

MPs and money

Quite a lot of MP s get into trouble over money.

A few extreme individuals turn out to be thieves or fraudsters. Submitting false invoices to be paid or cheating people or the state out of money is common theft and will end in tears.

Many others are brought into dispute by their use and abuse within the rules. There are some areas to watch for those of you concerned to see value for money from your representative.

Does the MP undertake a lot of travel directly charged to expenses? Does the MP undertake many paid for and sponsored trips abroad?

An MP can claim travel expenses between the constituency and Westminster on the basis that the MP works in two locations. A company usually reimburses a staff member for travel to another branch or office. MPs can also claim for necessary trips beyond their constituency for research and Parliamentary approved purposes. There are numerous MP groups who take sponsor money to pay for meals, events and travel. MPs can push the rules a bit far about claims. They can overdo the sponsored events. Some sponsored trips become notorious for the conduct of MPs on them.

Anything an MP does for the party has to be paid for out of party funds. Some MPs want to spend heavily on leaflets and events for political purposes. They need to raise money from donors and need to report that. Some donors can become a difficulty for the MP. Care needs to be taken to avoid conflicts of interest.

The public is very critical of expenses. Most of the expenses are legitimate costs that do not reward the MP. Each MP needs an office, office equipment, broadband, headed notepaper and staff. In most people's work this is supplied by the employer who just pays the bills. No one thinks they need to add office costs to an executive's salary when working out the pay package.

What is worth probing is the total cost as a measure of efficiency and value for money. I ran my MP office with just two staff who did a great job following up casework and responding promptly to constituents. I did all my own research and writing as I needed to know what I said and why I said it. Many MPs hire staff to write speeches, social media comments and press statements. That can lead to inconsistency and confusion if staff change or more than one might produce something. It also produced much higher office costs than I charged.