

E 576 - A. Macleod

Orkney
10/9/09

Sir Christopher Kelly
Committee on Standards in Public Life
35 Great Smith St
London
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Dear Sir Christopher

Submission to Your Review on MP's Pay and Allowances

General

I am writing to you as a citizen, as a former local government officer and as a Community Councilor.

Democracy versus Appointment versus Hereditary

Part of the shock of the expenses scandal and cash for lobbying scandal, is the blowing apart of the naïve assumption that democracy must be better and less corrupt than what we had in the past, ie the appointed High Sheriff, the Baron and Lord of the Manor.

We have now been rudely made aware that **election to office is no guarantee of probity** and that clear tight rules are needed with total transparency and accountability.

Basic Premises

What are MP's? They are not celebrities, they are not freelance small businesses. They are elected public servants on a short term contract.

The British Civil Service has along and proud history and has great experience of expenses and allowances. This problem is entirely solvable within that framework.

Sincerely

A Macleod

Submission attached

Submission from A Macleod to committee on standards in Public life

MP's Pay and Allowances

A. Salaries

First it is not acceptable to just raise MPs pay as has been suggested in some quarters. **A proper job analysis has to be done**; we cannot just pluck figures out of the air.

MPs do not hold responsibility directly for the lives of others as do head teachers, army officers, ships captains, neither is there a requirement for them to do their job to have professional qualifications such as do Surgeons and Lawyers. Neither are MPs comparable to top bankers and captains of industry where enterprise and risk taking is rewarded. MPs are public servants and we must start from this premise when examining salaries.

My own examination of MPs duties, meetings, public speaking, research, serving on committees brings me to feel that **the current remuneration for MPS of approx £64,000 is perfectly adequate.**

Salaries not be raised now or in the near future as a quick fix reaction to the scandal and if and when a raise is considered, a proper job analysis done so the job is graded. Other employees have to go through this process and the MP's who have called for a quick salary raise thus setting themselves above this process further underscores their misreading of not only of public anger, but of their tendency to see themselves as a special privileged class beyond normal rules.

In future pay to be regulated by a Pay Body external and uninfluenced by MP's.

B Travel Allowances and Accommodation linked with travel.

Being an MP can however be a stressful job involving working in more than one location and in the case of some involving a lot of travel. **MP's require to feel secure that they can undertake this travel as a legitimate part of their job and that this is approved and understood by press and public alike.** Clear parameters however need to be set. Local government travel and accommodation rules have been working adequately for years and may I respectfully ask that you ask for details of these as well as those of the civil service.

It is a job that requires extensive travel; to and from the parliament, round the constituency, to some overseas meetings, visiting industry.

So MPs need relatively generous travel allowances, set at a reasonably high level based on what a busy effective MP needs. All travel claims to be based on reason for travel to be connected directly with duties as set out in **A** above, Receipts and /or travel tickets and accommodation submitted for all trips. No silly rules like cheapest accommodation or cheapest travel as this can mean delay and frustrate effective working. A target hotel cost can be set each year and a bar max for the years travel expenses set.

FEES OFFICE to lose control of the scrutiny of MP's travel and Accommodation Expenses. This to pass to the civil service. Confidence has been totally eroded in the ability of the FEES Office to set and control expenses.

Accommodation near to Parliament

For those MPs out with daily traveling distance, MPs also need somewhere to live and work when at parliament. To aid family life the other place of living and working must potentially be a second home so that spouses and children can be there from time to time to cement family life, also big enough for a desk and computer so that MPs can spread out and work in the evenings as they undoubtedly will do. It is important that for them to be effective,

MP's and their families must have their legitimate need for a second home, or more aptly a second working base, acknowledged by the press and public.

I strongly suggests that all future discussion and printing of subsequent rules uses the terminology "second working base" to avoid the connotations of luxury and excess wrongly evoked by "second home"

Sale and Purchase of "Second Working Base"

Clear Rules about the purchase and sale of "second working base" to be set so that no gain is made at the expense of the taxpayer.

Again **FEES OFFICE not to be in charge of this**; civil service to oversee this. They do this for army and foreign office staff so it is not a radical move.

Staffing

What little knowledge I have of these matters suggest that MP's are under resourced in terms of the money they have to pay for staff.

MP's should have a secretary and a researcher. Adequate funds should be paid to fund these salaries. The secretary's job is not that of a junior secretary but more that of a PA. Currently salaries are near £20k - £25 K.

Traditionally the researcher was a recently qualified graduate filling in before a political career of their own, or progressing into business or the civil service. Nowadays good quality new graduates can expect £25 K to £30 K

Some attention needs to given to the tenure and pension arrangements for these staff otherwise the jobs may not attract and retain good candidates. Some consideration might be given to these staff being permanent civil servants, or local government employees who can then remain in parliament's secretarial pool or the local authority 's pool, if and when their MP moves on.

An office will have to be rented and equipped and allowance paid for this, Office furniture, desks chairs , computers printers, photocopiers, internet connection, telephone and money to pay for reasonable and invoiced running costs.

It would appear from the allowances debacle that MP's are under funded on this score and are having to decide whether to have an office in Westminster or an office in the constituency.

Does Westminster allow for each MP to have an office at Westminster? If not is it then fit for purpose as our parliament building?

MP's require to have a constituency office - again this needs to be adequately funded. If the party is not rich then MP's find themselves working out of run down old buildings. This ought to change for the credibility of Parliament and democracy. Is it beyond possibility that local government or the civil service could provide an office in a suitable location in the constituency, occupied by the sitting MP and vacated when he/she moves on?

Pensions

An MP's job is in effect a short-term contract. Many of us were shocked at the level severance allowance that MP's get after a very short time doing the job. £ 43 000 after 4 years! In fact it seems it was almost worth standing to get in and then leave picking up the severance allowance.

It took me 40 years of public service to get a lump sum of £40k and a half pay pension. There must be many people like me and others still who worked in the private sector who feel this was one of the biggest iniquities to come out of the "expenses scandal " What to do about it? I am afraid there seems no way to legitimize this severance payment. It bares no comparison to the redundancy pay that people get on losing their jobs. It seems a clear exercise in privilege with no justification.

The whole issue of pensions and severance payments needs to be stopped dead and looked at again.

The other aspect of this is that the severance payments stick in the craw even more when MP's who have made false expenses claims or not declared capital gains tax, step down and then are rewarded with severance payment! Further some that have been caught have offered to step down at the next election, a year away, so continue to get salary and allowances till then and then get the severance allowance. Why, we ask have they not gone now without the severance pay?

I am pretty certain if these things had happened in local government they would constitute grounds for instant dismissal.

In addition it is clear that for several, being an MP was a part time job yet the severance allowance was not attendance based.

So my recommendation on pensions is that a complete rethink is needed.

The confusion I believe lies in that the current system suggests a kind of directors emoluments scheme, with severance pay and a short term contract when if we start from the assumption that MP's are public servants then we should be talking hours, days weeks worked ie. an accrual system. My feeling is that MP's are not Directors or captains of industry rather they are public servants and some link to the extent of service is necessary. This may need to be measured by their attendance at the House. At the moment an MP could hardly attend but still pick up the severance allowance. Those that are standing down may do just this until next May.

Submission from A Macleod to Commission on Standards in Public Life.
MPS Pay and Allowances contd.

Jobs outside Parliament

The issue of jobs and directorships outside parliament is crucial to cleaning up Parliament.

For most people the salary of £64,000 indicates a full time job at upper middle management level.

Parliament is diminished if being an MP is seen as a part time hobby

If the job is a serious, one and that is what we the public used to think, then there should be no jobs allowed outside the job of MP.

In local government it was the case that this applied and the reasons were to do with conflict of interest.

It has now become obvious that there is substantial conflict of interest amongst MPs because of their part time jobs and Directorships and for some one wonders where they get the time for parliamentary duties.

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To consider an increase to this salary when obviously some see it as a part time job is an outrage and further proof of the hubris displayed at this level.

By making it a rule no jobs outside parliament rule we may lose some MPS but I argue we will be the better for it and the reputation of Parliament may be gradually restored.

Conclusion

Decisions on Salaries, Pensions and Allowances and Jobs outside Parliament must have wide discussion in the public and must have justification. MPs themselves must not be able to influence this process and must not be left in control of their pay and conditions after the review process, they should however have what all other workers have, the right to collective representation to the pay body.