

> Dear Sir
>
>I find it difficult to understand that MPs have had no understanding
of
>what is a reasonable expense when spending our tax payers money.
To
>me it is simple, just look at the rules parliament has made for the
>public when they have needed a second home either temporarily or
>permanently or goods to furnish a home , then apply the same rules
to
>MPs.
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>The rules I am talking about are of course those rules found in the
>welfare benefits system.
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>If a person who has one home and needs help towards the costs of a
>second home, they must apply for income support mortgage interest
>payments or housing benefits. Mortgage interest is limited to loans
>below £100,000 and is paid at a standardised interest rate, it is
means
>tested of course. Housing benefit is similarly means tested. If a
>person needs to travel to work or incur accommodation costs in doing
a
>job away from his normal workplace then there is no compensation via
>the tax credits system or by way of tax allowances for this
expenditure
>so why should MPs be treated any differently. A person fleeing
domestic
>violence who cannot stay in their own home because it is unsafe will
>have to pay their usual housing costs plus additional housing costs
of
>their temporary accommodation out of their own pockets and will only
>receive help from the benefit system if they are on low income - ie
>subject to a means test. Why can't MPs accept that their wages are
>sufficient to pay these expenses and not claim any extras at all. A
>person who wants to claim benefits for a 2nd home rarely receives
>payments for more than 52 weeks, they are expected to relocate and
not
>keep on running two homes. If somebody is homeless and needs
emergency
>overnight accommodation and applies to their local authority for
help
>it will be provided on a night by night basis for which the homeless
>person must reimburse the full cost, subject to any housing benefits
>received. The same should apply to MPs. They should not be allowed a
>second home of any sort either rented or bought but should make
>arrangements on a night by night basis the cost of which should be
>assessed by the rent officer for their area- in fact no new rules
are
>needed - just look at the local housing allowance rates which are
>published on the rent service website, these are based on tenancies
>which are usually for a minimum of 6 months so perhaps a multiplier
>could be applied to reflect the fact that night by night
accommodation
>will be more expensive.
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>If a person who is homeless or loses all their belongings through
>fire/flood or other disaster and has insufficient means to replace
them
>because, for example they are uninsured, they will need to apply to
the
>Social fund for help and may apply for a community care grant. The
>maximum CCG paid for any one claim in 2007-8 was £5,081.46 and I
would
>anticipate that this was for a whole household's furnishings. If MPs
>want to know what is a reasonable expenditure or which goods are
deemed
>as essential then they should look at some of the decisions made by
the
>social fund for members of the public. They would find that plasma
>screen TVs, garden maintenance and other high value electrical items
>would not be funded. what happens to the goods paid for by the tax
>payer? Once the MP no longer needs them why are they allowed to keep
>them? Why are they not public property and could be used by the next
MP
>needing the same item? Do these high value TVs not last long enough
for
>more than one person to have the benefit of them?
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>In many jobs uniforms are returned, cleaned and then made available
to
>the next employee of the right size. I'm sure these goods could be
>returned, stored and reissued and if an MP does not handle the items
>carefully they should be billed for any damage not deemed fair wear
and
>tear. I bet if somebody repeatedly claimed to the social fund for a
>damaged toilet their treatment of it would be questioned.
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>If anybody not on means tested benefits applies for a community care
>grant they will be refused and may be offered a social fund loan
>instead- which needs to be repaid - MPs should not receive any
benefit
>towards personal goods unless their income falls so low that they
need
>it topped up by Working Tax credit because of their personal and
family
>circumstances, then any payment should be by way of loan to be
repaid
>and subject to the same test of reasonableness and necessity as
applied
>to members of the public in similar circumstances.
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>MPs should only be allowed to claim the costs of actually doing
their
>job, eg, replies to constituents, and should not be able to claim
the
>costs of self promotion and other propaganda for their party. MPs
>should not be allowed to employ family members unless those
members
>have succeeded in getting the job through a widely advertised and
fair
>selection process, they should declare the relationship and be

subject

>to extra scrutiny.

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>MPs who breach the rules should go through the same criminal
>investigation process that claimants who are accused of welfare
benefit

>fraud are subject to. I'm sure that many a shoplifter has genuinely
>>walked out of a shop and forgotten to pay for very low value items
but

>has been prosecuted and a court has decided otherwise and they have
a

>criminal record to show for it - let the criminal justice system
decide

>whether these MPs genuinely forgot they were claiming for mortgages

>which had been paid off etc or whether they should be prosecuted for

>the courts to decide the issue.

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>Lunch expenses of up to £5 should not need receipt, that will just
keep

>more people in jobs for which we are paying for- every other claimable

>expense should need a receipt. Travel costs should be

limited

>to public transport except where it is unavailable or unreasonable

>practicable, mileage allowances should not increase with size of car

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>this encourages pollution. Car sharing should be encouraged with
costs

>shared. Alcohol should never be a claimable beverage.

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>yours faithfully

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>P Gravell (ms)

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