

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Andrew Turner,

The Daily Telegraph is investigating the expense claims made by MPs under the Parliamentary additional costs allowance system since the 2004/05 financial year.

We are considering publishing an article in tomorrow's newspaper (2nd June 2009) which will contain details of your expense claims.

We are aware of the provisions of the statutory instrument passed by Parliament last July and will therefore not be publishing members' addresses or any other details which could compromise security.

However, as a matter of legitimate public interest and concern, we intend to publish the following details about your expense claims under the Additional Costs Allowance and Incidental Expenses Provision. We would invite you to respond to the following points.

1. In 2004 you claimed £579 for occupational health treatment for Colin Hedgley, who later won an unfair dismissal claim against you. Please could you explain in what way you felt this was an appropriate use of public money.

The welfare and efficiency of my staff is important to me and I was advised to pay for occupational health treatment as the member of staff concerned was suffering from stress, which he said was caused at work. This course of action was agreed in advance by the Personnel Advice Service at the House of Commons who also advised that this represented good employment practice.

2. The following year you claimed £2,327 for solicitors' fees following the employment tribunal that found against you. Although the file is unclear, it also appears you claimed back the cost of the £10,250 compensation you were ordered to pay. Please could you explain in what way you felt this was an appropriate use of public money.

The tribunal case was in relation to the employment of a member of staff who was employed on Parliamentary and constituency business.

It was widely reported at the time.

All costs relating to Industrial Tribunals can be legitimately claimed against Parliamentary expenses. All costs were fully agreed with the Fees Office.

In January 2006 the fees office paid me £6,471 in relation to the compensatory award of £10,250 which was the balance left in the allowances budget for the year 2004/5.

3. In April 2005 your partner and parliamentary assistant Carole Dennett wrote, in an email to the fees office concerning your bank account details: "Look forward to receiving the money - I shall then be able to spend it on lots of booze so that the forthcoming election goes in an alcoholic blur." Please could you explain whether you feel this is appropriate.

In the cold light of day this could be judged as inappropriate but it was a private joke between two people who were in regular contact.

4. In the same year you claimed £3.48 for "Vax for pets" carpet cleaner. Please can you explain in what way this was necessary for your work as an MP.

To clean the carpets in my office which is used by staff and constituents and had become grubby over time.

5. In 2006-7 you attempted to claim £424 for a Hitachi camcorder and accessories but it was turned down by the fees office. Please could you explain in what way you felt this was an appropriate use of public money.

I was planning to put video clips on my website of the work I do in my constituency. I understand that the rules have subsequently changed and expenditure for this purpose is now claimable against Parliamentary allowances.

6. The same year you successfully claimed £16 for "robin and wreath" wrapping paper purchased on Christmas Eve. Please can you explain in what way this was necessary for your work as an MP,

and why you felt this was an appropriate use of public money.

I suffered a stroke in December 2006 and a number of people kindly sent flowers. Some came to my home – others to the office and £10 was spent in Matalan on a vase for the office. The wrapping paper (3 x £2) should clearly have been crossed off the claim.

7. You also claimed £240 for a member of your staff to study GCSE maths. Please could you explain in what way you felt this was an appropriate use of public money.

In accordance with good employment practice I believe in developing the skills and confidence of my employees. Two are currently studying for an NVQ3 in Customer Service.

8. In July 2007 you submitted a £160 claim for "life coaching (4 sessions)" for Miss Dennett. Please could you explain in what way you felt this was an appropriate use of public money. Please could you also explain whether these classes were related to her treatment of employees being described by the chairman of the employment tribunal as "far below an acceptable form of behaviour".

The treatment was not for Miss Dennett but for another member of staff who was suffering from emotional problems related to family illness which were affecting her work. This was agreed in advance with the House of Commons Personnel Advice service. Relationships between staff in my office are good.

9. In the same year you claimed £20 for House of Commons cufflinks. Please could you explain in what way you felt this was an appropriate use of public money.

It was a leaving gift for an intern who had worked as a volunteer for several months in my Commons office. He made a valuable contribution towards the running of my office.

10. In 2006-7 you claimed £199 for a radio, and then £139 for another one the following year. Please could you explain in what way you felt this was an appropriate use of public money.

I listen to the local and national news in my office. When the original radio broke down it was replaced. It was not realized until too late that the original one was still under guarantee.

11. You claim the Additional Costs Allowance for the house in Newport that you jointly own with Miss Dennett. This is the house on which you both appear on the electoral roll. Neither of you appear to have any links to homes elsewhere. Please could you explain what you consider your main home to be, and what proportion of your time you spend there.

We have a flat in London on which I also have a mortgage. The House of Commons Authorities are fully aware of both addresses. At the time I made the nomination I spent more nights at my London address than the Island one so it was nominated as my 'main' home in accordance with the rules.

We do not presently see the justification for all of these claims under the rules or spirit of the rules set out in the Parliamentary Green Book.

We would also be interesting in establishing what steps you have taken to ensure there are "no grounds for a suggestion of a misuse of public money" and that "value for money" has been obtained.

I have submitted my claims to the Conservative scrutiny panel and will abide by any decision they make. All of the claims you have highlighted relate directly to my work as a Member of Parliament and to the employment and development of staff, save the £6 claimed in error whilst I was ill.

Please could we receive your comments by 5pm today so that they can be given due weight in our inquiries and properly reflected in any article we decide to publish. Please could you also inform us if you do not wish to comment.

Many thanks for your time and I look forward to hearing from you shortly. I can be contacted on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely,

Martin Beckford