

COPE 83

I welcome the proposal that the system should be open and transparent and subject to audit and assurance.

I think that staff pensions should remain as they are as previous experience shows that some MPs did not give employees pensions at all or some gave very little.

I believe that MPs' spouses should be allowed to work for the MP as it is of benefit to the public as well as the MP and spouse. Spouses work for each other in many public services eg health, education and local government. MPs' spouses are unique in that they know the MPs' views on political issues, do not need to ask how he/she will respond to queries, know the constituency well, are keenly aware of the issues that will arise and have prolonged opportunity to discuss these with the MP and are, in my experience, welcomed at functions, surgeries etc when the MP is unavailable. If the criteria for change is to address what the public want then in the case of spouses I believe that the public are happy with the status quo.

The decision to disallow spouses working for an MP was not based on any malpractice that I am aware of but on one particular case (Derek Conway whose 2 sons were on his staff payroll but did not do the work they were paid for. His wife apparently did work in Parliament and stuck to the rules. How is it possible to be sure that anyone working for an MP is actually doing what they are supposed to do? It would be equally wrong for any unrelated employee to be paid for very little work but I do not believe this has been examined. Why not? We would need a clocking in system and random checks. If the concern is that any spouses were paid more than they deserved that is a problem that can be resolved without resorting to sacking them all. If there is any abuse it can be dealt with through the courts instead of a blanket assumption that "they are all the same and they are all at it" and then pandering to the media whipped up anger by sacking innocent people.

I took early retirement from a well paid career after we deliberately agreed that this would be the best option as we wanted to sustain our marriage. MP's work entails much travel and long hours and frequent absences from the family. MP's marital breakdown rates are higher than the average and, if as all parties are so fond of announcing, family values are important then families should be encouraged to make arrangements to ensure that their marriages are sustained. I work much longer hours for less pay than I had before but it is a price I am prepared to pay and the fact that we have remained together is proof that the plan we adopted has worked. Most MPs' employees stay for about 2 years and move on. Spouses

are different and provide continuity and experience as well as practical and emotional support. Would divorced partners be allowed to work together?

I also feel that if spouses are made redundant there should be a proper redundancy package that recompenses us for the invaluable work that we have undertaken as there is in any similar employment. It states in 8.28 IPSA are confident that they can do this legally. Obviously to make such a statement implies that IPSA has taken legal advice. In the interests of transparency this advice should be made public as everything else has been.

Will they let us see this?

The 5 years or end of next Parliament cut off for spouses is wrong . Those who will be in late 40's early 50s will be in a very difficult position in finding new employment or re-training. Employers are not going to line up given the age of ex-parliamentary employess and the terrible press Parliament and has had over the last few years.