

**Submission from Green Party – Adrian Ramsay**

Sir Christopher Kelly  
Chair  
Committee on Standards in Public Life  
35 Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3BQ

22 July 2009

Dear Sir Christopher

**MP EXPENSES AND ALLOWANCES**

I am writing on behalf of the Green Party of England and Wales to set out our views on the evidence submitted so far to the inquiry and to endorse and expand on the emerging conclusions set out in your statement to the hearing of 15 June.

The Green Party has campaigned for many years, and with some success, for reform of the system of expenses and allowances in the European Parliament. We have also been critical of many practices in the UK Parliament. But as a political party, we believe passionately in the potential for the political process to transform people's lives for the better, and the need to reconnect people with their elected representatives. As a party that aims to have MPs elected to the next Parliament, we have every interest in seeing reforms that work.

We think it crucial to have a system that prevents MPs profiting from second homes and that makes it a criminal offence to knowingly overclaim expenses. We also believe that wider democratic reforms of Parliament are crucial, such as elections to the House of Lords and regulating and containing the lobbying power of big business over MPs.

We believe that unless such issues are dealt with properly, the public will not believe that politics is being 'cleaned up' or that the culture of Parliament has been changed for good. The expenses scandal is not the first example of a failure of Parliament to manage its own affairs. If it is to be the last, there seems to be an alternative but to end the practice of self-regulation for MPs. While some of those who have given evidence have raised constitutional spectres such as judges removing MPs, the reality is that Parliament has already given powers to independent bodies to oversee aspects of the political process (for example, the oversight of candidates' election expenses by the Electoral Commission) and there seems no good reason why this could not be extended to the way MPs and Peers deal with salaries, expenses, allowances and the employment of staff. This is why we have proposed the creation of an independent commission to carry out these functions and, crucially, to have the role of ongoing scrutiny of the professional behaviour of MPs, so that new abuses or areas of doubt can be identified and resolved at an early stage.

I would therefore suggest an addition to the list of things to be done you set out in your opening statement: that the starting-point for the new system should be the principle that MPs are subject to the same rules as anyone else, not only for taxation but in all respects. So, for example, the rules on accommodation and other expenses would reflect those that apply to the Senior Civil Service. If variations are needed, there would be an independent body to agree these and ensure they are complied with.

We believe that reforms of this kind would not only help to rebuild trust in the political process, but also reduce the risk of similar damaging scandals in the future.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Adrian Ramsay  
Deputy Leader  
Green Party of England and Wales