



Sir Ian Kennedy
Chairman
Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority
Steel House
11 Tothill Street
London SW1H
9LH
February 2010

8th

Dear Sir Ian,

I am writing in a personal capacity in response to that part of your consultation which relates to the use of public funds for the employment by Members of Parliament of family members. I was first employed as a full time House of Commons' secretary in January 1985. I was placed by a recruitment agency following a competitive interview. Subsequently my employer, Christopher Chope, and I became engaged and then married.

I continue to work for Chris pursuant to a contract of employment. It would be grossly disproportionate if I had to be dismissed by Chris solely on the ground that he was denied funding by IPSA to pay my salary. There must surely be a reasonable expectation on the part of an MP's employee that the employer will be funded to enable the contract to continue.

While I recognise that the need to ensure that there is trust in the integrity of public office holders, it is not reasonable that those who are employees of public office holders and have been recruited on merit following competitive interview should be victimised for the mere fact that they later become related to their employer. My aunt was employed in the Foreign Service at a time when, if she had married, she would have been required to have resigned her post. Surely we are not going back to an equivalent system for MPs?

The impact of your recommendation, if implemented, will put me in the impossible position that the only way that I could retain my job would be to divorce Chris. Ironically, where an employee is only 'living with' but not married to their employer, the employment would continue to be funded by IPSA.

There seems to be some suggestion that, because a five year transition period has been recommended and accepted by the Scottish Parliament, the same should apply in the

UK context. It is important to remember that the Scottish Parliament has only been in existence for some ten years. Surely, if a five year transition period is appropriate for someone employed for ten years, a much longer period would be appropriate for someone who has been employed for, say, twenty five years. Why, in any event, is it unreasonable to give grandfather rights to existing employees?

You argue that there is a need to avoid the reality and perception of conflicts of interest. But there is no conflict of interest where a person has been recruited in open competition to a job by an employer who only subsequently becomes a family member. In all the time that I have worked for my husband in Parliament, neither of us have ever received any criticism on the ground that we have a conflict of interest.

For the above reasons, I ask you to recognise that the position of spouses/civil partners who are initially recruited in open competition before they become a family member is distinct and should remain so.

Yours sincerely,

MRS CHRISTO CHOPE
Secretary to Christopher Chope MP