

MY COMMITMENT TO STOURBRIDGE ON THE ISSUE OF MP'S EXPENSES

Statement by Margot James, Conservative Candidate for Stourbridge

Why I identify with the public mood of outrage over some MPs exploitation of Parliamentary Allowances

I have spent the last two weeks knocking on doors in Stourbridge campaigning for the European Elections. On the doorstep one issue has of course dominated all others. The revelations about MPs expenses.

Public reaction has taken three forms. Some people are very angry, some were resigned to a system they had never had much faith in, and a third group felt let down.

It is that third group that I found most upsetting. MPs have never been held in high public esteem; but there were many people who thought highly of their own MP and other MPs with whom they had some connection. But that faith, limited though it was, has been shattered.

Trust in politics will take some years to re-build. But we have to start now. So, as your Conservative Parliamentary Candidate, I am setting out the principles that would underpin my behaviour if I am elected as your MP at the next general election.

First and foremost will be my complete transparency in all matters relating to any allowances to which I may lay claim. I will publish any expenses which I claim every month on my website. They will be there for all to see on a regular basis. Anyone wishing to question me on this issue will be encouraged to do so. I will make myself available to answer any questions that may arise.

My pledge to the voters of Stourbridge

A new, more limited and transparent, system of allowances will be in place by the next general election. The sort of excesses which the current system has permitted, encouraged even, will be outlawed. None the less no system is perfect and I commit myself to the following principles:

1. Abiding by the spirit, and not just the letter, of any new system that is put in place.
2. Erring on the side of claiming less rather than more.
3. Checking all my expenses against the proviso that they must only be made for expenditure that is necessary for the performance of parliamentary duties
4. Listing all my expenses on my website every month in a way that makes them readily accessible to any constituent wishing to hold me to account.

My record of public service and why I have rarely taken allowances to which I was entitled

I have served on public and charitable bodies in the past for which some financial compensation was provided. I was a non executive director of Parkside NHS Trust from 1998 to 2002 for which a salary of approximately £9000.00 pa was provided

I declined to take this salary for the four years I served on the board. At the time I was well paid as a full time employee of my company and it was my wish to serve the needs of the NHS, without adding to its costs.

After I left full time employment I served as a local councillor on the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea from 2006 to 2008. I received allowances of £10,000 pa which I took to compensate for loss of earnings. During this period I was entitled to draw expenses for any costs incurred whilst performing my duties as a councillor. I claimed no such expenses during my time as a councillor.

Why I am backing the Conservative lead in reforming MPs allowances

David Cameron, leader of the Conservative Party, took the initiative in announcing four measures to be taken in respect of Conservative MPs with immediate effect as follows:

1. From now on the Shadow Cabinet and all MPs will publish online – for everyone to see – every expense claim they make as they make it.
2. We have outlawed so-called ‘flipping’ – the process where some MPs change what they describe as their first and their second home to make the most of what they can claim on expenses.
3. Conservative MPs selling a home for which the mortgage interest payments are currently paid by the taxpayer must confirm that if they sell it they will pay any Capital Gains Tax for which they are liable.
4. All Conservative MPs are banned from making claims for any furniture, household goods or food and related shopping. Only rent, service charges, mortgage interest, overnight bills, utility bills and council tax can be claimed.

My declaration if I am elected as MP for Stourbridge

The public anger over the manipulation of the rules governing MPs expenses is totally understandable. This has come at a time of crisis for the country, when the economy has been in meltdown. Greed, and some would say fraud, have come at a time when many people in Stourbridge face great hardship over food bills, paying their mortgage and other financial problems, indeed many will have been made redundant and are struggling to make ends meet on unemployment benefit. I identify with the problems here in Stourbridge. My roots are in the West Midlands community, I was brought up in the area and my father started his business from the Black Country. I declare if I am elected to represent Stourbridge at the next general election there will be complete transparency in all my constituency work