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6th July, 2009

M. Frampton

Dear Sir Christopher

I read today in the newspapers that one possible solution to the House of Commons Members' second homes might be a "barracks" ..

I worked in the Serjeant at Arms' Office of the House of Commons till I retired in 1988, and, for the last 30 years, I worked with a Whip of each party who dealt with office accommodation.

After each General Election, and particularly after an Election when there was a change of Government, the allocation of Members' offices was a nightmare. Before an Election we used to ask Members who were not standing to pack up their papers and remove them before the House rose in the hope that at least some rooms would be vacant after Election day. Some Members did but the majority did not, so that on the day after a General Election we were struggling with:

a large number of offices which were full of papers etc. belonging to Members who had not stood. After some weeks we had to parcel up the papers and some were not collected for months.

A large number of offices which were full of papers, etc. belonging to Members who have lost their seats, and who have lost all interest in their office and have disappeared.

the increased number of Members of the Party newly in Government who wanted offices, and the need for allocation of offices per Party to be agreed..

the re-elected Members of the new House of Commons who have said that they would like to have better offices but go on holiday before they return to the House so nothing can be done until they turn up again..

the desperately keen new Members of all Parties who turn up on the day after the Election demanding accommodation and who cannot understand why the offices are not empty and they cannot be allocated anything until it is clear which the offices are vacated, This leads to "squatting"

All this was more complicated when the Whip who dealt with accommodation in each Party was not necessarily the one who was to continue to do it. Until a replacement was appointed nothing happened

I realise that since I left a lot more accommodation is available, and the system of allocation has probably changed, but I have a feeling that the same problems will occur. I have visions of, after the next change of Government, someone trying to evict Members (and their wives/children etc.) in a hurry from flats in an accommodation block. This accommodation would of course be splendid for any ex-Member who was proposing to find a job in London and they would be loath to abandon it.

I know things have changed hugely since I retired but I feel Members may not have. I hope you will not think me presumptuous in listing a few possible problems which a "barracks" might produce..

Your sincerely

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