

For the attention of Sir Christopher Kelly  
cc Mr Oliver Letwin via Emma Gray  
The Editor, Daily Telegraph

Dear Sir

I have written via 'e' mail to my MP, Mr Oliver Letwin, on the subject of MPs' expenses and he has suggested that I communicate my views on the subject to you.

I have been unable to find an 'e' mail address for you and the link provided by Mr Letwin includes a number of 'e' mail addresses. To be on the safe side am sending this 'e' mail to them all and would ask that one of the recipients passes this 'e' mail on to Sir Christopher Kelly.

Background:

Firstly, I understand that the MPs' second home allowance was introduced as a "fudge" to compensate MPs for being refused, in 1971, a pay rise at a time when it would have been too political embarrassing (article by Christopher Booker, Sunday telegraph 17-5-09 refers). On the BBC's Question Time (14-5-09) Margaret Beckett MP indicated that a similar thing happened again in 1983.

It seems that MPs viewed, or were perhaps even told to view, this "fudge" as effectively a tax free salary increase which would be *forever* hidden from the electorate.

Unfortunately actions taken for the wrong reasons, as this one undoubtedly was, have a habit of coming back to haunt the perpetrators - and so it has proved on this occasion.

Secondly, for four years to our certain knowledge and probably for considerably longer, many MPs have "milked the system" unmercifully secure (they thought!) in the knowledge that the electorate would never find out how much they claimed, or for what.

MPs have fought long and hard to keep it that way but it was eventually agreed that four years' worth of claims would be published - but without the detail essential to expose "flipping", ie the address of the second home to which each claim refers.

It has been left to a Newspaper to do the job properly for the electorate.

Thirdly, this saga proves beyond doubt that MPs are a) totally out of touch with the hard pressed taxpayers funding their pay and allowances. It may surprise many of them to know that Income Tax commences to be levied when taxable income exceeds the pitifully low threshold of £6475. It may also surprise them to know that those most severely hit by Gordon Brown abolishing the 10 pence starting rate for Income Tax were never fully compensated (compensation was just 50% for those on incomes of circa £8,000 per annum) and b) either unable to comprehend crystal clear guidelines, or unwilling to comply with them.

Future Arrangements:

It seems that repayments of amounts illegally claimed (eg mortgage to which claim relates already paid off) and amounts clearly outwith the guidelines will continue for some time to come. The police may be involved, HMRC may be involved and there will surely be more resignations and de-selections.

Once the dust settles it will become clear that transparency will not be enough - the second home allowance, even with tighter "rules", just will not do!. Had MPs not fought tooth and nail to prevent the details being revealed the electorate might have been minded to forgive if not forget. As things have turned out the electorate has been contemptuously denied the information for so long that forgiving is the last emotion they feel - an appetite for revenge might be closer to the electorate's current mood.

In such a climate I see the only possible solution as Government owned flats in London available for use by MPs with constituencies beyond a reasonable travelling distance (this excludes all MPs with inner or outer London constituencies). This completely covers the need for MPs to work in two different locations.

NB: If an MP wishes to choose different accommodation in London then he/she would be free to do so at his/her own expense in exactly the same way that the electorate may choose private education or healthcare....but receive no help towards it from government. The iniquitous second home allowance must be scrapped forthwith without any raise in MPs pay - something else that would go down very badly with the electorate at this time.

The taxing of MPs should be on exactly the same basis as for the rest of the population.

And where an MP is "parachuted" into a constituency in which he/she does not own a property the MP should be treated in exactly the same way as the HMRC treats any of the rest of us when accepting a new job knowing it is beyond daily travelling distance (letter from Jane Landsborough Sunday Telegraph 17-5-09 refers).

To make it crystal clear, I believe that an MP has to make his/her own arrangements for accommodation in his/her constituency - and pay for it themselves! If he/she chooses not to have their main home in their constituency then if this causes additional travel costs the MP must pay these out of his/her salary.

Conclusion

Many, especially the MPs, may consider my proposals for abolishing the second home allowance completely without any raise in pays levels to be too harsh and unfair on, what we still fondly hope, is the majority of honest MPs.

I see it differently - those guilty of the worst abuses (in the four years we know about) will be repaying money, resigning and being de-selected. What of the other so-called honest MPs who stood by and let the system continue for year after year after year. The electorate are entitled to MPs that are awake, aware and ready to act in the face of colleagues' abuse of money taken from taxpayers. That is why I consider that all MPs must suffer to some extent if there is to be any chance of regaining the trust and respect of the electorate.

Additional Items

Clearly this particular scandal has been exacerbated by the reluctance of our MPs to deal with the matter themselves promptly and effectively.

M S Hahn

Beaminster