costs actually incurred to reflect the different circumstances of MPs when they are elected to the Commons and during their service.

One of the notable things about the current furore is that the public appear to be much more exercised by claims for food, furniture, fittings and maintenance than they are for rent or mortgage interest. The consequence of that is that MPs who have claimed at or near the maximum ACA for mortgage interest or rent have not been subject to the same level of criticism as those who have claimed less but have included the sort of items the public would expect people to pay for out of their own salaries. So, I would favour ACA being restricted to rent, mortgage interest and utilities etc with a cap significantly lower than the current level, leaving MPs to pay for other items out of their own pockets.

I do not think it would be equitable to force all MPs or Ministers to claim for costs in London or their constituency. Again, that would not reflect the differing circumstances of MPs when they are elected nor changes to their circumstances during their service. It would also be difficult to restrict claims to rent rather than mortgage interest as MPs have already entered into mortgage arrangements, which, as your consultation paper acknowledges, can also offer better value for the taxpayer.

In summary, I would like to see a simplified, transparent and cheaper system, regulated and audited externally.

Yours sincerely,

Ben

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