

Response to consultation

As an employee of an MP I am responding only on the issues that affect me personally and other members MPs staff. My main point is that this is a consultation about MPs expenses the idea that I am one of the MPs expense has never sat comfortably with me and I believe that the issue of staff employment and their livelihoods, which forms a very large part of MPs expenses should be addressed in a separate consultation and not hidden as a minor section of this consultation.. I would also like to point out that I am offended that I have only been given the opportunity to respond to a consultation that will affect my terms and conditions of employment in the same way that any member of the public can respond to the issue of MPs expenses. The majority of public sector consultations about staffing involve explaining the situation to staff and inviting them to respond. I was not even made aware that my employment terms and conditions were part of this consultation.

Contracts

Staff should be employed centrally so there is more scope to ensure proper standards are kept inline with employees from other industries ie contracts are issued, grievance procedures are in place, pay scales etc. MPs should be free to interview and select employees. There should be a Personnel/Human Resource department. The majority of MPs have no experience of being an employer and when newly elected have other more pressing concerns than staff.

Pensions

Pension contributions should be paid centrally and not subject to staffing budgets without provision for an increase in the staffing budget to reflect this. The current arrangements were introduced because previously pension arrangements were dependent on the individual MP. There does not appear to be any incentive for an MP to encourage his employee to make provision for their pension. MPs do not have the time to sit down with their employees and discuss their financial arrangements.

Redundancy

It is unfair to introduce a clause into an employment contract stating that because MPs may not be elected after the next general election employees should not expect their contracts to be terminated within a reasonable timescale. This would affect rights to redundancy etc. Many of my colleagues have been employed for twenty years or more and it would be unfair if their entitlement to redundancy was subject to one term of Parliament. The formula for redundancy pay should be calculated in the same way as MPs and not subject to the statutory minimum. When the IPSA are looking into MPs termination/wind up allowances they should also look at MPs staff redundancy terms.

Employment of family members

There have been abuses of the system but it would be wrong to put a complete ban on this. Many relations of MPs, who work for them, do an excellent job and it would be unfair to terminate their contract (even within a 5 year timescale) as an employee and for the constituents they help. Many people have worked in other industries for years and do an excellent job even though they do not possess the qualifications they would need if they applied for that job today. But it would be wrong to dismiss them. I would also question the legality of an employment contract that included a clause saying "Marrying the boss is a sackable offence" It would be fairer to introduce new rules that say MPs cannot issue **new** contracts to employ members of their family. It is equally unfair to say that members of an MPs family cannot be employed by **any** MP. Contracts should be open to all and someone that has been brought up in a political household, who has the relevant qualifications, could be the best person for the job.

Margaret Wells
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