

An MP's office

In 2020-21 The Taxpayers alliance published a league table of MPs by how much in total it cost taxpayers to employ their staff, run their offices and pay the MP's permitted travel and accommodation costs. The dearest MP claimed £280,000. The average MP claimed £203,000. I claimed £106,000 as the second lowest cost MP. My costs remained low by MP standards throughout the Parliament.

I always thought MPs should try to set an example and provide great service at sensible cost. During my time as an MP I saw allowances for staff and office costs go up a lot with many MPs expecting more staff to do things for them. I did my own research and made my own speeches. My two staff members helped me with constituency cases and keeping up with the voluminous email correspondence. I triaged cases and set out my views in response to new issues or problems. My staff took great trouble to follow up cases and seek a good outcome from public bodies for constituents. We set ourselves the target of replying by the next day to any email.

There was no pressure to contain costs or seek better value, until an MP approached the generous maximum allowed. IPSA did bring in rules about travel costs and provided standard form employment contracts for staff with salary bands. The only time I remember opposition parties taking an interest in my costs was to complain I did not claim enough of the allowances. They could not point to how the service I provided was inadequate owing to too few staff, as we clearly turned emails round much more promptly than the average MP and I delivered more campaigns and content through this website and frequent Parliamentary speeches than many MP s managed.

MP offices do offer better value and higher productivity than a lot of public sector administrative activity. That is the result of some cash limits for specified purposes on what an MP can spend. It also reflects the much closer scrutiny of detailed spending of these small offices compared to the disinterest in exposing waste and inappropriate spending in many government and local Council departments. It still leaves open the idea some have that they need to spend the full allowance, and can mean the MP does not do enough of the job for themselves. The more the MP does the better the MP usually is. There is nothing like reading all the emails and feedback and taking a personal interest in the cases where things are going wrong for people.

I am going to write a few blogs about getting better value from the public sector. I thought it provided a background to show that in my little bit of the public sector I was able to do what I preached, running my office for a little over half the average and for just over one third of the dearest. Most of the government departments I dealt with over the years did not manage the money and personnel well, and did not regard boosting productivity as a key objective.

I supported a Conservative policy of reducing from 650 to 600 MPs at the next boundary review, which the government then failed to implement. I proposed a

10% cut in Mp numbers down to 585, as I often represented a constituency that had considerably more constituents than the Parliamentary average without finding it difficult to give them a decent service. It would also be quite possible to cut the maximum allowance total by 25% and still allow an MP to spend 50% more than I did.