

MP's Expenses Consultation
Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority
Steel House
11 Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9LH

9th February 2010

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: IPSA MP's expenses Consultation

I have read and digested your consultation on MPs Expenses and wanted to make some observations. I have done this below and I hope they will be included with the responses to the consultation. I work as a Researcher to a backbench Member of Parliament at the House of Commons, but the views below are my own, and I have never discussed the consultation with her.

Section 5. Administering the expenses scheme – a new approach

5.5 – If you are to insist that all claims are submitted electronically, then there must be provision within the expenses to provide every Member of Parliament with the equipment to do this as a matter of course. The current IT provision does not necessarily include a scanner, and many MPs do not have access to one. If you are to make claims be submitted electronically then access to equipment is important for every member. This could be done by arranging through PICT to enable access to the scanning facilities which exist through photocopiers on the Parliamentary Estate, but are not currently enabled.

5.6 – If you are to insist that all MPs submit claims themselves then there should be a face-to-face helpdesk on the Parliamentary Estate where this can be done. Currently many MPs will rely on staff assistance, especially if electronic submissions are to be made. If IPSA are to insist that claims are made by Members themselves, rather than support staff, they should make allowances for their heavy workload, and the lack of time for filling in large amounts of paperwork. In any normal office environment where these sorts of expenses are submitted, there would be assistance for this.

5.8 – The concept of 'Interest-free loans' seems very bureaucratic and addresses problems which I do not feel exist. This would require another level of administration which would be costly and which I do not feel would not necessarily be of any benefit to the taxpayer in terms of results.

Q4 – I do not agree with your approach to the submission of claims as I do not feel it considers the points above.

Q6 – I cannot support the idea of requiring MPs to produce an annual report of their use of public funds without additional support and staff to assist them in this. MPs already have a huge workload, and I feel they just do not have time to do this themselves if they are to be active Parliamentarians, constituency MPs and give adequate scrutiny to legislation and Government Departments. I feel their time could be – and is currently – better used developing expertise in various areas rather than spending countless man-hours writing reports which will rarely be read.

Section 8 – Staff for MPs

8.20b – If recruitment is to be revised, this must be through providing personal and independent support to Members of Parliament and their staff at advertising, application and interview stages. If any such support is currently available, I am not aware of it.

Q14 – I think that a distinction should be made between spouses and other family members. Spouses will invariably at least play some role in the work of a Member of Parliament, and would, under these proposals, be expected to continue do this for free. I would support prohibiting any family member other than spouses from being employed by MPs, but allow spouses to remain.

Section 12 – Additional resources and contingency arrangements

12.14 – This would effectively see a cut of up to 10% in the staffing budget, by bringing employer’s contributions into the staffing budget, rather than having them paid by the House. I oppose this as staffing budgets are already allocated and staff would therefore need to take a pay cut or abandon their pension contributions. Staff may also feel an obligation not to make pension contributions to allow extra funds to be available – for instance to pay interns salaries.

I have seen no objections to the current system and think this aims to unfairly penalise staff (by reducing their salaries and threatening their pension rights) to remove a problem which does not exist and never has. I would propose allowing staff pension contributions to remain paid by the House. There is no scope for abuse of this system and thus far it has created no problems I am aware of.

I hope you will take these comments into account as part of your consultation.

With best wishes,

Tom Jones,

