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Mr Christopher Galley
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20 October 2009

Dear Mr Galley

Complaint against Lord Rennard

I am writing in connection with your complaint concerning Lord Rennard's claims for reimbursement of expenses.

I can report that I have completed my investigation. At the outset, I asked Lord Rennard to respond to your complaint and I have discussed it with him.

So far as your complaint about Lord Rennard's participation in the work of the House of Lords – in particular over the period April 2007 to March 2008 – is concerned, this has no bearing on the designation of his main residence. The number of times that Lord Rennard spoke and voted in the House is a matter for him. In fact, Lord Rennard's record over the period in question shows that he was far from inactive in the House and these statistics do not necessarily reflect the wider contribution which a Member makes to the work of the House. I should explain that claims for expenses arising from overnight subsistence can only be authorised for days on which a Member's attendance at the House is recorded. Your allegation that Lord Rennard did not attend on all the days for which he claimed overnight subsistence is not, therefore, well-founded; and I accordingly do not uphold this aspect of the complaint.

Turning to your complaint about the designation of Lord Rennard's main residence, the direct answer to the question why he did not claim overnight subsistence between 2003 and 2007 is that during this period his only residence was in Stockwell.

So far as Lord Rennard's re-designation of his main residence in 2007 is concerned, he has explained to me that his circumstances changed in 2007 when his wife took early retirement and he made significant changes to his lifestyle. He bought a flat in Eastbourne in October

2007 and registered this as his main residence with the House of Lords' Finance Department.

Taking up some of the detailed points which you made, he has explained to me that he and his wife are on the electoral register for both residences and that they had voted in Eastbourne in the recent European and County Council elections; that they were automatically deemed to be members of the Stockwell Park Residents Association; and that his Liberal Democrat party membership had remained in London since party rules provide for membership to be held where you live or where you work. He explained that he is, nonetheless, actively involved with the local party in Eastbourne. He stressed too that he and his wife pay council tax for the Eastbourne property.

I have also reviewed some of Lord Rennard's recent claim forms. These confirm that he travels to and from his Eastbourne address quite regularly at weekends (perhaps two out of three). He indicated that he normally resides there in recess periods (i.e. he stays there more than in his London property whilst recognising that he would often also be away from both homes through other work or holidays.) He also indicated that until recently his employment had entailed extensive periods of work and travel around the country at weekends.

In view of the assurances by Lord Rennard about the change in his circumstances and the time he spends in Eastbourne, and in the absence of any definition of main address in the current guidance to the House of Lords' Members Expenses Scheme, I have come to the conclusion that I should not uphold the complaint.

It may be helpful to point out that the Senior Salaries Review Body is currently undertaking a review of the whole system of financial support for Members, and in June of this year they were asked by the House of Lords' House Committee to consider the need for possible definitions of main residence.

In these circumstances and after due consideration, I have decided not to uphold your complaint: I have concluded that Lord Rennard's claims for expenses were in accordance with the rules and guidance on Members' expenses applicable at the time.

In line with our publication policy, we will make this letter available on the Parliamentary website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Pownall
Clerk of the Parliaments