



**Jim Sheridan**

*Member of Parliament for Paisley & Renfrewshire North*



DCH/JS/EXPENSES

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Dear Constituent,

You have recently contacted my office with regards to the on-going concerns over Parliamentary expenses for Members of Parliament. Full details of my own expenses are being prepared by Parliamentary authorities and will be published shortly and in future all MP expenses shall be published.

I am aware of the damage that the revelations have done to people's faith in Parliament and politicians. In order that we can begin to restore trust in our Parliamentary democracy a number of measures have been announced which will hopefully go some way to assuaging the concerns of the electorate on this issue.

Firstly, the Members Estimate Committee have agreed a process, proposed by the Committee on Members' Allowances, that will reassess MPs claims over the past four years and identify those claims that should not have been made and should not have been paid out because they were outwith the rules. The Members Estimate Committee also agreed to make arrangements for repayment. The public are entitled to see a process of reparation and Members are entitled to know that this will be orderly and fair.

Secondly, the House of Commons has voted to ensure that the threshold for receipts has gone down from £25 to zero and to introduce full-scope audit under the National Audit Office. In addition to this the Members Estimate Committee approved an immediate ban on claims for furniture, a cap on interest payments for accommodation at the equivalent per year of £1,250 per month and a restriction on any changes to designation of main and second homes. It was also agreed that MPs who are married or living together as partners should be prevented from claiming more than one second home allowance.

I should like to stress that these measures are being made in the interim pending the report by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, Chaired by Sir Christopher Kelly which will come forward with its recommendations later this year.

All political parties and all politicians agree that central to any long-term reform of the Parliamentary expenses system will be a switch from self-regulation to independent external regulation. This will end the gentlemen's club approach that means that we set and enforce our own rules, and instead bring forward proposals for a new parliamentary standards authority.

The proposal on which we seek to consult would see Parliament legislate to delegate specific responsibilities to a new, independent parliamentary standards authority, which would revise and

update the codes of practice for Members of this House, investigate complaints where a Member of this House is alleged to have breached the code of conduct, take forward the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life on allowances and take responsibility for authorising claims for payment under the new allowance system. It would be able not only to disallow claims, but to require payback of claims wrongly paid out and to impose financial penalties.

The new authority would also maintain the register of MPs financial interests and deal with the disclosure of second incomes. Discipline issues that might require sanctions such as suspension from the Commons, which would have a bearing on MPs ability to perform their work, would remain a matter for the whole House of Commons through the Standards and Privileges Committee. Only the electorate or those who are themselves democratically elected, should be able to prevent a Member from doing their work in the House of Commons.

I fully support the interim measures being brought forward and am hopeful that the Committee on Standards in Public Life will report with firm recommendations which will repair the faith of the public in politicians and strengthen democracy in our country.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Sheridan', written in a cursive style.

Jim Sheridan MP

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