

Statement from the Members Estimate Committee on February 4th publications

The Members Estimate Committee has today published the findings of Sir Thomas Legg following his review of past second home claims and the reasoned judgements of Sir Paul Kennedy following appeals submitted by 75 MPs.

These have both been major pieces of work and the Committee is grateful to Sir Thomas and Sir Paul for their diligence in carrying out their tasks.

Alongside these documents the House is releasing further information including:

- A full list of repayments made by MPs to the Department of Resources between April 2009 and 18 December 2009. MPs have had the opportunity to add explanations of their own repayments;
- Details of functions and events booked through the House of Commons by MPs on behalf of outside organisations since April 2004;
- Detail down to transaction level in most cases on allowance claims made by MPs during 2008-09 and the first quarter of 2009-10 in a new searchable format. Receipts covering second home claims for this period have already been published and will be linked to the new database. Receipts relating to IEP and Communications Expenditure will be published later this year.

Today's publications are detailed and extensive and represent the honouring of the MEC's commitment to openness and transparency over allowance claims.

Parliament 's reputation has been severely damaged by the expenses affair but the decisions to undertake the Legg Review and require the recovery of any overpayments demonstrate the Commons' deep desire to rebuild trust with voters and regain its reputation.

The MEC expects that as a key part of that process any MP who has been identified by Sir Thomas as having received an overpayment will (subject to the appeal decisions) repay or make arrangements to repay those sums by 22 February.

However, the MEC will support a resolution in the House to authorise the recovery from salaries and other allowance payments of any sums outstanding after that date.

The MEC points out in its report that the recommended repayments vary in character. While some reflect errors by Members or the House administration, others are no more than end-year accounting adjustments.

The Committee also notes that Sir Paul Kennedy did not accept the idea that MPs who breached the limits imposed by the Review on cleaning and gardening costs were lacking in propriety.

In a small number of cases MPs were unable to submit an appeal to Sir Paul before the December 23 deadline because they had not received the final decisions of the Legg Review in time. The MEC has agreed they should be offered the opportunity to make an appeal and 11 have submitted an appeal.

Following public criticism of expenses claims the Commons has carried out an independent review of past claims and has taken tough action to reform the allowances system. Sir Thomas Legg has been critical of the allowances culture that developed over many years. That culture no longer exists, following the reforms made over the past two years.

The establishment of an independent body to set up and run a new allowances system – the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority – marks a new era with effective scrutiny of future claims that will command the confidence of both public and MPs.