

Question 2: Do you agree with our proposal to concentrate on expenses rather than allowances wherever possible?

It seems to me that essentially it's a terminology change to satisfy the public mood. On the whole I do not have a problem with it. However, there must be some guidelines in place to ensure that MPs do not deliberately limit their expenses. Members are already known to watch how close to the top of their allowances they come, if they have to watch how much their expenses this could have an adverse effect on some of their work. I am particularly concerned about the impact on staffing. It must be made clear that staff expenses or expenses spent on paying for staff are reported separately as suggested in point 8.4.

Question 3: Do you agree that there should be annual limits to the amounts that can be spent from public funds on each of the main elements of our expenses scheme, except for travel and subsistence.

Yes, but only in so far as the limits are set at a reasonable level. High enough that they do not prevent those for whom the MP's salary is the only form of income or who do not have vast external wealth from seeking election and to reflect realistic costs.

Question 8: Which of the following is most important in a long term system for accommodating MPs:

- MPs having responsibility for their own actions
- Cost to the tax payer
- No money passing through the MPs hands
- Flexibility for MPs to identify properties that meet their particular needs?

Flexibility for MPs to identify properties that meet their particular needs.

Whilst it is important that value for money is achieved for the tax payer, I do not believe we should punish MPs for the service they provide. I believe that the House authorities should not hinder the personal life of a Member. I do not believe it is acceptable to expect all MPs to live in one size fits all accommodation. Rather than stopping all MPs from having autonomy over where they live/ stay in response to the expenses fiasco, why not ensure that there are adequate checks to make sure the system is not being abused? For example if it is just them in a 4 bedroom house perhaps this is not the best use of money. But if they have young children at school in London during the week they ought to be able to live with their family. I would be unhappy to see that as a result of this chaos, the personal lives of Members suffered as a result. They should be allowed to have their close family stay with them during the week if necessary. We think it is perfectly normal for businessmen staying away with work to take their partner with them to benefit from the accommodation or to extend a business trip into a holiday. I do not believe that it should be any different for elected officials.

Question 9: When should the payment of mortgage interest to existing MPs be ended?

I don't have a specific view on this but believe it should be of a length of time not to have an adverse financial effect on an MP. Whilst it may be right that mortgage payments cease, too sudden a change is not fair. I would agree in principle with the length of a Parliament, perhaps with a consideration of the possibility of a short term following the 2010 election. Perhaps it should be 5 years or one Parliamentary term - whichever is longer?

Question 11: Do you agree with our proposed list of running costs which might be met through public funds?

Not entirely. I think some allowance should be made for the initial costs of moving for the first time, not just in terms of a deposit. If a member were to take an unfurnished rental property which may save the taxpayer money in the long term, can money be made available for the initial furnishing? Could some kind of relocation award be available for Members the first time they are elected? My concern stems again from the issue of potentially preventing those who do not have private wealth from entering Parliament or from having no choice but to live in a hotel.

I agree with the proposal to allow rental costs or hotel costs. The choice should definitely exist and we should not expect all MPs to stay in a hotel on a long-term basis. Hotel cost allowances should be high enough to enable MPs not to incur significant travel costs to get to and from and also a realistic consideration of the cost of hotel rooms in the area should be made before setting a price. No point is setting a figure when there would not be enough rooms at that price available on any given night!

Question 12: Which option set out do you favour in providing assurance about claims for travel expenses?

Option 2.

Option 1 is open to abuse but option 3 is one step too far.

Question 13: Do you agree with our approach to travel by public transport?

Yes and I agree with the exceptions you have laid out about when first class travel would be acceptable except the two where travelling to/from the home of office affects the journey length. This seems unduly complicated and somewhat pedantic. It is likely that there will be only one or two mainline stations per constituency. If a trip is being made to Westminster for work in Parliament and that journey takes over 2.5 hours by train, 1st class should be allowed, regardless of whether the MP stopped off at the office in the constituency enroute or not.

I do not agree with the suggestion that First class can only be used if it is cheaper than standard. However, I do think encouraging MPs to pre-book tickets where possible is a good idea.

Question 14: We propose to prohibit the use of public funds in the employment of family members by MPs. Do you agree with this approach?

No. I am not a spouse of an MP but know some. I think it would be a great travesty of the misdemeanour of a very few MPs meant that all the rest are not able to use those closest to them in their work. I view MPs offices as like a small business. Small businesses rely on trust and confidence amongst the staff. If an MP chooses to employ a family member, I think this should be allowed. If this were to continue, I think it would be right to ensure that checks are in place to ensure that the job that is being paid for is getting done and feel this would weed out those who are playing the system but enable those who are not to continue the valuable job they are doing.

Furthermore, has anyone considered the added benefit of spouses working for MPs of the fact that it's a lot harder to be promiscuous when you're partner plans your diary or works late with you in the office! We want honest MPs with integrity - let's not make it any harder for them!

Question 18 and 17: What impact do you believe our proposals might have on the diversity of representation in the House of Commons?
Do you believe there should be any form of payment in the event of an MP leaving Parliament, either voluntarily or otherwise?

I am concerned that the proposals will adversely impact the diversity of the House of Commons so that only those who have private wealth or who have been working in highly paid professions will be able to enter. It is certainly worth considering the costs which might have to be borne by someone coming to the Commons from poorer parts of the UK where salaries are lower etc. It would be just as bad as the expenses scandal if the result is that only the richest can realistically become Members of Parliament.

If an MP does not have wealth behind them, to severely limit what they are entitled to when they leave the House could be very negative and cause serious financial difficulty. Consideration should be made for this.

Question 19: Are there further areas we should consider which have not been referred to in this consultation?

The current staffing budget means that very quickly you get to the top of what the Member can afford to pay you regardless of longevity of service or seniority. This disincentives those with experience from staying. Similarly, the difference in work load from MP to MP is such that some staff get paid considerably high salaries compared to others. My boss employs a total of 5 people and pays expenses to an intern whereas a friend of mine is one of 2 staff members. The pay difference between my friend and I is £7000 yet our jobs are comparable.

Any proposal to ensure interns receive the minimum wage must be weighed against the total of the salary budget. Interns are sought because there is too much work to do but often not the money to employ further members of staff. To impose minimum wage on to interns should only be done if there is the money to pay for them.

We see our intern as a volunteers rather than employee. They can take time off accordingly and are free to leave whenever they want to. Should an intern get paid it would be right that they get treated as a

full member of staff serving a notice period etc. This would not be wholly advantageous as the flexibility of the system at the moment means that if an intern gets a job they can start virtually straight away. Many industries rely on internships or to get stuck into the field/ profession you do your time as an intern. Media, PR, lobbying, and even things such as teaching require you to have gained experience which is usually unpaid. We must remember that politics is not unique in this. However, the cost of living in London can be preventative for many. Perhaps one solution would be to have awards available for interns to apply for living costs if they need them?

Role of staff

Please bear in mind that staff working for shadow front bench members inevitably end up doing party political work and that to clamp down on this should only be done if serious thought is given to the workload of front bench MPs. Parliamentary politics is about party and completely taking this away seems silly in my mind and wholly impossible on a day to day basis.

Please consult widely before any changes are made. The workload of a Frontbench member is completely different to a back bench. I would be happy to provide more information on this if necessary from my own experience.

Work of Parliamentary staff is completely different in many cases to constituency and similarly the work of different MPs Parliamentary offices varies widely. This should be borne in mind to ensure that generalisation does not take place.

Finally, points 8.8 - 8.12 talk about MPs being responsible for employment practice.

MPs often have no HR experience or experience of managing an office or the staff within it. The training available is limited if not non-existent. On the whole MPs staff get a pretty rough deal on management and professional development. Saying the MP is responsible for this is one thing but only if really good resources area available.

On a related note, the training currently available for Members staff is pretty useless and whilst suitable when you are a new member, does not adequately take into account the needs of longer term members of staff and is developed by those who have no idea what it's like to work in Parliament. I am sure that the training contract is pretty big for whoever supplies it. This should be considered.

Again, I am happy to discuss this further if you feel it falls within your remit.

To close, I would like to point out that there is a massive difference in the employments rights and benefits available to members staff compared to the staff of the House in terms of holiday, salary progression, pension and other benefits such as Occupational Health. I think this needs addressing as members staff are often treated like the poor relations. If we weren't there, neither would be MPs and therefore neither would the House staff!

Again, I can provide further comments if necessary. But for example, our pension is worth half of that of the House staff and we are

entitled to much less holiday. I realise this is because they are civil servants and we are not, but I believe it gives some food for thought.

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