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Dear Sir Ian

May we take this opportunity to thank you for providing a forum today for the MPs' staff to present their case for better standards and more authority to enforce any new rules.

As we have been here before, we would comment that it is a mistake to assume Members of Parliament are fully equipped with the set of skills and competencies of a highly competent human resources director of a main stream large employer. This is not why they were elected and is the last thing on their mind when they arrive at Westminster. Any new system must assume very little experience or competence on the part of most MPs as regards HR skills or indeed any knowledge of what are lawful, let alone desirable, employment practices.

The variety and complexity of the work done by the staff of MPs and the difficulty in attaching a value to the skills and competencies required does not make a transparent payment system easy. Often, because of the volume of work that flows through the office of a Member of Parliament, there is a great incentive for MPs to seek to maximise the hands in their office at the cost of sticking to any set of pay scales. A one design fits all concept will encourage cheating so that in the end it fits nobody. Essentially, many staff are underpaid and over-worked as the present system allows and encourages this.

Our main point is the very real need to police the process; not only to eliminate corrupt or illegal practices, but also to maintain fair and appropriate employment terms and conditions. Regular and consistent labour audits are required so it is transparent as to who are paid or not paid and what everyone's duties are. If there are clear rules of employment; both paid and unpaid having contracts or agreed conditions of work; a time based system of checking or auditing employment is created so rules are not broken; then a fair and transparent system should be possible.

At the moment no-one checks why a particular level of pay is given or what the employee actually does for this money. There is an information gap worth some seventy million pounds of public money between the Fees Office as payer and employee as receiver easily exploited by some Members as the employer.

Simon Milner – Liberal Democrat Researcher
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