

Dear Sir Christopher,

Thank you for your letter of 24th April 2009 calling for submissions to your review of MPs' expenses.

I think the Green Book published in March 2009 could well be the start for your enquiry, as there is a lot of good in it.

The first thing I would recommend is that the term "allowances" be changed to "expenses", because allowances can be taken as an automatic right.

The second general point, is that the excellent principles outlined on page 7 of the Green Book should all be converted into absolute rules. It is sad that the first two have to be said at all.

Regarding staffing expenditure, as this never goes through an individual MP's bank account, I do not think there is much need for change except, of course, the employment by an MP of a family member has to be on exactly the same contract, salary and range of duties as any other non-family member who is employed.

Travel expenditure, I think, is clear for travelling between one's home in the constituency and London. I question whether there should be an automatic right to claim any distances at all within the constituency, without details of mileage actually done. I cannot imagine in any other walk of life you are allowed to claim for an amount according to the size of your constituency, whether you have done that mileage or not.

The rules of communications expenditure probably need tightening, although I do not use this source of funds myself, as I have a regular piece in my local paper which I regard as my main means of communication.

The difficult allowance is the Personal Additional Accommodation Expenditure. The easy things about this are that the definition of one's main home is pretty obvious to most people and should be where one's family reside.

Another thing that is probably straightforward is that the distance from London from which a South East MP should be expected to commute should be defined probably by travelling time, and a travelling time of one hour would seem to be pretty typical for most people who work in London.

My personal view about the Accommodation Allowance is that it should be restricted to rent for a second home in London, even though we are not in London for more than three or four nights per week, thinking of younger career politicians with young families, the possibility of having one's family with one is essential.

If mortgage interest is to be allowed, then somehow the taxpayer should have a share of any capital gain. The mechanism for this would require careful thought but for this sort of gain to be taxable would be one suggestion for a solution.

Personally, I do not think that a £25 daily allowance for food, when one is away from one's main home, is necessary in any way.

The new Member's Reimbursement form, PAAE 2, by putting subsistence at the top of the form as an automatic right makes it even easier to claim than the previous form. By abolishing this, one could probably reduce the amount of taxpayers' money spent on MPs' expenses, particularly if the total allowed for Personal Additional Accommodation Expenditure was reduced by £4,800 per year, which I understand is the maximum that some MPs have been able to claim for subsistence.

Finally, I have to point out that as a retired doctor with an NHS pension who happens to be an MP, my personal needs are less than a younger career politician with a young family.

I hope these comments are helpful.

Yours sincerely,

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