

## MPs EXPENSES CONSULTATION.

Broadly the proposals including a general shift from allowances to expenses should limit scope for 'working the system' for personal or party gain.

Concerns about the proposals *as a set of rules ("binding guidance")* are;

- • It is not sufficiently clear that the guiding principles will be enforced, not just the detailed rules. Guiding principles should be broadly stated and include the traditional 'No private gain (ie profit) from public office.'
- • Under no circumstances should the taxpayer provide both a London home and a constituency home irrespective of whether the latter is in or adjacent to the constituency. An existing *second* home anywhere or an official residence should remove the need for yet another home at public expense. Where one home at public expense is justified, if profits go to the public purse, it should also bear legitimate losses. Putting homes in different or business names to circumvent the intent should be banned.
- • The Greater London commuting requirement is restricted to MPs *with a station in their constituency*. Commuting to an overground or underground station is normal. This restriction is not justified.
- • The termination grant does not distinguish between sudden loss of office and salary say at an election and planned departure, voluntary or otherwise. These should be based on some equivalent scheme (eg civil service redundancy/ retirement).
- • The ban on employment of family should extend to exchanging family members with other MPs etc to circumvent the intent.
- • The consultation document indicates that some points are still to be resolved. These need to be publicised later.

Concerns about the proposals *as a financial control* are:

- • There is no incentive to minimise cost or 'share the pain' in difficult times. .
- • There is neither a budget nor an indication of how generous or otherwise the expenses etc will be. The budget should be frugal and include IPSA and audit costs. If there had been firm financial control not laissez-faire, MPs would have stopped the discredited system long ago.
- • There is no stated provision for independent audit and full prompt public disclosure
- • There is no stipulation that the scheme will not fund lavish lifestyles or tastes.
- • Termination grants should be means-tested if the budget runs short of funds..
- • The transitional arrangements are far too slow and far too generous.
- • The scheme does not prevent 'junketting'.on other budgets.

Concerns about the proposals *as a means of restoring confidence in the Parliamentary system* are;

- • The consultation document alludes to wider reforms. The expenses issue is just a tiny fraction of the range of public dissatisfaction and existing proposals for a referendum on voting reform are hopelessly inadequate. These seem to be the minimum that the main parties think they can get away with, apart from which it will be the same gentlemen club as before.
- • A wide range of issues need to be expressly decided by the electorate including MPs salaries (which should not reward failure); honours, parliamentary privileges in their widest context; all aspects of the House of Lords, the size, functions costs and powers of both Houses; evolution of a presidential style of Government; lobbying and the influence of interest groups; the balance of power and influence between cabinet and parliament and parliament and electorate; functions of MPs including outside interests; voting reform including selection of candidates, provision for rejecting all candidates and 'recall'.
- • Any increased expenditure on parliament and political parties from public funds should come from genuine reductions in other parliamentary budgets and be further reduced in proportion to funding cuts necessitated by the current financial situation affecting the nation.
- • Running the country competently is primarily a duty, not a lucrative career.

Yours faithfully,

{sent electronically}

