

## **To The Committee on Standards in Public Life**

My name is M Grant.

Before going on detail my views I want to briefly tell you a little about myself in the belief that this will provide a context for them.

I am a full-time carer looking after an older person with vascular dementia and Alzheimer's. The person I care for is profoundly disabled, doubly incontinent, and displays challenging and at times violent behaviour. Together with my wife we provide care 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and have been doing so for over three years.

Why did we give up career, salary and status? Because like many others we realised it was the right thing to do.

When I first took on the role our savings were such that we only qualified for a carers allowance of £50 per week. When our savings ran out we had to apply for Income Support. The process was degrading, humiliating and intrusive. Furthermore, my entitlement was reduced by £30 a week because I was in receipt of the carers allowance. I was even required to provide details of my 16-year-old daughter's bank account. When the caring is over I will return to career and life will go on. I seek no special recognition for doing what strikes me as so obviously right, but am infuriated by the extreme difference between the expectations Parliament has placed on me, and those that it applies to itself.

## **A Personal Submission in Respect of the Review Of MPs' Expenses**

Unfortunately I don't have the time to address every issue in detail and therefore restrict myself to the following points:

1. I recognise that there is a need for MPs' to be properly funded in carrying out their public duty. This should include the costs of maintaining and running a constituency office, the cost of travelling to and from Parliament and over night accommodation when that is necessary.
2. The supremacy of Parliament means that MP's must be the final determinants of their terms and conditions. My expectation is that openness and transparency will provide sufficient scrutiny.
3. The payment of mortgage interest to fund second homes is completely unacceptable and undermines the principle of selflessness. While everyone wants cost effectiveness, financial probity is more important. Moreover, mortgage interest is only cheaper when rates are low. Given the scale of recent fiscal stimuli interest rates are likely to rise sharply in the medium term.
4. The rules for people claiming Job Seekers Allowance, and ultimately determined by Parliament requires claimants to accept work within one and a half hours travelling time from their home. I think most people would agree that to exempt MPs' from the onerous standards imposed on their constituents is wrong. Against this background it would be completely wrong for anyone representing a constituency within an hours travelling time of Westminster to qualify for a second home allowance.

Some argue that Parliament sitting until 10:00pm is a justification. However, I have family working in the catering trade and living in Hertfordshire who often don't finish work until very late. They cannot stay overnight and claim the cost.

Such is the reality of life. Another reason why this argument should be rejected is because the hours worked are determined by MPs' themselves, principally to allow them to carry on second jobs. Finally on this point, it is generally accepted that a change in hours would attract more women into Parliament.

5. Other than in exceptional circumstances, for example a married couple, a MPs' first home should be the one in their constituency.
6. In the medium to long term the state should provide suitable accommodation for those MPs' living more than an hours travelling time from Westminster. In the short term it is appropriate to fund furnished rented accommodation, or overnight hotel accommodation. In the case of rented property claims should be limited to the cost of rent capped in line with the present level of £1250/month, service charges, utility bills, and council tax.
7. There is particular problem with MPs' employing members of their family. As an observer of Parliament one of the most striking things is how unrepresentative it is. Women and Black people are only noticeable by their absence. If MPs' are mainly white and are allowed to employ their spouses, those jobs will only be available to white people. I don't support banning the practice but it seems essential that any post funded from the public purse should be properly advertised, and open to free and fair competition.
8. Receipts should be provided for all expenses, and all expenses should be published without constituents having to apply under FOI
9. On the one hand the public is told how hard MPs' work, but at the same time more than half have another job.

Representing their constituents should be a full time job, and an MP should have no other. The idea that MPs' can only know what is going on outside Parliament by having a second job is ridiculous. With a bit more time they could ask their constituents!

10. I am opposed to funding for Newsletters. Of course I want to know what my MP is up to, but I get a regular newsletter that tells me little and actually looks more

like a bit of free publicity. I'd rather see the money used to allow MPs' to employ a welfare/advocacy worker in the constituency.

11. I would favour an increase in funding for a properly staffed constituency office for all MPs'. My MP is available one morning every fortnight. There is no constituency office but he claims office expenses. How does that work?