

Dear Committee,

As a private individual I should like to make a submission regarding MP's expenses and allowances.

I am an ordinary citizen and a member of a mainstream Political Party, formerly but not recently an activist. My concern regards the impact upon political engagement of the populous.

As well as tarnishing the reputation of our politicians, our democracy has also been weakened. Newspaper reports suggest widespread political abdication. Ordinary citizens feel powerless to act as it appears to be the choice of the political parties, the constituency associations and so on as to who stays and who goes. The involvement of the electorate is deferred, creating a damaging feeling of disempowerment, with anger turning to apathy. Errant candidates are endorsed or go unpunished for seemingly political reasons.

Growth in independent candidates may actually support the status quo, with voters encountering option fatigue at the ballot boxes. This may return the candidates they seek to reject by splitting the protest vote, which is as dangerous to our democracy as increased monitoring is a danger to our liberty.

Ordinary citizens need to look at this as an opportunity for change.

### **Travel and a Second Home 'I have to be in two places to do my job'**

These items are entwined. The distance of an MP's constituency to Westminster is not so much a factor as the length of the commute and, politically, the proportion of their constituents who make that journey.

If that journey is less than one hour by the best means, the MP should receive a London weighting and pay for their travel expenses out of it.

MP's outside that who have a particular proportion of their constituents commuting anyway should not be able to claim for a second home, but should be able to claim either free public transport, or have a car, using the same tax rules as other company car holders.

For other MP's, they should all have grace and favour accommodation paid for directly without any reference to the MP. This might pay for itself in 10 years. They should also have a choice of either a company car, or free public transport as above. For MP's who need flights, they should be allocated a set number per year.

Ultimately this means no additional costs allowance, but possibly a house and a car are provided without reference to the MP's pocket, excepting tax liability.

### **Office Costs, Employing Family Members and Political Activists 'People I can trust and rely on'**

Staff should be politically neutral and should understand government and party boundaries, and what they are and are not permitted to do.

Many existing staff are qualified and should be given the option of transferring onto Civil Service contracts that are centrally managed. Where qualified, they should be considered favourably.

They should automatically transfer to a new MP at election time, and be employed directly by the state. If they are tied to the constituency, they should understand the constituency, even if located in Westminster.

One of the civil service staff members should be designated as a Constituency Office Manager, and they should be responsible for office costs, not the MP.

Any existing employees who cannot work for an MP of another political affiliation, who are unqualified or over paid in relation to other staff, and those who are past retirement age should be released .

The government should be free to redeploy qualified personnel between constituencies to allow for professional growth and development. All need job descriptions and person specifications that should be written and maintained centrally.

The communications allowance should be scrapped. Reasonable printing should be requestable centrally where the content can be checked for political bias. Internet should be used wherever possible.

### **MP's Salaries 'We need to attract the right people'**

It's a public perception that the majority of MP's earned less in private life than they earned in public life, hence the argument regarding MP's salaries is perceived to be disingenuous. The expectation is also that they will earn less once they have returned to private life, unless they accept consultancies or directorships that exploit their political contacts.

A five year or full parliamentary session ban on seeking or accepting consultancies should help to reassure members of the sincerity of former politicians.

Paying MP's the salary they earned the year they entered the House for their first parliamentary term, capped for very high earners, would ensure no MP turns away from politics because they cannot afford the pay drop. It would also ensure that those whose earning potential is way below that of a parliamentarian do not hide behind that argument. Only after an MP is re-elected should they qualify for the MP's pay scale. If they leave the House after only one term, they should have a legal right to their old job back, or compensation if it's unavailable. If they stay for more than one, they forfeit that right.

The second term and beyond MP's payscale should be a particular multiple of the average salary of the constituency.

### **General Changes**

Fixed terms for MP's, Prime Ministers and Governments would prevent the growth of self interested career politicians. They would also prevent the distraction of Parliament arguing about when the next election should be. Dissatisfaction in parties perceived to be clinging on for grim death would end, as election dates would be set in statute.

The public and politicians would understand exactly when the days of reckoning are. The economy would be stronger as business would be able to plan. MP's would naturally spend more time in their constituencies in the final year of a parliament.

Politicians given a maximum of three 4 year terms would be not become disconnected from their constituents by years of parliamentary privilege, while sat in safe seats. Members of the public would feel more able to influence policies if they felt there was genuine movement and opportunity for new politicians to challenge old ones.

Allow the House to pass a vote of no confidence in a particular MP that triggers a by election.

Allow anyone to claim back their first year's membership of a political party.

Remove the exit payments for politicians, unless they have served 3 full terms and are retiring.

Yours respectfully,

R.Fawley, Sheffield