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The Chairman
Committee of Standards in Public Life
35 Great Smith Street
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Dear Mr Chairman

I would like to make the following observations and suggestions in respect of your review of MP's remuneration and expenses and the wider issue of the workings of Parliament. Whilst clearly sorting out the mess that is MP's remuneration and expenses I do not believe that any satisfactory solution can be found without addressing some of the wider issues surrounding Parliament as a whole.

My observations are as follows:

1. I believe that the prime principle in any changes that are made in respect of MPs remuneration, expenses, working structures and arrangements must be to ensure that we attract people of the highest quality and integrity. To do this, I believe, requires not just a good and sustainable remuneration package but a number of other qualifying criteria, which a prospective MP must attain before selection and then advancement to committee and ministerial roles.

I also believe there should be an employment contract, which clearly lays out the duties for which they are being paid as they are not self-employed. Like other employees, public and private, they must adhere to the employment law of the country in respect of such things as pensions, dismissal, compensation for loss of position etc.

There is a belief, I believe, amongst MPs that the job they are asked to do is different to anyone else in the working population yet for many people the hours, working away from home to secure employment, significant travel, renting whilst living away from home, responsibilities and uncertainty of tenure etc. are virtually exactly the same. They should therefore be employed in the same way as any other employee at a major corporate or public service organisation with remuneration reflecting contribution at all levels.

2. Like any other organisation there needs to be a structure for advancement that ensures that only those MPs with the requisite experience and knowledge can rise to the high offices of state. Currently too many of our Ministers are holding portfolios for which they are ill equipped, and frequently for too short a period, to make any useful contribution to sustainable policy making or understanding of the real public need. And yet they get a huge hike in their remuneration on appointment.

Service at ministerial level should be attained through merit and contribution rather than back door deals based upon party internal machinations. The Prime Minister should clearly be allowed to choose whom he has around his cabinet table but perhaps he should only be allowed to choose MPs who

meet certain basic criteria as part of an advancement structure similar to any other corporate organisation. The public relies on Ministers at every level to make huge decisions which will effect every aspect of their lives therefore it seems only reasonable that they should be individuals who are qualified to do the job rather than be party placemen. A simple set of requirements could easily be drawn up.

For example a criteria for ministerial or shadow ministerial appointment could be the requirement of past membership of a Commons Committee related to the area of public service for which they are being promoted. They could also be asked to spend a period of training, which should include outside of the Commons input of the area for which they will have responsibilities before fully taking up an appointment.

Such an advancement program would, I would suggest, ensure MPs seeking ministerial advancement became more active in understanding the issues they might encounter before being promoted. Such a program could lead to a more professional class of minister who specialises in certain areas of policy and therefore would be prepared to remain within the same ministry at different levels for a much longer period of time, especially if remuneration was linked to the advancement. Prime Ministers should be encouraged to maintain Ministers in post for longer periods, which maybe even a full parliament or least a minimum of three years.

We recently have seen governments re-elected two or more times yet Ministerial appointments change with ever increasing speed to satisfy personal ambition rather than the public need. A solution, which can meet MP advancement ambition whilst at the same time serving the national interest, needs to be found urgently.

The situation over the last few years at the Ministry of Defence is a good case in point where constant changes to the Minister has led to the sorry state of defence procurement, long term planning and the defence of the realm being down graded in government priorities. One of the most important ministries of state has been reduced to a revolving door of personnel to suit Prime Minister patronage.

3. The funding of Parliament as a whole needs to be put on a more professional basis. The public purse can no longer be asked to provide purely on the basis of the perceived need and the requests of those within it. A sustainable budget needs to be set by the Treasury for each government five year period on taking office and all expenditure including MPs remuneration, expenses, allowances and annual rises should be required to be funded within it. Where extra funds are required for one area in any year, savings should be made in others to meet budget requirements. The funding of parliament should be seen in the same light as other major departments of state but should be scrutinised by an independent body before going before parliament as part of the total fiscal planning process.

The cost to the public currently of government is rising at an unsustainable pace which only a total restructuring of it finances, member numbers and working practices can address. Any new deal for MPs needs to be viewed as part of the total cost and not in limbo.

4. There is an urgent need to review the number of MPs we have sitting in the House of Commons and Peers in the House of Lords however it is finally decided to restructure it. This is required not least because of the extended

number of other bodies who are responsible for governing parts of our isles and at local level, and not least the ever encroaching power of the European Parliament. However also because if we want to remunerate our legislators better, as we need to, to attain the standards we require we will not be able to afford the numbers at present. A smaller set of better paid individuals will be a better deal for the public purse and will in my view deliver a higher and more relevant standard of governance.

5. There is an urgent need to rethink the Parliamentary schedule. Sittings need to be more regularly spaced and maybe four terms of equal amount are the best option with only two/three week breaks between. Holidays as such for MPs could then be handled in the same way as the general work place with the taking leave at times more suitable to themselves. Sittings could start earlier each day and finish later for three full days a week allowing MPs long weekends in their constituencies. I appreciate that such arrangements could effect how legislation is voted upon but I am sure that this can be overcome by a more structured pairing system and it might just reduce the power of the whipping system which would be in everyone's best interest.

A few specific suggestions for change are as follows:

1. MPs should get a good starting basic salary of no less than £75,000 which through an advancement programs such as committee work could rise to £100,000 + per annum. Ministers should clearly get additional remuneration packages as at present but be better targeted to the scale of workload and experience required rather than just across the board figures. The Prime Minister and leading portfolio holders who have met the criteria to hold these offices must be as well rewarded as captain of industries however this will only be achievable by the slimming down in ministerial numbers. Only MPs who meet a basic set of more rigorous selection criteria should be able to be paid this new basic sum.
2. Expenses should be paid only on an agreed list of items with receipts. An additional payment should be made to all MPs living further than 60 miles from London to cover rented accommodation only, either furnished or otherwise, based upon a set of guidelines and market prices for London or the constituency, which ever chosen as the second home. A prime abode once agreed should not be allowed to be changed except where a person sells and moves to another main property. This would eliminate the practice of MPs benefiting from rising house prices based upon funding by the public purse. It would also be more easy to monitor such arrangements. There should be no payment for goods in kind to furnish etc. a second rented home.
3. MPs pension arrangements should be the same as other public service bodies and end salary rights should be abolished. If MPs want additional pensions then they should fund them themselves like most of the rest of the population. The lump some payments for MPs who loose their seats should be replaced by the normal payments system included in the Employment Acts. In today's world a job virtually guaranteed for five years with a possible extension of a further five in many cases puts MPs in a more stable position than a great many other working people.
4. There needs to be a Contract of employment drawn for each MP which clearly lays out what is expected of them at both parliament and constituency levels and for what they are therefore being remunerated. Terms should include being able to be forced a stand down between elections for certain written misdemeanours or non adherence to the contract. In addition

by defining the job more specifically it will be clear to the public exactly what they can expect from their local representative and a more clear understanding developed as to where in the chain of governance they sit. I believe that a more defined set of expectations will allow for a significant reduction in the number of MPs. I believe the target for reduction should be a minimum of 150 individuals.

5. To be an MP an individual should ideally be no younger than 25 years old – probably 30 is more ideal, and have at least three/five years of actual business or other kind of work experience. The current route of university to party researcher etc. should not be acceptable. The criteria must be that individuals have proper life experience outside of the Westminster environment before becoming an MP. A clear set of basic criteria needs to be drawn up by an independent authority.
6. MPs should be encouraged rather than discouraged to have outside interests again so that they get to be part of the real world however this time should be limited to no more than 15% of their total time and the activity should be agreed and monitored by the Parliamentary authorities. What they are paid for this should in no way effect their MP remuneration.
7. No Ministers or Commons Committee members should be able to work in areas for which they have had responsibilities for at least five years after they have left the role. The whole question of books, lectures tours etc. needs to be regulated much better. If MPs and ministers are to be paid at the equivalent rates as their private sector colleagues then they should not be allowed to make millions from recounting their experiences paid for by the public purse – perhaps a proportion of any income gained this way if it has to be allowed could be paid back to the Treasury.
8. MPs should get on average four weeks holiday a year increasing for long service as in other organisations and this time should be administered and monitored by the Authorities.
9. All support services for MPs should be overseen and paid by the Parliamentary officers. However MPs should be allowed to employ their spouses/partners/ family members, especially in their constituencies so long as there is an agreement /contract which clearly stipulates their job requirements, time expectations etc. for the funds paid to them by the authorities. The contracts should be reviewed annually to ensure compliance. There should be a ceiling fixed for the amount the state will pay for such services.
10. A new Parliamentary authority should be set up to administer MPs contracts, set up criteria, pay expenses and allowances etc. which should be chaired by the Speaker but be responsible to an outside independent body such as the Committee for Standards in Public Life. It should function more like an HR department and should include professionals from this sector within its team.

The above observations and specific suggestions are just some of the key issues that I believe need to be addressed by your Review. I believe the aim of the Review must be not just to find a formula for an acceptable MP remuneration package but also to provide a broad framework within which good practice throughout Parliament can be developed, individuals well rewarded, contributions expanded and very importantly costs contained. We need a more professional legislator class in today's world but we must not lose sight of the need for MPs to be able to be the grass root focal point from which people can hope to influence legislation and solve local and

personal problems. It is a rebalancing of these two elements that will in my view be key to developing trust and respect for the political class as a whole whatever they get paid.

I hope that the above will add a little something to your deliberations and I look forward to your final report with great interest.

Kind regards

I Lewis-Hinde