

## The Committee on Standards in Public Life

Dear Sir,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment for your review of MPs allowances. I would like to make the following observations.

Members of Parliament should be paid the appropriate salary for the job they do. Any allowances should be to cover the necessary expenses they incurred to do their job. These expenses are not an enhancement of salary and should not be regarded as such by MPs.

The salary of MPs should be set by an independent body and not by the MPs themselves. It may be appropriate to link MPs pay to other countries of a similar standing (eg: Germany, Italy, France (not USA)). MPs pay, once set, should be linked to inflation and this figure used to determine salary rises each year. Periodically the salary should be reviewed by the independent body and appropriate adjustments made.

Allowances for MPs should reflect the expenses they incur to do their job. It is appropriate for families of MPs to be employed by them as secretaries and other assistants. Appropriate salaries should be paid to these people for the time and effort they put into their duties and proper records kept to enable an audit trail to be examined.

Regarding accommodation, all MPs will be expected to live within their constituency and to fund this accommodation themselves. MPs who's constituency is in Greater London will not be eligible for housing assistance allowances. They will be entitled to travel allowances to and from their home (within their constituency) to Westminster. The travel allowance may be public transport, taxi or other private car arrangement.

MPs who live outside Greater London will be entitled to a housing assistance allowance. My favoured choice would be a building or hotel dedicated to MPs use. The building could be owned by the State or privately owned with rooms exclusively for MPs to use. The building need not be in Westminster but could be anywhere in London. Claims for travel allowances to the accommodation would be permitted.

Alternatively MPs could be allowed to purchase a second home. Any allowances paid to them for these homes would be based on the current fee for a hotel room in London as opposed to the actual costs of the second home. Once again the second home need not be in Westminster but could be anywhere in Greater London. MPs would be entitled to the transport costs allowance as previously mentioned for all London based MPs but again the costs should reflect the actual costs involved. Only homes within 25 miles of Westminster can be included in this allowance category.

Furniture for these second homes is needed but this should be for essential items and not frivolous ones and should certainly not include food and drink as this is not an additional expense. I would expect property values to rise generally so MPs can expect to benefit from the house value when they later sell the property. Any additional services needed for the second home should be paid for by the MP concerned (gardening, window cleaning, repairs etc).

Receipts will be needed for all items for which a claim is made. This will enable a complete audit to take place and will aid transparency in government. The independent body who audit the claims must include people from 'the real world' (lay members as it were). A percentage of claims must be audited each year. This should be a random audit and results should be published.

Yours faithfully,

M Elflain