

As a member of the electorate / public I have been giving some thought to what processes and procedures would give me confidence that the system for managing MPs' expenses was fair to them and the electorate without every individual needing to either check them themselves or trust the newspapers to publish a fair and balanced view.

The objectives should be (or at least include)

- Fair to both MPs and electorate
- Simple
- Cost effective to operate
- Hard to mis-use and corrupt
- Visibly not managed by any "clique"

I would propose that the expenses should be sufficient to cover all reasonable expenses, in addition to normal costs, which are expended in the course of their duties. This should be similar to a private commercial company's system and should require the individual to sign that they comply with the guidance.

The expenses should be audited every year. There should be a team led by an accountant – probably a senior individual from the Inland Revenue, taken from different offices and geographical areas each year – chosen perhaps by ballot. They should be supported by a team of 4 – 6 others chosen in a way similar to juries. The key is to have a mix of people and skills which changes each year – they do need some specific skills but should come from a wide range of backgrounds and locations.

The team does an overview of the system operation but will also pick at random say 10 MPs plus a number of others who have not been audited in the last 5 years. Those MP's expenses would be fully checked to confirm that they comply with the rules and the principles behind the rules.

The team's report would be published and accessible by everyone – it need not give every last detail but should be in sufficient detail to give confidence that the system is operating effectively. No party or politician or member of a quango should be in any way able to influence the report.

Personally I have no problem with MPs hiring family members as long as they can demonstrate that they have the skills to do the job and have delivered and that they are paid at commercial rates – for the locality if it is in a constituency.

regards
S Stephens