

Liberal Democrat Staff Group submission to Sir Christopher Kelly's review.

Overall, Liberal Democrat staff members welcome the central employment of staff to bring equality between offices from all sides of the House and to make sure that staff are paid fairly for their work, but as details of the new system are not yet fully decided, we cannot comment on them extensively.

We would like to see the following concerns addressed in the new employment system.

- We want to make sure that MPs can employ the staff they want and need. There should be a degree of flexibility for MPs employing staff as MPs' offices operate differently. We would not support the Welsh Assembly system, where AMs are allowed to employ only 2.5 staff all on different designated pay scales. MPs work differently, and have different caseloads. They may deal with more casework but still want to employ a researcher. Sometimes it is important for MPs to attract a caseworker to a remote constituency or a constituency with a heavy caseload using a higher payscale than that designated. There should be enough flexibility to employ the number of staff that an MP needs within their staffing budget, with flexible working time, and on pay scales that reflect their responsibilities rather than arbitrarily designated, but we would welcome the role of an external auditor to make sure that staff are paid fairly across the House for the work that they do.
- We would welcome external auditing and monitoring of recruitment processes and mandatory annual staff reviews with an external auditor also. An MP, as the line manager, is best placed to analyse and evaluate how an employee is getting on, but as they are not trained managers, it is important that an external assessor makes sure that there is not malpractice or exploitation occurring.
- We very much support the responsibility for the occupational health and health and safety of MPs' staff in the constituency offices and in Westminster being transferred from MPs to the House Authorities.
- There are staff employed by more than one MP or Peer, splitting their time between offices, but often working for both day to day on a needs-basis, and we would hope that the new system can take this into account and allow for flexibility in hours of work.
- Political sympathy and campaigning activity of staff: we are concerned that central employment will overly restrict this aspect of employment. If staff are also councillors – would their jobs in the House be at risk? Will staff have to conform to the Civil Service Code of Conduct? It is hugely important that staff are able to be active within their political party while also working for their MP. We believe it would be very difficult to make sure that an MP's employee is not politically motivated and active when carrying out their work: often their work will be part of a wider campaign for instance. As an opposition party, any research etc carried out will often be "anti-Government" and could therefore be deemed politically motivated and therefore against the rules. We would welcome assurances that staff will not be governed by the Code of Conduct and that taking part in campaigning activity outside of the office will also not be restricted. Furthermore, some staff perform dual roles, working for Parliament for a part of their working week, and for the party for the rest; being paid by both parliamentary allowances and by the party for their separate roles. We would welcome assurances that these kind of arrangements can continue, but we would welcome an auditing role for the House Authorities in making sure that these arrangements are satisfactory.

- Personality plays a role in the recruitment process and, given the extraordinary circumstances within which an MP works, we would support the continued employment of family members on the grounds that an appropriate CV and job description exist that can prove to the public and House Authorities that they are well qualified to do their job. Again, an external auditor would make sure that this is not being exploited and that they are fulfilling their duties.
- We would welcome changes to staff pension schemes and the extension of benefits to MPs' staff. Currently staff pensions are part of the Portcullis Pension Scheme. We would welcome the change to the House of Commons Pensions Scheme that a change of employer would bring. We would also welcome the added benefits that House staff enjoy, including longer annual leave entitlements, and childcare vouchers among others. If the House does decide to take on the employment of MPs' staff, would the Committee consider providing the means to an employment tribunal if it was found by a staff member that there were large discrepancies between pay for staff in identical roles in different offices?
- The current restriction on pay increases for staff as reflection of loyal service. With MPs managing a lump sum staffing budget, often there will be no leeway for staff increases as a reflection of loyal service. We would hope that the central employment of staff will allow for bigger pay rises for loyal employees that would not adversely affect the staffing pay for the rest of an MP's employees. While it may be the case that there is a high turnover amongst some staff and a shorter length of service is the norm, there are also many others who stay longer than that and who then have no means of salary progression.
- Internships: we would recommend that money be made available to pay interns to attract a broader group of applicants for internships with MPs, seeing internships as both beneficial to the MPs office and to the intern. We would hope that internships within the House can be developed further as a part of the centralisation of staff employment.
- Individual staff are less likely, not more likely to be able to address grievances and concerns under the current system. By creating a recognized staff body through central employment, we expect concerns will be addressed faster and more effectively. At present, the Department of Resources only takes representation from MPs. Any member of staff who wishes to raise examples of malpractice has to request that their MP raise the issue with the Department of Resources. We would welcome the creation of a human resources body, separate from the interests of MPs, to take responsibility for staff concerns.
- Resettlement and Redundancy Payments: we would hope that current redundancy arrangements in place between MPs who are standing down and their staff, would not be adversely affected by any changes to redundancy payments made by the Government's proposals.

Many thanks,

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