

Written evidence submitted by Anonymous MP (2)

In general the current code seems more than adequate. Setting more rules does not necessarily improve behaviour, just creates more witch hunts and fear of which there is already more than enough at Westminster.

There are far too many pages of rules and procedures for anyone to have time to digest as a new MP and the code should be kept as brief as possible and enable MPs to take responsibility for themselves within broad boundaries.

I do believe the code should extend to the manner in which MPs behave on social media, which at present is a free for all, and some of the hostilities perpetuated by MPs online, of all parties, is frankly unacceptable in any line of work, let alone one that is supposed to be public facing.

To date I have not had an investigation, but the descriptions from other MPs are horrific. This level of fear does not create a good working environment, and there does need to be an acceptance that we are all human beings, and may make errors – particularly given how complex the reporting systems now are for expenses – it is easy to make an error – but this seems to be used constantly as an opportunity to make an example of people, and always assume the worst – there seems to be no assumption of innocent until proven guilty in the current process.

The idea that IT equipment or emails are to be further monitored or restricted in my mind is ridiculous. Our lives are completely online and no one should be expected to carry around multiple devices to avoid checking a personal email account, or making a personal video conference call. We are expected to provide and use our own phones for work purposes, so it seems to me entirely reasonable that balance be applied to our parliamentary IT equipment, indeed despite working from home every weekend I am not allowed to claim my broadband – how is any of this balanced? The world has changed, and particularly post pandemic, where many of us work more or less 24/7 regardless of where we are on portable devices, our thoughts are not in this piece of IT equipment or connection parliamentary, personal, or even belonging to another member of my family, it is how can we better serve our constituents.

Whilst not perhaps in scope, IPSA does have a bearing on our conduct, and the public's perception of that conduct. I think that our expense budgets need to be properly defined as business expenses and updated to reflect the costs we actually incur in our line of work. Far too many of us are out of pocket every month because our rents exceed the amount allocated – which clearly encourages people to claim everything else they are entitled to. Having an independent pay body that we are allowed to overrule is also unhelpful – not everyone that has become an MP has independent financial means – and I have never worked in another job where I am expected to pay out of my salary my travel and accommodation costs.

The manner in which these expenses are published is paramount to bullying. We know every single thing we claim is in the public domain – which again seems excessive. And if we as an MP make an error we are punished – yet if IPSA makes an error – that is also our fault. The systems have got out of hand, cost far too much and assume guilt rather than innocence at every point.

The baseline assumption as a new MP, seems to be that I am on the scrounge and should be treated like a child and punished at the first opportunity. If we were treated like adults we would be far more likely en masse to act like them.

I do think keeping any code of conduct brief would be helpful, and maybe being sent hard copies annually to remind us would be beneficial, or a training session that doesn't last for hours, but uses older and wiser members' experiences to explain how we may fall foul of the code inadvertently would be much appreciated. We were given so much information in 48 hours on arrival at Westminster, and then despatched to our homes for best part of two years, it is no wonder many of us are confused and make unforced errors, through ignorance, not malice. Having revisited some of the documents to complete this submission, it is clear there are reams of information that I was not familiar with.

As for second jobs – each constituency, each MP is different, and our family circumstances are also different. The experience we bring to the House of Commons is generated from our previous careers and those that choose to work in the private sector should not be penalised, when some colleagues are bank rolled by union handouts. This is not a normal job, and if we cannot be trusted to balance our work as MPs with our life outside of work the system is what is broken, not the policy. Some MPs are single with no family commitments and their time to commit to other work beyond the parliamentary and constituency is clearly greater than those who have more extensive family commitments. We all have to choose our work life balance, and many of our constituents juggle multiple jobs to make ends meet, and I do not see us as MPs as any different. Having left the EU we are no longer constrained by 37 hour working weeks – and in my entire working life, I don't think I have ever only done 37 hours and have no intention of starting now.

We are not compensated for the huge invasion into our private lives that comes with this job, the security we have to live with, or the abuse we have to tolerate and that our place of work treats us like young offenders makes the job nearby impossible.

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