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Durham North Team Ministry

Comprising the parishes of St Cuthbert Durham with St Aidan Framwellgate Moor,
St Michael & All Angels Witton Gilbert, St Peter & St John Sacriston, St Philip & St James Kimblesworth,
All Saints' Local Ecumenical Partnership Newton Hall and St Edmund King & Martyr Bearpark

E123

Durham

14 May 2009

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

Dear Sir Christopher

Submission to the Review on MPs' Expenses

I recently wrote to my MP Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods on this subject with an idea which she has suggested I submit to you as a piece of evidence for your review of MPs' expenses.

As a vicar I am an office bearer who must live in a place which my stipend does not allow me to afford, so I live in accommodation provided by the diocese. I pay the utilities and day to day running costs and the diocese pay all the maintenance and major repair bills, whilst also retaining the capital value of the property. It's up to me to make provision for when I'm no longer in post, and many clergy acquire holiday homes as a way of providing for the future.

Would it not be possible for Parliament to have a scheme whereby MPs were provided with accommodation in London on a similar basis? Houses and flats in different locations would offer a variety of locations/house sizes to suit different people and would spread people about ensuring no security problems. It would take time to build up the property portfolio, and I can see that every time there's a General Election it would potentially be very tricky with people needing to move quite quickly, but I guess that happens anyway. There are many jobs where people have to take the accommodation offered, so assuming that Parliament houses would always be decent properties in decent suburbs that ought not be a problem. If there were more properties than MPs then there would be shuffle room, and empty houses could be rented out when unoccupied - so the scheme should make money too. London MPs would simply receive a London weighting (in line with other professions).

yours sincerely

The Reverend R W Lawrance
Team Rector