



Unlock Democracy's Evidence to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's Review of MPs Expenses

About Us

Unlock Democracy (incorporating Charter 88) is the UK's leading campaign for democracy, rights and freedoms. A grassroots movement, we are owned and run by our members. In particular, we campaign for fair, open and honest elections, stronger parliament and accountable government, and a written constitution. We want to bring power closer to the people and create a culture of informed political interest and responsibility. For more information please see www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk

Executive Summary

Unlock Democracy believes that appropriate levels of remuneration and expenses for MPs are essential if we are to have a Parliament that properly serves the people of the United Kingdom.

Trust in politics and Parliament has been undermined by the recent expenses scandals and the system of expenses is in urgent need of reform. However this should also be seen in the wider context of the funding of political parties and in particular, the need for the introduction of caps on donations to political parties to end the perception that politics can be bought. Addressing the issues of expenses in isolation will not restore the public's faith in the political system.

Unlock Democracy believes that any new system of expenses should be based on three key principles:

- that the system should be open and transparent;
- that MPs should not be able to personally profit from the system; and
- that the system should be as simple and easy to understand as possible.

Unlock Democracy proposes that where second homes are necessary they should be provided by Parliament with all monies being paid directly to landlords or mortgage companies without being given to MPs.

It is essential that MPs are funded to travel between Westminster and their constituencies but this should be used to incentivise the use of public transport where possible.

While MPs should be able to decide both who to employ and how to structure their offices, the recruitment process should be run centrally by Parliament with the MP taking on a line managerial role rather than being the employer.

Unlock Democracy believes that MPs should be able to employ family members but that this should be declared and they should have a clear person specification and job description against which performance can be monitored.

It is inappropriate that MPs should vote on their own salaries, rather recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Board should be made binding. Also Unlock Democracy believed that MPs' pay scales should be restructured to reflect the value of select committee work, thereby offering an alternative career path to becoming a minister.

Unlock Democracy recognises the value that outside interests can bring to an MP's work in Parliament and that we would not want to discourage candidates with a professional background from standing for election. However the public needs to be reassured that MPs are serving their constituents and not their business interests so we recommend that there should be further reforms to the Register of Members Interests and that the time spent on outside interests should be limited to ten days a year.

Unlock Democracy proposes that the administration of the expenses system should remain within Parliament but that it should be reformed to administer, supervise and enforce the rules, with a view to ensuring propriety. The Fees office should be seen as the finance office of the House of Commons by MPs and not as a body which advises MPs on how to maximise claims. The body should be properly audited every year and be subject to random inspections like any other company.

Introduction

Unlock Democracy has long campaigned for reform of MPs expenses and the funding of political parties. We believe it is essential that Parliament broadly reflects the population it represents and that a career in politics is open to people from a wide variety of backgrounds. For this to be possible MPs must be appropriately remunerated and be able to claim reasonable expenses.

However expenses should not be used as a means of topping up salaries or funding a particular lifestyle. In fact, we believe that using the word expenses is misleading. In most walks of life expenses refer to a business meal or travel costs, not employing staff and providing accommodation. While it is right that MPs should receive funding for both of these, calling them expenses only adds to the perception that the claims are unreasonable and excessive. Whilst this has certainly been the case in some instances it is important to remember that the majority of MPs have not abused the system

Unlock Democracy proposes that three principles should underpin any reform of MPs expenses:

1. The system should be open and transparent

MPs should be accountable to their electorate but for this to be possible it has to be a matter of public knowledge what MPs have claimed for. Unlock Democracy supports full publications of all MPs expenses with receipts. Whilst we recognise that there may be some personal details, particularly payment or bank details that should not be published, we do not see this as a bar to full transparency. We believe that Parliament's attempts to block the publication of expenses has been extremely damaging to Parliament's reputation and to the public's faith in democracy in the UK.

Transparency is also the best way for MPs to guard against rumour and insinuation. If all claims and receipts are already in the public domain then there can be no reason to assume all MPs are corrupt. Sunlight is the best disinfectant.

The publication of elected representatives' expenses with receipts is already common practice in many legislatures including the Scottish Parliament. We see no reason why this could not be introduced in Westminster.

2. MPs should not be able to make a profit from any reformed expenses system

Unlock Democracy believes it is necessary for the state to provide accommodation for MPs and to ensure that expenses are paid at a level that enables people from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds to consider standing for Parliament. However this does not mean that MPs should be able to personally gain from the expenses system.

Possibly the most damaging aspect of the recent scandal is the sense that MPs have been able to exploit the property market, that the taxpayer funds second homes but then the individual makes a profit when the home is sold. This is plainly wrong. It must be explicit in any new expenses system that funding is available to allow MPs to fulfil their role and to ensure that they are not financially penalised for choosing a career in politics. It is not a means of topping up salaries and making personal gain.

3. The system should be as simple and easy to understand as possible for both MPs and ordinary members of the public

As outlined in point one, Unlock Democracy thinks it is important that voters can hold their MPs to account for their use of expenses and for this to be possible it has to be clear what it is permissible to claim for and who has claimed what. While there have undoubtedly been examples of MPs abusing the present system, there also seems to have been confusion about what the expenses system was for and what is was appropriate to claim for.

On a practical note we also believe that the simpler the system the easier it will be to administer and the less likely that people will be able to find loopholes to exploit. The danger with complex systems, such as the one that has existed in Parliament is that it is possible to find ways of abusing the system, such as flipping homes or setting up blind trusts that do not technically break the rules. The best way of counter-acting this is full transparency and having a simple system based on clear principles that the public can understand and if necessary quiz their MP about.

We have structured our evidence to cover the six areas we believe an expense system should cover. These are:

- Housing / Accommodation
- Staffing
- Travel
- Communications Allowance
- Pay and terms and conditions
- Administration of the expenses system

We believe this covers all the issues raised in the Issues and Questions paper.

Unlock Democracy believes that if we as a country want a democratic parliamentary system of Government, that is open to all rather than just a wealthy elite, we have to be prepared to pay for it. While we believe that, over time, our proposals would save the public money, this was not our primary concern when analysing what is wrong with the current system.

In our proposals for reform we do not single out individual cases, rather we examine where we would begin if we were creating an expenses system from scratch. We propose that these reforms are implemented as soon as possible. For those MPs who have, wrongly or excessively, claimed expenses under the old system, we welcome cross-party moves to ensure repayment of monies claimed. We also strongly recommend that any profits made from the subsequent selling of second homes bought or part funded with taxpayers money be repaid to the Fees Office.

Housing

Unlock Democracy recognises that MPs, particularly those with constituencies outside London, need to be provided with accommodation in order to carry out their parliamentary duties.

What has enraged the public is that MPs have been able to personally gain from the expenses system. There has been insufficient oversight of what claims were being made and little regard seems to have been paid to ensuring the taxpayer got value for money.

Unlock Democracy proposes that all MPs who wish to claim expenses for accommodation must formally satisfy the Fees Office that the second home or other accommodation is necessary for them to fulfil their Parliamentary duties.

There could be a variety of reasons why the accommodation is necessary, the most obvious being that the constituency is a long way from London and it would not be possible to commute on a daily basis, but there may well be others to do with an individual MP's family circumstances or caring responsibilities. Rather than trying to tightly define each and every circumstance where a second home may be necessary, or creating arbitrary rules about distance from Westminster which fail to take accounts of transport issues, we believe it should be up to voters to decide if a claim for a second home is appropriate. The MP should have to explain to the Fees Office why the claim was necessary and then the fact that the claim had been made would be a matter of public record. If voters felt it was unreasonable they would be able to raise this with the MP concerned.

Another advantage of this system would be that MPs would need to think through why they need a second home rather than simply assuming it was a perk that went with the job. It would reinforce the fact that they are using taxpayers money and that this has to be properly accounted for.

Under our proposals, an MP would not be eligible to claim for a second home if they or any member of their immediate family already had a property in London, even if it was rented out.

As outlined above Unlock Democracy does not believe that MPs should not be able to make a profit from any expenses system, if an MP already owns a suitable property, then under our system, they should use that instead of claiming for accommodation. This would for example protect against a candidate deliberately selling part of a property portfolio before becoming a Member of Parliament, so that they could make a profit before claiming the cost of a tax-payer

funded second home for the duration of their term of office. MPs making a claim for a second home would have to sign a declaration to this effect, it is not expected that the Fees Office would have search land registry records or trace MPs family members.

Another way of resolving the second homes issue would be for Parliament to build accommodation for MPs, as is the case in Australia and is currently happening in Japan. We do not believe this is a suitable option for the UK Parliament. Not only are there limited options for development in central London, but we think this would unduly limit the housing options for MPs and may deter those with young families or caring responsibilities from standing for Parliament.

If MPs require a home in London upon becoming an MP we believe they should be offered two options by the Fees Office:

1. We propose that they either rent a place of their own choosing or
2. That MPs live in a property owned by Parliament under a 100% mortgage

As each MP's personal circumstances are different, MPs should, within reason, be able to live in a London home of their own choosing. The needs of a bachelor MP would vary vastly from the needs of a single mother or father of four, for example. We would not want to place restriction on the type of housing that could be claimed for that might prevent a candidate from a particular background, with particular accessibility needs or with caring responsibilities from undertaking the onerous path to becoming an MP¹. It should not be forgotten that MPs often work long, unsociable hours. To help ensure that we do not alienate candidates, as part of an ongoing aim to ensure that parliament is as representative and diverse as possible, we want to ensure that any reforms are as fair and practicable as possible, taking into account the day to day demands on MPs and their families.

Under our system, an MP would meet with the Fees Office to discuss and agree their housing requirements and be given the option of a property managed by the parliamentary estate or a privately rented property. If they chose to opt for the former suitable properties and options would be then presented to MPs. If the MP preferred to rent they would be responsible for finding the property. MPs would be encouraged, but not forced, to flat share where appropriate.

If the property was bought, it would be owned by the House of Commons, and bought on a 100% mortgage. In line with our second principle, that MPs should not be able to make a profit from any expenses system, all monies (for rent or mortgage interest) should be paid direct by the Commons authorities and not via the MP. The MP would also be allowed to claim for Council Tax, Utility and telephone Bills. All expenses should be approved, be accompanied by receipts and be paid for direct by the Fees Office.

We recognise that Parliament would have a duty of care to ensure that the accommodations were furnished to an appropriate standard. The government already has extensive experience of providing accommodation for the armed forces². Unlock Democracy believes that this would be an appropriate benchmark to use. MPs would of course be able to add to these furnishings if they chose but they would not be able to reclaim the money for any additional furniture or decorations.

¹ The cost of being a candidate http://conservativehome.blogs.com/goldlist/2006/08/the_costs_of_be.html

² British Army Website – Soldiers Accommodation <http://www.army.mod.uk/join/terms/1106.aspx>

When an MP finished his or her term, they would have first refusal on buying the property from parliament at the market rate. If this was not taken up then the property could be offered to another MP, e.g. one of the new intake etc, rented out or sold on the open market. Crucially it would be the public purse and not the individual who benefitted from any rise in property values.

Our system is similar to the successful model already implemented in Sweden. Second homes in Stockholm for members who live outside the capital are provided rent-free by parliament. As a result the state owns some 250 apartments.

The Swedish MPs who choose to live in these apartments, find an appropriate property themselves, and then receive a flat rate in compensation (7,000 Krona (639 euro, £588). They cannot claim for subsequent improvements to that accommodation. The state pays for maintenance, repairs and improvements to state-owned apartments, just as any landlord would³.

If an MP chose to rent rather than buy a second home then we propose that they should provide the Fees Office with a contract for the rental of the property and the payments would be made directly to the landlord rather than to the MP.

MPs who do not need a permanent second home should be entitled to claim a specified amount towards the cost of overnight accommodation when they are unable to return home because of their parliamentary duties. They would be expected to provide receipts for the accommodation in order to reclaim the money and this would be published along with all other expense claims.

Staffing

We agree with the changes implemented by the House of Commons⁴ which now mean that all staff are employed by the House of Commons and not by the MP.

We propose a similar model to that which they in the Scottish parliament⁵, the one key difference being that the staff would be employed directly by the House of Commons. The MP would in effect become the employee's line manager. This system would allow complete transparency, a system of annual appraisals and staff improvements to take place and free MPs from some of the current administrative burdens placed upon them. An employee's contract would automatically end if the Member lost their seat or resigned as an MP.

Unlock Democracy believes that MPs should be able to determine how their office is run and how it is staffed. Just as with regards to housing, each MP will have different personal working styles and different requirements due to the constituency they represent. For example some MPs feel that they do not need a researcher for example, and some prefer to have their staff based in the constituency rather than the House of Commons. Unlock Democracy finds this

³ For more information on the Swedish system please see the briefing on the Swedish Parliament website http://www.riksdagen.se/templates/R_Page_10935.aspx

⁴ The decision can be found in the House of Commons Hansard 30 Apr 2009 : Column 1133 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090430/debtext/90430-0019.htm#09043030000013>

⁵ For more information regarding the Scottish Parliament Staffing arrangements please refer to the Members Expenses Briefing <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/MSPAllowances/index.htm#3-1>

perfectly acceptable and understandable. We also believe therefore that they should retain control of how their office budget is spent, e.g. on office resources, pay etc.

However think it is essential that employment law is adhered to in each case and that MPs are completely transparent in the nature of their staffing arrangements. For every role there should be a clear job description, person specification and interview process that would withstand scrutiny. There are MPs who already operate best practice but unfortunately this is far from universal.

Unlock Democracy accepts that MPs should be allowed to hire members of their family as staff, as long as those family members can show that they meet the requirements of the person specification and job description and that the fact that a family member is being employed is publicly acknowledged as is the case in the Scottish Parliament⁶. Whilst the public remain suspicious about MPs employing family members, we recognise that MPs often work long unsociable hours and employing family members can help to maintain relationships in these circumstances.

Travel

Unlock Democracy believes it is essential that MPs are funded to travel between Westminster and their constituencies and is broadly supportive of the current arrangements for this. However as with all expenses we believe these claims should be published. We would also recommend that the use of public transport should be incentivised wherever possible.

Communications Allowance

Unlock Democracy believes that the Communications Allowance is a form of party funding that is restricted to those parties that already have MPs and should be scrapped. If each MP claimed the full allowance over the course of a five year term, it would cost £32,300,000.⁷

The Communications Allowance⁸ is widely interpreted as a means of combating the Conservative Target Seat operation, which is chaired by, and until recently has been funded⁹

⁶ An MSP who submits a claim in respect of the cost of employing a close family member, whether individually or through a pool, shall declare that relationship to the SPCB. The declaration shall be in writing and include the name of the close family member, the relationship to the member and such other information as the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body (SPCB) may determine. The SPCB shall arrange for all such declarations to be registered in a register which is open to public inspection.
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/MSPAllowances/index.htm#3-1>

⁷ This is a simple calculation of 646 (the total number of MPs) multiplied by £10,000 (the maximum limit MPs can claim) multiplied by 5 (the maximum length of a Parliamentary term).

⁸ House of Commons Debate March 28 2007 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/cgi-bin/newhtml_hl?DB=semukparl&STEMMER=en&WORDS=straw%20commun%20allow&ALL=&ANY=&PHRASE=%22Communications%20Allowance%20%22&CATEGORIES=&SIMPLE=&SPEAKER=Straw&COLOUR=red&STYLE=s&ANCHOR=70328-0006.htm_snew3&URL=/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm070328/debtext/70328-0006.htm#70328-0006.htm_snew3

by Lord Ashcroft. Unlock Democracy believes that if the government have concerns that electoral law is being bypassed, then this should be remedied by giving the Electoral Commission adequate powers to properly enforce the law or if necessary, by amending the relevant legislation.

Unlock Democracy works to promote a more participatory culture of politics and believes that public funding should be given to support political activity at a grassroots level through a limited system of matched funding or tax relief on donations. However this funding should be available to all parties who have elected representatives in the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, Northern Irish Assembly or the European Parliament and not just those who have MPs. This only exacerbates the effects of the first past the post electoral system and reinforces the advantages of the larger parties. MPs allocating themselves public money to promote their activities in Parliament only adds to the 'power of incumbency'.

Sitting MPs or incumbents have structural advantages over challengers during elections. For most political offices, the incumbent often has greater name recognition due to their previous work in the office. Incumbents also have easier access to campaign finance, as well as government or parliamentary resources (such as the free postage) that can be indirectly used to boost a campaign. Whilst we recognise that it is not possible to entirely remove the advantages of the incumbent nor do we think these should be reinforced by additional allowances, such as the Communications Allowance, that are only available to those already elected.

What is more the money is often spent on direct mail¹⁰ and full page¹¹ adverts in newspapers which do nothing to engage with the electorate. We want to incentivise grassroots political activity such as canvassing door to door, street stalls or advice surgeries that are likely to engage people in the political process, rather than just more billboard ads.

The fact that politicians felt the need to legislate for a Communications Allowance in the first place highlights the drastic decline in local political activism in this country. Historically, paying advertising a MPs work in the constituency, and the cost thereof, fell to the local Association or party. The Communications Allowance is a just 'sticking plaster' covering a larger problem, namely the decline in membership of political parties and the disconnection of politicians from the public.

The repeated scandals surrounding the funding of political parties, from cash for peerages to controversial large donors being perceived to buy influence and unincorporated associations being used to bypass the regulations, undermine trust in our political system. When the Hayden Phillips process broke down in October 2007, Unlock Democracy predicted that without reform there would be another party funding scandal within five years. Even we were shocked that it

⁹ Political parties' latest donations and borrowing figures May 2009 <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/news-and-media/news-releases/electoral-commission-media-centre/news-releases-donations/political-partieslatest-donations-and-borrowing-figures-published>

Labour trails Conservatives in donations despite big bequests The Times May 28, 2009
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article6375222.ece>

¹⁰ For more information please see the report of the Standards and Privileges Committee into the Conduct of Mr Norman Baker, Mr Malcolm Bruce and Mr Sadiq Khan (HC 184) 13th December 2007
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmstnprv/182/18203.htm>

¹¹ For more information please see the report of the Standards and Privileges Committee into the Conduct of Mr Elfyn Llwyd, Mr Adam Price, and Mr Hywel Williams (HC 94) 19th November 2007
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmstnprv/94/9402.htm>

took less than five weeks. Without reform, specifically a cap on donations to end the perception that politics can be bought; we will simply lurch from scandal to scandal, while political participation falls still further.

Pay (including Pension, Redundancy and Second Jobs)

Unlock Democracy believes that pay is a separate issue from that of expenses, indeed the conflating of the two is one of the reasons for the current crisis. However it is an issue that needs to be addressed. It is entirely inappropriate that MPs should vote on their own salaries. Unlock Democracy suggests that the recommendation of the Senior Salaries and Review Body (SRRB),¹² be binding. The meetings of the SRRB should be minuted and those minutes published, much in the same way the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)¹³.

Unlock democracy also believes that this inquiry presents an opportunity to alter MPs salary structure to help improve the way Parliament is run, and in particular to emphasise the role of MPs in holding the Executive to account.

Peter Riddell¹⁴ highlights how many MPs do not see any benefits in terms of their career in serving on a Select Committee and so rather than focusing on scrutiny, work to advance within their own party. Unlock Democracy would like to see the SRRB consider a pay structure which offers rewards for a diligent backbench MP, such as an increased salary for those on Select Committees¹⁵.

Select committee work is essential, however it is detailed, involves long hours, and members receive little or no recognition from constituents. Committees used to represent a way to "earn your spurs" and "make your name" (as, for example, Rt Hon David Davis MP did) but many MPs see them as a distraction from holding on to their seats, advancing in the party or even outside business interests.

An improved pay structure would mean that MPs would be in a stronger position to take independent views and defy the whips, which we believe would improve parliamentary scrutiny and subsequently the quality of legislation.

Second Jobs

Unlock Democracy believes that MPs can benefit from outside interests as they can increase their understanding of policy issues and other sectors of the economy. Also MPs who come from a professional background may want to keep up a certain level of professional involvement so as to ensure they can return to that career on leaving Parliament. However we also recognise that being an MP and constituency representative is in itself a full-time job and that is

¹² For more information please refer to the Senior Salaries Review Body website <http://www.ome.uk.com/review.cfm?body=4>

¹³ For more information please refer to the Monetary Policy Committee website <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetarypolicy/overview.htm#meetings>

¹⁴ Peter Riddell *The lure of the red box is as much to blame as laziness* The Times April 8, 2009 http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/peter_riddell/article6054837.ece

¹⁵ Peter Facey *A Question of Scrutiny* The Guardian, 9 April 2009 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/apr/09/mps-expenses-boris>

essential that voters see MPs as representing their interests and not those of any companies or groups they may be involved with.

We are mindful that in its first report in 1995, The Committee on Standards expressed the view that ‘The House of Commons would be less effective if all MPs were full-time professional politicians and MPs should not be prevented from having outside employment.’¹⁶

Unlock Democracy does not want to discourage practising doctors, barristers, solicitors, surgeons, members of the Territorial Army or teachers from becoming Members of Parliament. We are also mindful that, especially during long periods in Opposition, some talented Members of Parliament, who would command a higher salary in the private sector would be lost to public life if there were not allowed to pursue other options outside of Parliament. Therefore we feel a balance needs to be struck that enables MPs to benefit from outside interests but that is open and transparent so that the public can be assured that first and foremost MPs are in fact public servants. Therefore we propose that the days that they spend on those jobs should be strictly limited to set number per year, for example 10.

In terms of short term contracts like magazine or newspapers articles, or even the authorship of a book, we believe that MPs should be allowed to pursue these avenues, again as long as they are all properly registered. We note that many MPs have regular columns with their local papers which they do for little or no charge.

Redundancy

Unlock Democracy believes it is appropriate that MPs should receive a redundancy payment when they lose or resign their seats. We recognise that it is often difficult for former politicians, particularly those who have served on the backbenches, to find appropriate, alternative employment¹⁷. There are many organisations, including our own, that would find it difficult to employ a former MP in a senior role as it would open us to allegations of political bias.

However we do not believe that redundancy settlements for MPs should be substantially better than those enjoyed in other sectors of the economy. Rather there should be a basic redundancy package for all MPs and bursary for former MPs to apply to for financial assistance if necessary.

¹⁶ First Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life: *MPs, Ministers and Civil Servants, Executive Quangos*, Cm 2850, May 1995 <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/parliament/nolan/nolan.htm>

¹⁷ For further information on this please see Professor Kevin Theakston, Dr Ed Gouge and Dr Victoria Honeyman *Life after Losing or Leaving: The experience of former Members of Parliament* by University of Leeds October 2007 <http://www.epolitix.com/Resources/epolitix/Forum%20Microsites/Association%20of%20Former%20Members%20of%20Parliament/life%20after%20parliament.pdf>.

Pensions

MPs, like all workers in the UK, should have the opportunity to contribute to a pension scheme. Unlock Democracy recognises that the MPs final salary pension scheme, with an additional payment linked to length of service, is particularly generous. However we also note that this is already being reviewed by the Senior Salary Review Board¹⁸.

As already outlined above we would want to ensure that any new pension system was open and transparent and was simple and easy to understand. While we understand the public's anxiety about the costs of MPs pensions and concern that MPs should not have a disproportionately better pension system than those that are available to their constituents. However Unlock Democracy believes it is important to recognise that being an MP is a public service and should be appropriately but not excessively rewarded.

Administration of the expenses system

Unlock Democracy believes that the expenses system should still be administered within Parliament, by a reformed Fees Office or a similar body with a different name. We are concerned that taking the responsibility for the expenses system outside Parliament is simply avoiding a difficult issue and could actually make the system less accountable to voters.

Unlock Democracy welcome the thrust of the proposals drawn up for a new parliamentary standards authority to administer the reformed expenses system, agreed at the meeting of the Members Estimate Committee on 19 May 2009 convened with the party leaders and the Chair of the Committee on Members' Allowances. We agree that the Fees office as it is currently formed should be abolished. A new body should have the authority to apply sanctions, to disallow claims and take money back from a Member who is found to have broken the rules.

The function of that body should be to administer, supervise and enforce the rules, with a view to ensuring propriety. The Fees office should be seen as the finance office of the House of Commons by MPs and not as a body which advises MPs on how to maximise claims, which seems to have been the case in the past. The body should be properly audited every year and be subject to random inspections as any other company.

It will be necessary to change the culture of the Fees office. Unlock Democracy strongly believes that, just as the Rt. Hon Michael Martin MP was not deemed to be an appropriate Speaker to enact the necessary reforms to Parliament, Andrew Walker, The House of Commons Resources Director, should not remain in post. We draw the Committees intention to his evidence to the Information Tribunal on February 2008¹⁹, in which he vigorously defends the previous expenses system which has now been exposed as corrupt.

Under our proposals the Fees Office would pay all monies regarding housing and staff directly to the people concerned, rather than to the MP. This would clarify and simplify the relationship between the MP and the Fees Office.

¹⁸ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/feb/14/gordonbrown-economy>

¹⁹ How expenses boss defended system, BBC Website, Tuesday 19 May 2009
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/8055333.stm