



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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

2 June 2009

Dear Sir Christopher,

Submission by Ian Taylor MP (Esher & Walton).

The need for a fundamental review of MPs' income and allowances is evident. There is an urgent challenge to gain public confidence in and better understanding of the role of MPs. Clearly we will now have a system of independent scrutiny and audit of some description.

As an MP with 22 years of service, I can recall the way the remuneration system has been distorted several times because of pressures not to adjust salaries under the 'time is not ripe' rule. As a result, allowances have become far too significant in relation to salary - never a good idea. There must be a serious re-weighting.

There is one real concern which I hope your Committee will address. In the current crisis, those MPs who have broken the rules and committed offences should fall on their swords and deserve public anger. The rest of us may share the collective contrition but not the guilt. There is a danger that retrospective value judgements in the heat of a media storm are being applied to MPs who have not committed any offence yet are being threatened and their position in the House questioned. These are dangerous precedents.

MPs have in general a desire to serve (and if they do not, it is a very unsatisfactory career given the weight of constituency problems!). They mostly enter Parliament without contemplating 'becoming rich' but also often without realising the strains on the family and its budgets that they are likely to face.

I have long argued that we should work out whether the role of an MP should be full time. If it is deemed so, then pay a significantly higher salary and restrict outside activities entirely. Yet this is not straightforward and I am not advocating it as a solution.

If an MP becomes a Minister he now gets additional pay - but he remains an MP. I can assure you that not being a Minister frees up a tremendous amount of time! If being an MP is 'full-time', then logically we must move to something



like the French system: when an MP is appointed a Minister he steps down as an MP in favour of his alternate until he relinquishes office. I should not favour that here.

Backbench MPs typically broaden their Parliamentary duties and interests with perhaps a select committee or all party committees in the House; externally, work with policy think-tanks, charity work, a campaign on some issue and in some cases outside business interests. I am in favour of such a mix. Hence for many of us, there is a real attraction of outside interests that may remunerate but also inform. Personally, I would regret being in a parliament formed only of career politicians. I doubt there would be many 'independent spirits'. Of course there needs to be an explanation and also transparency of all activity. I suggest declared outside interests do not necessarily detract from the responsibility to constituents and Parliament but can add-value and assist in understanding relevant issues and increasing depth of knowledge.

On staffing, I have had an extremely able team working with me during 22 years so far. Although there have been changes, most individuals have worked for periods of over ten years each. I do employ my wife part time under contract, and she in fact works under direction of my senior staff member. She not only contributes but feels involved in the work I do. I believe choosing staff – even if centrally employed – must remain with the MP.

There is then the thorny issue of the ACA. Part of the problem for longer serving MPs is that it was not regarded as critical to have a base in or near the constituency when we were first elected. We were being elected to represent our constituents at Westminster, not the other way round. My revered predecessor lived in Gloucestershire for most of his 17 years in the House. Times have changed and with it attitudes. MPs now are expected to identify more with their constituents by being amongst them more often. So the pressures of being in two places each week have grown. But the key is the need to have a base in both. I fully support the recent tightening of definition of allowable claims under the ACA, and the abolition of 'flipping' for CGT purposes.

Let me turn to my own case in respect of ACA, as evidence that each MP faces somewhat different circumstances and challenges which makes one rule to fit all difficult. Last month, the Government succeeded in getting through the House (despite conceding that it would be subject to your review), an arbitrary new rule which classified my Esher and Walton Constituency as 'Greater London' – an imposition without historical justification or practice. As it stands at present, therefore, I shall lose the ACA from next April and qualify only for the London Allowance. Hence the basis of my overall arrangements would be changed without proper consideration or regard for consequences for decisions



made for the duration of the period of serving in the House. Instead, I would advocate a phased withdrawal of the ACA for situations such as my own.

Here is the background.

1. My main home is nearer Guildford than the boundary of Greater London. When I moved here in 1988 (after renting a house from 1986 even closer to Guildford) it was within the constituency boundary of Esher. The boundary changed in 1997 to Esher and Walton, so I now reside close to but beyond a seat all of which - only just - fits within the recently artificially designated 20 miles radius from Westminster as the crow flies. My house is 29 miles from London by road.
2. For many years (1990-2003) I rented a house in London the cost of which I claimed back. I bought my current flat in 2003 as mortgage interest fell below rental costs. I now claim mortgage interest only (not repayment) and associated costs such as Lambeth Council tax and service charges all of which are allowable. The actual costs of the flat exceed my claims allowance.
3. For an MP the priority when I was first elected was to have a home near the House of Commons - 'within the division bell area'. Indeed it was recommended sternly by the whips! It was expected that any commuting would be from London to the constituency for meetings mainly on a Friday or Saturday.
4. Having a base in town and a constituency related base makes the long hours tolerable for both (partially disabled) wife and myself. And more productive - a point lost in all the current debate. Given that I have never counted hours worked during a week including evening functions or speeches, it makes sense that I represent constituents in Westminster for some days each week and to be around locally on others. In my view that requires a base at both ends - regardless of distance. I believe I have served my constituents well so far and that is because I have organised my time efficiently in two places.

I respectfully submit these points for the Committee's consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Taylor MP