



House of Commons  
Committee on  
Standards and Privileges

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**Ms Dari Taylor**

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**Eighteenth Report of Session 2007-08**

*Report and appendices, together with formal minutes*

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## The Committee on Standards and Privileges

The Committee on Standards and Privileges is appointed by the House of Commons to oversee the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards; to examine the arrangements proposed by the Commissioner for the compilation, maintenance and accessibility of the Register of Members' Interests and any other registers of interest established by the House; to review from time to time the form and content of those registers; to consider any specific complaints made in relation to the registering or declaring of interests referred to it by the Commissioner; to consider any matter relating to the conduct of Members, including specific complaints in relation to alleged breaches in the Code of Conduct which have been drawn to the Committee's attention by the Commissioner; and to recommend any modifications to the Code of Conduct as may from time to time appear to be necessary.

### Current membership

Rt Hon Sir George Young Bt MP (*Conservative, North West Hampshire*) (Chairman)  
Rt Hon Kevin Barron MP (*Labour, Rother Valley*)  
Rt Hon David Curry MP (*Conservative, Skipton & Ripon*)  
Mr Andrew Dismore MP (*Labour, Hendon*)  
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The Hon Nicholas Soames MP (*Conservative, Mid Sussex*)  
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### Powers

The constitution and powers of the Committee are set out in Standing Order No. 149. In particular, the Committee has power to order the attendance of any Member of Parliament before the committee and to require that specific documents or records in the possession of a Member relating to its inquiries, or to the inquiries of the Commissioner, be laid before the Committee. The Committee has power to refuse to allow its public proceedings to be broadcast. The Law Officers, if they are Members of Parliament, may attend and take part in the Committee's proceedings, but may not vote.

### Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at: [www.parliament.uk/sandp](http://www.parliament.uk/sandp). A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this volume.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Mr Steve Priestley (Clerk), Mrs Sarah Hartwell-Naguib (Second Clerk) and Ms Jane Cooper (Committee Assistant).

### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to The Clerk of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, Journal Office, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6615.

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## Ms Dari Taylor

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1. The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards has submitted a memorandum on the outcome of his investigation of a complaint against Ms Dari Taylor, Member for Stockton South, by Mr James Wharton, of Stockton South Conservatives. Mr Wharton expressed his concern that in letters sent between August and October 2007 Ms Taylor may have misused stationery and postage provided by Parliament.
2. The Commissioner's memorandum is reproduced at Appendix 1. It was sent to Ms Taylor for comment and her response is reproduced at Appendix 2.
3. At the centre of this complaint is the question of whether Ms Taylor's letters represented an allowable use of Incidental Expenses Provision and of House of Commons stationery and postage. However, as is clear from the Commissioner's memorandum, different considerations apply to the six letters that were the subject of the complaint. The Commissioner has therefore reached separate conclusions in respect of each letter. He has also made some general observations on the wider issues which this complaint, and other, similar complaints have illustrated, to which we will return in a later Report.
4. Of the six cases the subject of the complaint, the Commissioner dismisses two and upholds a third only in part.<sup>1</sup> The Commissioner concludes that in three cases, official House of Commons stationery provided by the House and pre-paid envelopes were misused, and that in the fourth case, official House of Commons stationery purchased by Ms Taylor was misused.<sup>2</sup> On the basis of the facts as set out in the memorandum, **we agree with the Commissioner's conclusions.**
5. The Commissioner comments that "Not all these breaches are of equal seriousness."<sup>3</sup> He states that, in his view, Ms Taylor's use of stationery funded from the Incidental Expenses Provision and of pre-paid envelopes to send identical letters to constituents following two 'street surgeries' conducted by her and her constituency team represented a more significant breach of the rules than did the two other cases.
6. These were not the first occasions on which Ms Taylor had misused pre-paid envelopes and stationery purchased using the Incidental Expenses Provision. In April 2007, in response to a complaint made to the Serjeant at Arms, Ms Taylor repaid the cost of pre-paid envelopes and House stationery relating to 25 letters sent following a constituency surgery.<sup>4</sup> At the time, the House authorities provided advice to Ms Taylor, drawing her

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1 Appendix 1, paragraphs 72, 76 and 78.

2 Appendix 1, paragraph 80.

3 Appendix 1, paragraph 81.

4 Appendix 1, paragraph 31.

attention to the rules concerning the use of House stationery and pre-paid envelopes.<sup>5</sup> Although, as the Commissioner notes, the advice given to Ms Taylor was not accurate in every respect, “it was made clear to her by the House authorities that pre-paid envelopes should not be used for ‘common form’ letters to residents she had met following her street surgery.” Ms Taylor nonetheless continued to use pre-paid envelopes for such communications in at least two further cases in August and September 2007, those being two of the six cases the subject of the present complaint.

7. According to Ms Taylor, during her eleven years in the House there have been four occasions in all when a complaint has been made that she has broken the rules of the House on sending mail to constituents. In Ms Taylor’s opinion, these few breaches of the House’s complex and—in her view—“ambivalent” rules show that as a hard-working constituency Member she has tried her best to comply with them.<sup>6</sup>

8. Ms Taylor does not suggest that she does not understand the rules. We note that, although the Commissioner asked Ms Taylor to comment on the advice given following the earlier incident, and that, in particular, he invited her to tell him how she understood the rules concerning use of pre-paid envelopes and why she understood the use of such envelopes for her later correspondence to be permissible, Ms Taylor did not comment on these matters.<sup>7</sup>

9. Given the clear advice she received from the House authorities in March 2007 concerning the use of pre-paid envelopes, it is difficult to see why in August and September 2007 Ms Taylor continued to use pre-paid envelopes to send correspondence which was very similar to that in respect of which she had already been found to be at fault. **We agree with the Commissioner that “There should have been no confusion ... about the use of first-class pre-paid envelopes for such communications.”**<sup>8</sup>

10. Only approximate numbers of the circular letters sent out in August, September and October 2007 are known. Ms Taylor estimates that between 50 and 100 copies of these letters were sent on each of the three occasions.<sup>9</sup> She also states that she sent about five circular letters following ‘street surgeries’ in a twelve-month period.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore possible that, in addition to the three circular letters considered by the Commissioner, there have been other examples of misuse of pre-paid envelopes and stationery. Ms Taylor herself states in her letter (f) that “Three Saturday mornings a month I visit different parts of my constituency listening to concerns of people I represent ... [and send] a letter to all the people in the streets I visited ...” and in her letter (a) that she visits “some 250 houses during an on-street surgery ...”.<sup>11</sup>

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5 Appendix 1, paragraph 83.

6 Appendix 2; see also Ev pp 44, 55.

7 Ev pp 52–54.

8 Appendix 1, paragraph 84.

9 Ev p 44.

10 Appendix 1, paragraph 82.

11 Ev pp 41, 34.

11. In all four cases where the Commissioner has upheld all or part of the complaint against Ms Taylor, he has found that official House stationery bearing the portcullis symbol—in one case purchased by Ms Taylor, in the other cases provided through the Incidental Expenses Provision—has been misused. **We strongly deprecate the continued misuse by Ms Taylor of House stationery for political purposes.**

12. **We are surprised that an experienced Member has repeated previous breaches of the rules and has failed to act in accordance with advice given by the House authorities. We particularly regret the fact that Ms Taylor has continued to dispute parts of the Commissioner’s findings and we are very disappointed that she has offered no apology. We conclude that Ms Taylor should pay the House authorities the sum of £500 and submit an unequivocal written apology.**

# Appendix 1: Memorandum from the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

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# Complaint against Ms Dari Taylor

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## Introduction

1. This Memorandum reports on a complaint that Ms Dari Taylor, the Member for Stockton South, has misused Parliamentary allowances to send unsolicited letters for party political purposes to residents in her constituency.

## The Complaint

2. I received a letter of 10 April 2008 from Mr James Wharton of Stockton South Conservatives with six letters sent by Ms Dari Taylor between 20 August 2007 and 26 October 2007 using House of Commons crested notepaper.<sup>1</sup> Mr Wharton enclosed with two of the letters, the pre-paid first-class House of Commons envelopes in which he said the letters had been sent. In an earlier e-mail to me of 2 April 2008, he said that he was particularly concerned at the way Parliamentary resources were being used to “*target known Labour voters and to promote party political points*”. He was further concerned about the practice of writing to all people in an area both before and after a ‘street surgery’, particularly given the nature and content of these letters.

3. The relevant material sent by the complainant may be summarised as follows:

- a) A letter of 20 August 2007 to a constituent in Ingleby Barwick. The letter started: “*I was very pleased to have had the opportunity to speak to many local residents during my recent street surgery in your area of Ingleby Barwick*”. It identified queries regarding local issues which were brought to Ms Taylor’s attention. In discussing secondary school provision, Ms Taylor sets out the education spending in England announced in the 2007 Budget and adds: “***This means that cash spending per pupil, which was £2,500 in 1997, will rise to £6,600 by 2010—continuing to narrow the gap in investment per pupil between state and private schools***”. The letter also referred to: “*The Labour Government’s 10 year Youth Strategy*” and emphasized “***This will mean £184 million of new money in addition to the £495 million of continuing funding specifically available to young people***”. In the same paragraph Ms Taylor refers to plans for Romano Park: “*The park proposals were the subject of extensive public consultation by the Labour Council last year*”. The letter concluded: “*Finally, I am conscious that in visiting some 250 houses during an on-street surgery, it is not always possible to record every single issue raised on the doorstep. **If you feel that a personal concern of yours has not been addressed here, please do not hesitate to contact my office on ...***”. The letter was sent on House of Commons green crested notepaper in a first-class pre-paid envelope.

- b) A letter of 18 September 2007 to two constituents in Ingleby Barwick. The letter started: *"I was very pleased to have had the opportunity to speak to many local residents during my recent street surgery in your area of Ingleby Barwick"*. The letter notes the issues which were brought to Ms Taylor's attention during the surgery and reports on each. It is written in very similar terms to letter (a), with the exception of a new paragraph on the possible provision of a police station in Ingleby Barwick. As with the previous letter, it refers to rises in cash spending per pupil since 1997, *"The Labour Government's 10 year Youth Strategy"*, the total sums available and the consultation on the Romano Park proposals by the Labour Council. And it concludes that *"Finally I am conscious that in visiting some 250 houses during an on-street surgery, it is not always possible to record every single issue raised on the doorstep. **If you feel that a personal concern of yours has not been addressed here please do not hesitate to contact my office on ...**"*. The letter was sent on House of Commons green crested notepaper.
- c) A letter of September 2007 to a constituent in Thornaby. It started: *"I have been asked y some residents what has the Labour Government done for Thornaby, so I thought it was time I wrote a letter outlining the investment we have benefited from. Whilst I am pleased with what has happened so far I will remain determined to fight for more accepting that in 1997 the year I was elected to Parliament Thornaby had received little, if any, investment from a Conservative Government."* The letter referred to a number of initiatives in Thornaby. It commented: *"... without a Labour Government Thornaby Town Centre would not be in the process of redevelopment"* and *"In my terms whilst there is more to fight for my Labour Government, in support of a Labour Council, have delivered in a very positive way for Thornaby"*. The letter was sent on House of Commons red crested notepaper. It had attached to it a photocopied sheet carrying the Labour Party logo and headed 'Thornaby Labour: Stockton South Constituency' which started: *"Hope you don't mind but many local people have asked me—'How do I join the Labour Party?' ... so I am enclosing this freepost return Membership/Supporters 'Show of Interest' form"*. The form enabled recipients to show interest in becoming members or supporters of the Labour party.
- d) A letter of 5 October 2007 to two constituents in Yarm. The letter started: *"I am in the process of contacting residents that I know in the past have been, and I hope remain, Labour supporters."* The letter then covered a number of policy areas, including employment saying *"The Government has complemented this activity by introducing the 'Modern Apprenticeship' which is being added to by the new school curriculum .... It has taken my Government a long time to get to this point ..."*; local NHS services; deployment of the British Armed Forces in Iraq; and immigration and asylum. Ms Taylor concluded: *"In my terms whilst there is more to fight for the Labour Government has delivered in a very positive way"*. The letter was sent on House of Commons green crested notepaper.
- e) A letter of 23 October 2007 to a local Councillor in Ingleby Barwick. The letter identified the streets in which Ms Taylor and her team had spoken to residents during her street surgery. It referred to a school in the constituency, commenting that: *"... if it were not for my persistence with a Labour Government and Council there would be no*

*comprehensive school at all in Ingleby Barwick*". In response to what the letter said was the Councillor's comments about a youth café and park, Ms Taylor said: "*the only funding that is available comes directly from the Labour Government... and previously a Labour Lead Council.*" And it concluded: "*Finally, previous to 1997... the UK had a Conservative Government. Public funds were slashed and at a premium—maybe you are too young to remember.*" The letter was sent on House of Commons green crested notepaper.

- f) A letter of 26 October 2007 to two constituents in Ingleby Barwick. The letter explained Ms Taylor's use of on-street surgeries and enclosed a copy of letter (e), explaining that the Councillor had implied that she did not conduct an on-street surgery in the street of the people to whom she had sent an earlier letter. The letter was sent on House of Commons green crested notepaper and apparently in a first-class pre-paid House of Commons envelope.

## Relevant Rules of the House

4. The Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament provides in paragraph 14 as follows:

"Members shall at all times ensure that their use of expenses, allowances, facilities and services provided from the public purse is strictly in accordance with the rules laid down on these matters, and that they observe any limits placed by the House on the use of such expenses, allowances, facilities and services."

5. The rules on the use of Parliamentary stationery and postage are set out in a booklet entitled 'The Communications Allowance and use of House stationery' published in April 2007.

6. Appendix Two to this booklet provides rules and guidance on producing newsletters and other publications from the Communications Allowance. Paragraph 5 gives a list of articles not permitted for publication funded from the Communications Allowance, which includes party political activities, including fundraising or membership drives. Paragraphs 6 and 7 set out the principles as follows:

"6. The purpose of the publication must be to inform constituents about your work as a Member, consult with constituents or local groups, or provide information about how to contact you.

7. No party political or campaigning material is allowable in any part of a publication funded, wholly or in part, from the allowance."

7. Paragraph 15 sets out purposes for which the Communications Allowance must not be used, including:

- "to fund publications that promote, criticise or campaign for or against anyone seeking election
- to advance perspectives or arguments with the intention of promoting the interests or any person, political party or organisation you support, or damaging the interests of any other such person, party or organisation

- for fund raising
- ...”

8. Paragraph 23 provides as follows:

“The content of publications should not seek, directly or indirectly, to compare a Member’s party favourably with another, promote one party at the expense of another or seek to undermine the reputations of political opponents. In this context, the selective use of statistics should be avoided. This means that the following examples would not be acceptable:

‘Investment in our national health service will have trebled over the past 10 years to 2007/08.’

‘Council tax has already increased by a staggering amount since 1997.’”

9. Appendix Four to the booklet sets out the rules and guidance on the use of the House portcullis emblem, House of Commons stationery and pre-paid envelopes.

10. Paragraph 5 of Appendix Four under the heading ‘Use of the House Emblem’ provides as follows:

“The principal emblem of the House is the crowned portcullis. It is a royal badge and its use by the House has been formally authorised by licence granted by Her Majesty the Queen. The designs and symbols of the House should not be used for purposes to which such authentication is inappropriate, or where there is a risk that their use might wrongly be regarded, or represented, as having the authority of the House.”

11. Paragraph 7 refers to the use of original House stationery as follows:

“Original House stationery, however it is acquired, should not, in any circumstances, be used for the following purposes:

...

(b) in connection with fund raising for the benefit of a political party, advocating membership of a political party, or supporting the return of any person to public office;

...”

12. Paragraph 10 refers to the use of pre-paid envelopes in the following terms:

“In broad terms, the pre-paid envelopes are designed to enable you to reply to letters received and to write to individuals and organisations in pursuit of your parliamentary business. They should not be used to send mail to people on issues on which they have not previously contacted you. You should refer to the guidance note on publications funded from the Communications Allowance (such as annual reports) for help with the costs of mail to inform your constituents about, for example, news about your work as a Member.”

13. And paragraph 14 provides as follows:

“Pre-paid envelopes must not be used:

...

(c) in connection with fund-raising for the benefit of a political party or supporting the return of any person to public office

...

(h) for correspondence with constituents on issues on which they have not previously contacted you or on which they have only contacted you at your own instigation.”

14. Paragraph 18 provides:

“You are encouraged to use second-class pre-paid envelopes. First-class envelopes should only be used for priority mail.”

15. The Green Book on Parliamentary Salaries, Allowances and Pensions, published in July 2006, sets out in Section 5 arrangements for the Incidental Expenses Provision which, among other things, can be used to pay for office supplies and communications and travel. Section 5.13.1 includes among allowable expenditure: “*purchase of stationery*” and Section 5.13.4 permits postage. Section 5.13.4 identifies expenditure not allowable under this head as follows:

- “Campaigning on behalf of a political party or cause
- Communications or travel on personal or party political matters
- ...”

## My Inquiries

16. I wrote to Ms Taylor on 23 April inviting her response to the complaint.<sup>2</sup> Having set out the relevant rules of the House, I asked her to let me know how she came to use the stationery and postage for each of the six letters; whether she believed that the use of the House of Commons emblem, in particular for the letter sent with the “*How do I join Labour?*” form, was in accordance with the rules of the House; whether she believed that the use of original stationery and pre-paid envelopes was in accordance with those rules; how many copies of each letter were sent; how they were distributed and how the costs were met, including whether any of the costs were met by the Communications Allowance (CA); whether staff funded through her allowances contributed to the preparation or despatch of any of this material; whether she had subsequently sent other letters of this type using postage stamps and if so why she did so; how many similar despatches she had sent using original Parliamentary stationery and pre-paid envelopes in each of the last three years and whether she was in touch at any time with the House authorities to seek advice prior to despatch of the letters.

17. Ms Taylor responded on 28 April.<sup>3</sup> She commented on each of the examples (numbered as in the summary in paragraph 3 above) as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> WE 8

<sup>3</sup> WE 9

- g) Letter of 20 August 2007—This was the letter sent to constituents following one of Ms Taylor’s street visits. Ms Taylor said that 50 to 100 copies were sent, depending on who was at home and spoken to during the on–street surgery. As she considered her letter was a response to the issues brought to her attention by constituents, it was sent in a pre-paid envelope.
- h) Letter of 18 September 2007—This was a letter sent to constituents following another on–street surgery. Ms Taylor said that the letters were sent to 50 to 100 people: this *“referenced the number of people I or my team spoke to during an on–street surgery”*. She considered her letter was a response to the issues and concerns raised by constituents, hence pre-paid envelopes were used.
- i) Letter of September 2007—This was the letter explaining what the Labour Government had done for Thornaby. Ms Taylor estimated that 100 to 200 copies of the letter were sent. They were hand-delivered by volunteers. She noted that the photocopied form [for membership of the Labour Party] was on white paper with no portcullis used.
- j) Letter of 5 October 2007—This was the letter to those Ms Taylor hoped were Labour party supporters. Ms Taylor said that the postage for this letter was paid for by Ms Taylor herself. It was sent to 100 to 120 people.
- k) Letter of 23 October 2007—This was a response to an allegation posted on the website of a Councillor from another party. Ms Taylor said that the website did not allow a person to respond. As it was a response, consequently she had used a pre-paid envelope.
- l) Letter of 26 October 2007—This letter explained Ms Taylor’s use of on–street surgeries and enclosed a copy of her letter to the Councillor. Ms Taylor said that this was a response to between 50 and 100 constituents she had met on an on–street surgery. It was responding to an allegation made by an opponent that she had not done an on–street surgery. She thought she had the right to reply. It was sent to everyone she or her team had met. As it was a response letter, it was sent in a pre-paid envelope.

18. Ms Taylor said that red portcullis paper had been purchased by her and was used in all letters in this group that had a red portcullis [letter (c)]. The green formal House of Commons paper was paid for from her Incidental Expenses Provision (IEP).

19. Ms Taylor provided the following additional information:

- Freepost provision for her Labour Party membership form was provided by her constituency party;
- permanent staff were absolutely separate from Labour party and constituency volunteers;
- all party material was administered after hours and prepared, printed and despatched by volunteers and not her staff;
- until recently, she had not asked the Department of Resources to check the content of letters to constituents;

- she had since used the Communications Allowance to send two letters, one to 8,500 Ingleby Barwick constituents and one to 12,000 Thornaby constituents using her Communications Allowance. The content of these letters had been agreed by the Department of Resources [in March 2008].
- postage stamps were used on letters that were not Parliamentary business.

20. Ms Taylor said that she attempted to carry out an on–street surgery once a month for a maximum of five months of the year, weather permitting. The extent of the contact varied. The one-off letters of September 2007 (example (c)) and 5 October 2007 (example (d)) were the first time she had used this approach of sending letters to a section of her constituency.

21. Ms Taylor said that at all times she attempted to live within the rules concerning the use of House of Commons stationery and postage. On maybe a maximum of four occasions, a complaint had been made about her sending unsolicited mail. In response to criticism, she had paid the appropriate postage costs as recommended by the House authorities. As an MP for ten years, she believed that making a maximum of four mistakes suggested that she did all she could to remain within the rules of the House. She hoped I would accept that she used the green Parliamentary letterhead only when she believed she was right to respond officially. Inevitably there would be a few mistakes made when visiting up to 150 houses during an on–street surgery. Attempting to note accurately who was actually spoken to during the visit was difficult when a five member group was involved.

22. Given the complexity of this complaint (because of the number of different examples cited) I decided that it would be helpful if I were to produce a summary of the complaint and Ms Taylor’s response to it. Ms Taylor and I exchanged correspondence about that summary in the following weeks. I subsequently wrote to the Acting Director of Operations in the Department of Resources and to the Head of Client Relations in the Facilities Department on 10 June with a copy of the agreed summary<sup>4</sup> together with my correspondence with Ms Taylor up to that point. I sent Ms Taylor a copy of the summary on the same date.

23. The summary showed that first-class prepaid House of Commons envelopes and original House stationery paid for from Ms Taylor’s Incidental Expenses Provision were used for her letters of 20 August 2007 (letter (a)); 18 September 2007 (letter (b)); 23 October 2007 (letter (e)) and 25 October 2007 (letter (f)). Ms Taylor paid from her own resources for the original House of Commons crested notepaper and for the plain envelopes and any associated postage used for her letters of September 2007 (letter (c))— which was delivered by volunteers— and of 5 October 2007 (letter (d)).

24. The Acting Director of Operations responded on 3 July.<sup>5</sup> He noted that notification to constituents of any on–street surgeries would be a legitimate charge against the

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4 WE 10-12

5 WE 13

Communications Allowance, as would any associated cost for delivery. But in his view: “*In essence, all of the publications fell outside the rules for the use of the Communications Allowance*”. He noted:

- Letter (a) (20 August 2007)—The Department considered that this would normally be a charge against the Communications Allowance. But the inclusion of comparisons in spending since the election of the Labour Government in 1997, and references to ‘Labour Government’ and ‘Labour Council’ initiatives took it outside paragraph 15 to Appendix Two of the rules.<sup>6</sup> This communication could not, therefore, have been charged to the Communications Allowance.
- Letter (b) (18 September 2007)—For the same reasons, this could not have been funded from the Communications Allowance.
- Letter (c) (September 2007)—This letter could not have been paid for from the Communications Allowance since it dealt extensively with the achievements of the Labour Government and the Labour Council, and included a membership leaflet contrary to paragraph 5 of Appendix Two of the rules.<sup>7</sup>
- Letter (d) (5 October 2007)—The Acting Director considered that this letter also fell firmly outside the scope of Parliamentary allowances as it was targeted at known Labour supporters.
- Letter (e) (23 October 2007)—The Acting Director thought it did not seem unreasonable for a Member in these circumstances to correspond with a local councillor using House of Commons stationery, although this was more a matter for the Facilities Department.
- Letter (f) (26 October 2007)—This also was a matter for the Facilities Department. But since it was a personal rebuttal of allegations made by a political opponent, the Acting Director did not consider the letter or the enclosure of the letter of 23 October 2007, could have been funded from the Communications Allowance.

25. The Acting Director noted that in any event Ms Taylor did not appear to have charged any of the costs to the Communications Allowance. She had stated however that some of the paper used had been purchased from the Incidental Expenses Provision. Although it appeared to be a small quantity, the Acting Director advised that its use would be outside the rules on the use of Parliamentary allowances.

26. I wrote to the Acting Director of Operations on 3 July about his reference to the use of the Incidental Expenses Provision for the purchase of crested stationery for some of these communications. I asked if he could clarify his views on the use of the IEP for letters (e) and (f) sent on 23 October and 26 October 2007 respectively.

27. The Acting Director responded on 15 July.<sup>8</sup> He noted that, while this was primarily a matter for the Department of Facilities, his view was that using House of Commons

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6 See paragraph 7 above.

7 See paragraph 6 above.

8 WE 14

stationery for letter (e) of 23 October 2007 to the Councillor did not necessarily breach House rules. The rules in respect of political communications using original House stationery were not expressed in the same way as those relating to political communications funded by the Communications Allowance. In this case, he would not make a distinction between stationery obtained from the stationery allowance and that claimed from the Incidental Expenses Provision.

28. While the Acting Director accepted that it might be a fine judgement, his conclusion was that since the response to the Councillor on 23 October 2007 (letter (e)) was a personal rebuttal containing party political comment, using Parliamentary allowances to distribute it more widely was not acceptable and the letter which did so, letter (f) of 26 October 2007, was in his view outside the scope of both the Incidental Expenses Provision and the Communications Allowance.

29. I received on 12 September a response from the Director of Accommodation Services, who had acquired from the Head of Client Relations the responsibility for stationery matters.<sup>9</sup>

30. The Director of Accommodation Services' advice on each of the complaints was as follows:

- Letter (a) (20 August 2007)—This should not have been sent out using pre-paid envelopes. This was because the correspondence was in his view instigated by Ms Taylor and was not specific to issues raised by those to whom she wrote. The letter did not claim that the recipient was actually spoken to.
- Letter (b) (18 September 2007)—The Director of Accommodation Services took the same view on this letter: it should not have been sent out in pre-paid envelopes.
- Letter (c) (September 2007)—The Director noted that the rules required that a Member must purchase from the suppliers, any original House of Commons stationery to be sent to people on issues on which they had not previously contacted them. But however it was acquired, original House of Commons stationery could not be used to advocate membership of a political party. In his view, in this case it was possible to argue two alternative cases. It could be argued either that the letter on House stationery did not of itself advocate party membership, or that the letter by association with the enclosed membership/supporters form did advocate such membership. He was inclined to take the former view. But he thought that the issue should be clarified when the regulations were next revisited.
- Letter (d) (5 October 2007)—There was no breach of the rules since the notepaper was purchased by the Member.
- Letter (e) (23 October 2007)—The Director understood that this letter was in response to material about Ms Taylor placed on a website. Assuming this was the case, whilst this could be seen as an unsolicited letter, he believed the use of a pre-

paid envelope was justifiable under the rules since such use was allowed in reply to letters received. He doubted the drafters of the rules had considered how to respond to web material. He did not think his view set a difficult precedent since the use of pre-paid stationery to correspond with anyone other than the author or authors of such web material would in his view clearly fall into the category of unsolicited correspondence. But again, the issue might be clarified when the regulations were revisited.

- Letter (f) (26 October 2007)—The Director noted that this appeared to be a communication mainly dealing with giving information to residents in relation to street surgeries and the remarks made by the Councillor. It should not have been sent out using pre-paid envelopes because it was not specific about issues raised by the individuals receiving the letter, and information about surgeries was not something which could be given out via pre-paid envelopes.

31. The Director noted that in 2007 the Serjeant at Arms had received a complaint that Ms Taylor had wrongly used pre-paid envelopes and House stationery to send out correspondence following a constituency surgery. She had repaid the costs. He sent me copies of the relevant correspondence.<sup>10</sup>

32. The correspondence related to a complaint sent to the Serjeant at Arms in March 2007 from a Councillor in Stockton-on-Tees. The Councillor enclosed a copy of a first-class pre-paid envelope together with a letter of February 2007 which began:

“I was very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to many local residents during a recent street surgery in **Elm Tree with [ ] and [ ] your local Labour Party candidates for the 2007 local election.**”

33. It identified community queries regarding local issues. It included the following:

“Meanwhile, the Tories have proved yet again that [they] are still the same party they ever were. They recently refused to back more of the Government’s family-friendly measures ... . We’ve heard plenty of warm words from the Tories, but we are yet to see a policy that supports people on less income or social benefits.”

34. The letter concluded:

“Finally, we are conscious that in visiting some 250 houses during an on-street surgery, it is not always possible to record every single issue raised on the doorstep. **If you feel that a personal concern of yours has not been addressed here, please do not hesitate to contact me, [ ] or [ ] on ... .**”

35. Ms Taylor wrote to the Assistant Serjeant at Arms on 15 March 2007 saying that she apologised for sending a constituent correspondence constituting an abuse of House regulations. She undertook a street surgery every Saturday and this meant that she would knock on the doors of 150 to 200 households asking them if they had any concerns which

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she should handle. She did this with her staff and three volunteers. It was inevitable that they made mistakes believing they had spoken to people when they had not. She would send the Assistant Serjeant at Arms the postage money if she thought that appropriate.

36. The Assistant Serjeant at Arms replied on 29 March that House stationery and pre-paid envelopes could not be used for a circular letter of this kind, even following visits by Ms Taylor and her team. She said that this kind of correspondence could be sent out using the Member's Incidental Expenses Provision and, as of 1 April 2007, it could be sent out using her Communications Allowance. She asked Ms Taylor to let her know the number of letters which were sent out so that she could be invoiced for the cost of the paper, envelopes and postage. Ms Taylor could then pass this to the Department of Finance and Administration to have it paid for from her Incidental Expenses Provision. She said that her office was very happy to offer guidance and that revised rules would shortly be available.

37. Ms Taylor responded on 19 April to say that she had sent out 25 letters following this street surgery. She was of the belief that:

“the fact that you can charge the costs of these letters to one account and not to the other represents bureaucratic nonsense.”

Ms Taylor said that she was in no position but to accept the Assistant Serjeant at Arms' ruling, but she did see it “*as a complete nonsense*”.

38. Having considered the advice I had received from the Acting Director of Operations in the Department of Resources and from the Director of Accommodation Services, I wrote to Ms Taylor on 16 September summarising this advice.<sup>11</sup>

39. In sum, the advice was:

- Letter (a) (20 August 2007)—The House authorities' conclusion was that this letter should not have been sent out using paper bought from Ms Taylor's IEP account (because of its party political content); nor should first-class pre-paid envelopes from her provided stationery allowance have been used as this was not, under the rules, correspondence with constituents in connection with an issue on which they had previously contacted her. The letter's recipients did not raise all the issues reported in the letter, nor was each recipient necessarily spoken to.
- Letter (b) (18 September 2007)—The House authorities drew the same conclusion as with letter (a).
- Letter (c) (September 2007)—The Director of Accommodation Services believed there were two possible perspectives on this letter. Under the rules, Members may only use crested notepaper when the letter does not advocate membership of a political party. It would be possible to argue that the letter of itself did not advocate party membership and so could be funded from Parliamentary resources; on the

other hand it was possible to argue that, by its association with the Thornaby Labour Party form enclosed, it did do so. The Director was inclined to the first view. But I noted that this was a matter on which I would need to draw a conclusion.

- Letter (d) (5 October 2007)—The advice was that this communication did not breach the rules. It was permissible to use original House stationery bought from the Member’s own resources for this letter since the content did not breach any of the prohibitions on the use of such stationery.
- Letter (e) (23 October 2007)—The advice was that a pre-paid envelope was justifiable for this communication and the Incidental Expenses Provision was acceptable to fund the use of the notepaper, since it could have been funded from Ms Taylor’s provided stationery allowance.
- Letter (f) (26 October 2007)—The advice was that it was a breach of the rules to use pre-paid envelopes for this despatch since the correspondence was not in connection with an issue on which those receiving the letter had previously contacted Ms Taylor. The letter and copies of her letter to the Councillor should not have been funded from her Incidental Expenses Provision since they concerned Ms Taylor’s personal rebuttal of allegations made by a political opponent.

40. I invited Ms Taylor’s comments on this advice and on her earlier correspondence with the then Assistant Serjeant at Arms. I asked how she understood the rules on the use of pre-paid envelopes as explained in the Assistant Serjeant at Arms’ letter of 29 March 2007 and why she understood her more recent correspondence to be permissible.

41. Ms Taylor responded with her letter of 22 September.<sup>12</sup> Referring to each of the examples in turn:

- Letter (a) (20 August 2007)—The ‘party political content’ was not requesting support. It was responding to criticism made of Government policy. “*Surely I have a right to do that!*” Secondly, the fact that “*one, maybe two, mistakes*” were made during an on–street surgery suggested to her that the judgement that she had broken the rules of the House was harsh. By initiating on–street surgeries, she attempted to speak with, listen to and represent the views of her constituents. This was the essence of democracy and she would hope that tolerance would be expressed when the odd mistake was made and acknowledged. She was of the belief that if the intention was honourable, the act was honourable. She was “*frankly dismayed and disappointed with your conclusion*”. If she had asked constituents to agree with her or vote for her, that would have been political and, as such, an unacceptable use of Parliamentary stationery.
- Letter (b) (18 September 2007)—Her response to this was the same as for letter (a).
- Letter (c) (September 2007)—She noted the alternative views set out in my letter of 16 September. She noted the suggestion that: “*the letter of itself did not advocate*

*Party membership ... [but] by association with the Thornaby Labour Party form enclosed, it did so*". She asked whether (on this view) the fact that her name was on the letter thus meant that it was associated (closely) with the Labour Party. In that case she wondered whether it was the case that every letter she signed was believed to be political and could be defined as breaking the rules of the House. If so, every Member of the House would be seen as breaking the rules of the House.

- Letter (f) (26 October)—Her response was the same as made for example (a).

42. Ms Taylor said that no response was required by her on letters (d) and (e) where no breach had been found by the House authorities.

43. Ms Taylor said that she did not just sit in an office. She worked *"fastidiously and tirelessly to know and represent my constituents. I additionally know from my professional background that working the streets, or energetically and enthusiastically contacting constituents matters little when people define their party preference or when they cast their vote during elections. Thus the implicit concern that I am using Parliamentary stationery to further my political ends is, I believe, misplaced."* Ms Taylor concluded that she had calculated that the time taken and stationery and postage used for this exercise—which she had found *"thoroughly undermining"*, though she was sure that was not the intention—had cost the House in excess of £150, and this could be an underestimate.

44. I wrote to Ms Taylor on 25 September to acknowledge her letter.<sup>13</sup> I said that I had not myself formed any conclusions on the complaint. My letter had been an attempt to summarise the advice I had received from the House authorities. I noted that Ms Taylor had not commented on her correspondence with the Assistant Serjeant at Arms in 2007. I noted also that it was clear that she did not accept that she had breached the rules of the House in respect of the communications identified by the complainant and that I would now prepare a Memorandum for the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

45. I copied to the House authorities Ms Taylor's letter of 22 September and my response for any final comments they wished to make. There were none. The Department of Resources confirmed to me in their letter of 16 October that Ms Taylor had paid for the cost of the stationery and pre-paid envelopes used for her earlier letter of February 2007 from her own resources.<sup>14</sup> The cost was £10.79. She had not claimed from the Incidental Expenses Provision for this correspondence.

## Findings of Fact

46. Between August and October 2007 Ms Taylor sent a number of letters to her constituents, for some of which she drew on stationery and on postage funded by Parliament. The preparation and dispatch of these letters did not engage any staff time funded by Parliament.

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<sup>13</sup> WE 23

<sup>14</sup> WE 24

47. It is Ms Taylor's practice to visit, with a team of staff and volunteers, the streets of constituents living in the different parts of her constituency to listen to the concerns of the people she represents. She or her team attempt to speak on their doorsteps to all the residents in a particular area. Following each of these visits, which Ms Taylor describes as 'on-street surgeries', Ms Taylor writes identical letters to those to whom she or a member of her team have spoken, listing the issues raised during her visit to the area, commenting on them and reporting on action she has taken. Ms Taylor is in the habit of sending such letters about five times a year to between 50 and 100 constituents on each occasion, although a letter she sent in February 2007 was sent to 25 constituents.

48. Following two such visits to areas of Ingleby Barwick, Ms Taylor wrote on 20 August 2007 and on 18 September 2007 (letters (a) and (b)) to all the residents who she believed she or a member of her team had met during the visits. Between 50 to 100 copies of each letter were sent. Ms Taylor accepts that some copies of these letters may possibly have been sent to constituents who had not been spoken to. For these letters Ms Taylor used House of Commons green crested notepaper bought from her IEP account, and first class pre-paid envelopes provided from her Stationery Allowance. All work on the preparation of these letters was undertaken by volunteers.

49. In September 2007 Ms Taylor sent a further letter (c) to some of her constituents in Thornaby, in which she explained what the Labour Government had done for the area. She enclosed with it a photocopied Labour Party form, printed on white paper with no House of Commons portcullis used. The form invited people to show interest in Labour Party membership or support. Between 100 and 200 copies of her letter with the form enclosed were hand delivered by volunteers. For this letter Ms Taylor used House of Commons red crested notepaper and plain envelopes, both purchased from her personal resources. All work on the preparation of this letter was undertaken by volunteers.

50. In the following month, on 5 October 2007, Ms Taylor wrote a letter (d) to residents in Yarm whom she believed to be, or to have been, Labour supporters. It was sent to 100 to 120 people. Ms Taylor used her personal resources to pay for the House of Commons green crested notepaper, plain envelopes and postage which she used. No Parliamentary resources were therefore used for either the letter or the envelopes.

51. Later that month, on 23 October 2007, Ms Taylor wrote a letter (e) to a Councillor from another party, dismissing his allegation that she had not undertaken a street surgery. The allegation had been made on that party's website, and since the website did not allow Ms Taylor to respond, she wrote a letter to the Councillor. She used a first class pre-paid envelope from her stationery provision and House of Commons green crested notepaper bought from her IEP account.

52. Under cover of a further letter (f) Ms Taylor sent on 26 October 2007 copies of letter (e) to between 50 and 100 constituents whom she had met on the visit in question to Ingleby Barwick. Letter (f) explained that Ms Taylor had undertaken three such visits to Ingleby Barwick in August and September, and described her practice in relation to the visits. Ms Taylor sent this letter and its enclosure to everyone she believed she or her team had met during the street surgery. Ms Taylor used House of Commons green crested notepaper

bought from her IEP account, and pre-paid envelopes from her provided stationery allocation.

53. The House authorities had previously advised Ms Taylor that centrally provided stationery and pre-paid envelopes could not be used for letters in common form sent to follow up her street visits in her constituency. In March 2007, following a complaint about such letters, she had been notified that this kind of correspondence could be funded from her Incidental Expenses Provision. She was also told that, following its introduction on 1 April 2007, it would be permissible to use the Communications Allowance instead of the Incidental Expenses Provision. On that occasion Ms Taylor paid for the cost of these letters from her own resources (the cost was £10.79) but criticised as “*bureaucratic nonsense*” the fact that it was possible to charge these letters to one account and not to the other (in this case her provided stationery account).

54. In considering the examples of Ms Taylor’s use of stationery and postage which are the subject of the complaint, the House authorities took the view that it was a breach of the rules of the House to use first class pre-paid envelopes from her provided stationery account to send letters (a), (b) and (f) to those Ms Taylor had met during her constituency visits since this was not correspondence with constituents in connection with an issue on which they had previously contacted her. The correspondence was instigated by Ms Taylor and was not specific to the issues raised by those to whom she wrote. The House authorities took the view that it was also a breach of the rules to use House of Commons crested notepaper funded by the Incidental Expenses Provision for these letters as their party political content took letter (a) and (b) outside the rules for the allowance and because letter (f) enclosed Ms Taylor’s personal rebuttal of allegations made by a political opponent.

55. Letters (c) and (d) used House of Commons red and green crested notepaper respectively and plain envelopes, all bought from the Member’s own resources. The House authorities were inclined to the view that the use of privately-funded House of Commons crested notepaper was permissible for letter (c) because it did not itself advocate Party membership, although a Labour Party form was enclosed. They considered that there was no breach of the rules in using crested notepaper funded by herself for Ms Taylor’s letter (d) to Labour supporters, and that it was in accordance with the rules for Ms Taylor to use House of Commons crested notepaper bought from her Incidental Expenses Provision and a pre-paid envelope to write (letter (e)) to the Councillor who criticised her on his party’s website.

56. Ms Taylor had not sought the advice of the House authorities on the letters which were the subject of the complaint, believing there was no need to do so. More recently however she had asked the Validation Team in the Department of Resources to check two letters which she had sent out to her constituents, funded from the Communications Allowance.

57. Ms Taylor believes that she does all that she can to ensure that she works within the rules of Parliament. She used green crested Parliamentary notepaper only when she believed she was officially right to respond. This applied to all her letters except her letter on red crested paper sent to residents in Thornaby (letter (c)), although she also paid for

the House of Commons green crested notepaper she used to write to Labour supporters in Yarm (letter (d)). Complaints had been made on a maximum of four occasions in the past about her sending unsolicited mail (using pre-paid envelopes). She believed that as an MP for ten years, making a maximum of four mistakes over that period suggested that she did all she could to remain within the rules of the House. In her view it was inevitable that there would be a few mistakes when visiting up to 150 houses during an on-street surgery.

58. Ms Taylor believes that it was legitimate to use pre-paid envelopes from her stationery account for letters (a), (b), (e) and (f) as these were ‘response letters’. She also considers that the notepaper for these letters could legitimately be funded from her Incidental Expenses Provision. She accepts that one or two of the letters amongst those which she sent following her on-street visits (letters (a), (b) and (f)) might possibly have been sent by mistake to people whom she or her team had not met. She believes however that it would be wrong to conclude that because one or two such letters had been sent in error, none of the letters should have been funded from her Incidental Expenses Provision and that the postage should not have been funded from her provided stationery allowance. She believes that any political content of these three letters was necessary in order to respond to criticisms made of Government policy, which she had a right to do. She believes that it would have been different if she had asked constituents to agree with her or vote for her.

59. In relation to letter (c), Ms Taylor rejects the suggestion made by the Director of Accommodation Services (which he did not himself support) that a letter on crested paper which did not itself advocate party membership might be thought to do so on account of its association with the party membership form enclosed with it. She felt that if this approach were adopted, every Member of the House could be seen as breaking the rules when they wrote on House of Commons crested paper since all Members were closely associated with their political party.

60. I sent Ms Taylor the factual sections of my draft Memorandum. She responded with a letter of 22 October.<sup>15</sup> She accepted the content of my draft Memorandum, but she remained “*thoroughly unhappy with the persistent statement*” that she sent correspondence to constituents who had not contacted her on a specific issue. She said that the response she sent referenced issues raised on the doorstep with her by constituents who lived within the immediate vicinity. If this was not the case, the responses she sent would have been meaningless. It would additionally have been a waste of her time to “*invent issues that were of no relevance to local residents*”.

61. She also pointed out that she received countless telephone requests for assistance and advice. She had no correspondence from these constituents to prove that this contact took place. This was equally the case for the significant number of people who stopped her in the street asking for her help. She asked whether she was outside the rules in responding to these people.

62. Ms Taylor concluded that she had always remained, or attempted to remain within the rules of the House on correspondence with constituents—her record over 11 years proved that. She thought that some of the rules were ambivalent and needed to be thought through or rewritten. She had accepted that she had made mistakes but *“the amount of valuable contact (in democratic terms) I engage in makes that fact inevitable”*. She would have thought that simply charging her the *“appropriate”* amount for the mistakes in April, as opposed to the engagement in hours of correspondence over seven months that has cost the House significantly more than a repayment she would have to make as reparation for her mistakes, would have been the sensible way forward.

## Conclusions

63. This complaint provides an opportunity to consider some wider issues about the clarity and ease of application of the current rules about Members’ use of Parliamentary funds to send letters to their constituents.

64. I address these issues later in this section, but first I come to my conclusions on each of the examples which constitute this complaint.

### **Letter (a) of 20 August 2007**

65. Following a street visit to residents in Ingleby Barwick by her and her team, Ms Taylor wrote to all those whom she recorded either she or her team had met. The letter was written in identical terms to all recipients. Between 50 and 100 people were sent the letter. Ms Taylor accepts that it was possible that she or her team had not met one or two of the recipients of her letter.

66. The House makes provision for Parliamentary funds to be used to enable Members to communicate proactively with their constituents or with groups of their constituents. Since 1 April 2007, the cost of such communications, including stationery and postage, can be met from the Communications Allowance. But communications funded from the Communications Allowance must not include party political or campaigning material, including comparing a Member’s party favourably with another and the selective use of statistics. Pre-paid envelopes may not be used for communications funded from the Communications Allowance. This is because the rules make clear, in broad terms, that pre-paid envelopes are intended to enable the Member to reply to letters they receive and to write to individuals and organisations in pursuit of their Parliamentary business. They must not be used to send mail to people on issues on which they have not previously contacted the Member, or on which they have contacted the Member only at the Member’s instigation. Under the rules, communications, including stationery and postage, may also be funded from the Incidental Expenses Provision, but not if the communications constitute campaigning on behalf of a political party or cause, or are on party political matters.

67. I consider that a letter sent in identical terms to all those whom a Member has spoken to during street visits cannot reasonably be held to be a response to an issue on which the constituent has already contacted the Member (whether by letter or by other means,

including face-to-face discussion). I have no evidence that each person spoken to raised all the issues covered in each letter—and it is difficult to conceive that they would do so. There was, in my view, no need to seek to stretch the rule beyond its natural interpretation since such communications can be funded from the Communications Allowance. But neither the Communications Allowance nor the Incidental Expenses Provision (which Ms Taylor used to pay for the crested notepaper sent) can be used in respect of party political or campaigning material. I consider that the references in the letter comparing increases in cash spending per pupil in 1997 to projected spending in 2010, taken together with the other references to the Labour government and the Labour council, constituted party political material.

68. I conclude, therefore, that the notepaper used to send a letter in identical terms to between 50 and 100 constituents following a street visit by Ms Taylor should not have been funded from the Incidental Expenses Provision because parts of its content were party political in nature, contrary to the rules of the House; and that pre-paid envelopes should not have been used for this letter since it was a common form letter and each recipient had not raised individually with Ms Taylor the issues which it covered. Ms Taylor therefore breached the rules of the House with this despatch. This finding applies to all the letters sent out, not just to the few where the constituent may not have met any member of the team.

### ***Letter (b) of 18 September 2007***

69. This was a letter sent to between 50 and 100 residents in Ingleby Barwick whom Ms Taylor and her team had met during a street visit. The terms of the letter are in many respects identical to the letter sent on 20 August 2007. For the reasons set out above, I consider it was a breach of the rules to use House of Commons pre-paid envelopes for this communication. I consider it was also a breach of the rules to fund the notepaper from Ms Taylor's Incidental Expenses Provision because of the party political content of the letter (which, as with the letter of 20 August 2007, also makes references to cash spending per pupil since 1997 and to the Labour government and Labour council).

### ***Letter (c) of September 2007***

70. The only question here is whether Ms Taylor was in breach of the rules of the House in using original House of Commons crested notepaper to write to between 100 and 200 constituents about what the Labour government had done for Thornaby, enclosing with her letter a 'show of interest' form for the Thornaby Labour Party. This is because Ms Taylor paid for the stationery from her own resources and the letters were hand delivered. The rules do not allow original House of Commons notepaper to be used to advocate membership of a political party.

71. The content of the letter itself is clearly party political. It promotes what Ms Taylor sees as the achievements of the Labour government and of the local Labour council in benefiting the people in the Thornaby part of her constituency.

72. But nothing in the letter can, in my judgement, be said to advocate membership of Ms Taylor's political party, either directly or indirectly. The inclusion of a form for the membership of the Labour party certainly reinforces the party political nature of the communication, but cannot in my view be used to impute a purpose to the letter itself (namely advocacy of membership of a political party) which cannot be deduced from its content. I conclude, therefore, that it was not a breach of the rules for Ms Taylor to use the original House stationery which she purchased for this letter from her own resources and I therefore dismiss this part of the complaint.

### ***Letter (d) of 5 October 2007***

73. This was a letter sent to between 100 to 120 residents in Yarm whom Ms Taylor believed were Labour party supporters. Ms Taylor paid for the stationery, envelopes and postage for this correspondence from her own resources. The only question here, therefore, is whether this letter breached the rules of the House which prohibit original House stationery being used (however it is procured) to advocate membership of a political party.

74. I take a more robust view on this than the House authorities. I accept that the letter does not itself constitute direct advocacy. At no point does it invite the recipients to join the Member's political party, nor at any point does it suggest that they should do so. But I consider the letter clearly constitutes indirect advocacy of membership of or at least support for a political party. It is solely addressed and directed to Labour party supporters. In its opening paragraph it expresses the hope that the recipient remains a Labour supporter. The clear purpose of the letter is to maintain that support. That in my view constitutes advocacy of membership of a political party. In my judgement, the content goes at least one step further than the letter to the constituents in Thornaby discussed above (letter (c)) and in doing so, crosses the line into advocacy.

75. It would in my view be too literal an interpretation of the rule to say that since the letter seeks only support for a political party and does not directly seek membership of that party, it is within the rules for the use of original House stationery. The letter is in my view one devoted to bolstering support for a political party from its supporters list. The overall purpose of all facilities provided to Members is to support them in the conduct of their Parliamentary duties. I do not consider that a letter to supporters of a Member's political party is part of a Member's Parliamentary duties: it is a party political activity. In my view, therefore, the letter should have been sent using party or personal stationery—not House of Commons stationery, even though it was paid for by Ms Taylor. I conclude therefore that it was a breach of the rules of the House to use original House stationery purchased by Ms Taylor to send a letter to Labour party supporters, because it advocated, albeit indirectly, membership of a political party through seeking continued support for that party and because the letter was not sent in fulfilment of her Parliamentary duties.

### ***Letter (e) of 23 October 2007***

76. This was a single letter sent to a Councillor in response to his criticisms of Ms Taylor on the website of the Councillor's political party. The notepaper was funded from Ms Taylor's Incidental Expenses Provision and sent using a pre-paid envelope in response to what she has told me was criticism of her on-street surgeries by a local Councillor. I believe it is reasonable to argue that the website entry (which I have not been able to access) was the equivalent of an open letter to the Member of Parliament and that therefore a written reply from the Member to the author using a House of Commons pre-paid envelope (and a sheet of notepaper funded from her Incidental Expenses Provision) was within the rules of the House. Alternatively, it could be seen as a letter written to an individual (the Councillor) in pursuit of Ms Taylor's Parliamentary business (explaining her use of street surgeries, although the tone of the letter may seem to some quite robust). This sort of letter is also permitted under the rules of the House for the use of pre-paid envelopes. There is no specific prohibition in the rules against using pre-paid envelopes for letters with party political content, only against using such envelopes in connection with fundraising for a political party or for supporting the return of anyone to public office, and this letter did neither. It might have been better for the single sheet of notepaper to have been funded from Ms Taylor's provided stationery account, but to find a breach on that account would be a disproportionate response. I therefore conclude that sending this letter to the Councillor using a pre-paid envelope and IEP funded notepaper, despite its tone and its political references, was not a breach of the rules of the House and I therefore dismiss this part of the complaint.

### ***Letter (f) of 26 October 2007***

77. This was a letter sent to between 50 and 100 residents whom Ms Taylor had met on her street visits. It gives her views on the Councillor's criticism of her, and explains the practice of her on-street surgeries. She enclosed a copy of her letter to the Councillor. I do not believe that letter (f) could be said to be a reply to something on which the recipients had previously contacted the Member of Parliament. The use of pre-paid envelopes for this communication was, therefore, a clear breach of the rules.

78. There is a separate question of whether the notepaper should have been funded from Ms Taylor's Incidental Expenses Provision. Contrary to the views of the House authorities, I consider that the text of the letter itself to the residents did not breach the rules in respect of the Incidental Expenses Provision because its content did not in my judgement constitute campaigning on behalf of a political party or a communication on a personal or party political matter. The letter to the Councillor, however, in my view contained party political material. This is because of its reference to Ms Taylor's persistence with a Labour government and council in respect of a comprehensive school in Ingleby Barwick; her reference to funding from a Labour government and a Labour led council for a youth café, together with her references to the position on public funds under a Conservative government before 1997. Such party political content in my judgement makes it inappropriate that the wider circulation of such a letter should have been funded from the Incidental Expenses Provision, which prohibits expenditure on communications on party

political matters. Using the Incidental Expenses Provision to meet the cost of the notepaper for sending to residents in Ingleby Barwick with letter (f) the copies of Ms Taylor's letter to the Councillor (letter (e)) was therefore, in my judgement, a breach of the rules of the House.

## Overall Conclusion

79. I therefore dismiss the complaint in respect of the use of original House stationery, bought by Ms Taylor herself for her letter of September 2007 to constituents in Thornaby (letter (c)). I also dismiss the complaint in respect of the use of a pre-paid envelope and House of Commons funded notepaper for the letter to the Councillor of 23 October 2007 (letter (e)). And I dismiss the complaint in respect of the notepaper used to send the letter to constituents of 26 October 2007 (letter (f)) but not in respect of the notepaper used for the enclosure.

80. I uphold the remaining aspects of this complaint, which relate to:

- the use of House of Commons funded notepaper and pre-paid envelopes to send a letter in identical terms to between 50 and 100 residents on 20 August 2007 (letter (a));
- the use of House of Commons funded notepaper and pre-paid envelopes to send a letter in identical terms to between 50 and 100 residents on 18 September 2007 (letter (b));
- the use of original House stationery (albeit paid for by Ms Taylor herself) to send a letter to 100 to 120 Labour party supporters on 5 October 2007 (letter (d));
- the use of pre-paid envelopes to write to between 50 and 100 constituents on 26 October 2007 (letter (f)) together with using House of Commons funded notepaper to copy the enclosure to that letter, Ms Taylor's letter to the local Councillor of 23 October 2007 (letter (e)).

81. Not all of these breaches are of equal seriousness. In particular, I consider that the breaches I have identified in respect of the letters sent to Labour party supporters (paid for by Ms Taylor herself) on 5 October 2007 (letter (d)) and her use of House of Commons funded notepaper to send copies of the Councillor's letter (letter (e)) to her constituents on 26 October 2007 are less significant breaches of the rules than her use of House of Commons funded notepaper to include party political material in her communications to her constituents following her on-street surgeries in August and September 2007 and her use of centrally provided envelopes for these and her October 2007 communications (letters (a), (b) and (f)).

82. I note that Ms Taylor has said she sends communications similar to letters (a) and (b) up to five times a year following her on-street surgeries.

83. In assessing the overall seriousness of this complaint, the Committee may wish also to take into account the guidance Ms Taylor received following the complaint to the House authorities about her circular letter to residents in February 2007 following an earlier street surgery. While Ms Taylor considered the rule to be "nonsense", it was made clear to her by

the House authorities that pre-paid envelopes should not be used for ‘common form’ letters to residents she had met following her street surgery. She was told, however, that she could use her Incidental Expenses Provision, or, from 1 April 2007, her Communications Allowance for such communications. It was not made clear to her, however, that the use of that allowance would depend on the content of her letters. It is difficult to see how the content of the letter of January 2007 could have met the requirements of the Incidental Expenses Provision since the rules prohibit campaigning on behalf of a political party and communications on party political matters.

84. There may, therefore, have been some uncertainty in the mind of the Member about the propriety of using the Incidental Expenses Provision (or the Communications Allowance) to pay for the notepaper she used for the letters she subsequently sent out with party political or campaigning references. There should have been no confusion, however, about the use of first-class pre-paid envelopes for such communications.

### **Wider Issues**

85. I turn now to some wider issues which this complaint has illustrated in common with some others I have considered. These issues did not in my judgement affect Ms Taylor’s handling of the communications which I have examined.

86. I draw the conclusions which follow from a number of complaints about Members’ communications which I have considered in recent months. These others have not been of themselves inherently serious and, where the Member accepts that he or she has breached the rules, the breach has been inadvertent and he or she has taken action to correct the position, I have been able to resolve the complaint through the rectification procedure provided for in Standing Order 150, and so without a formal submission to the Committee. But there are I believe sufficient examples of Members inadvertently breaching the rules to suggest that some review of the rules in respect of stationery would be helpful to Members and their staff. I am bolstered in this view by the suggestion of the Director of Accommodation Services that aspects of the rules would benefit from a review.<sup>16</sup>

87. Based on my own experience, I would suggest that any review should include the restrictions on party political or campaigning material in communications funded by the allowances; responding to web material; and the arrangements in the House for advising on these allowances.

### ***Restrictions on party political or campaigning material***

88. I consider that restrictions on party political and campaigning material are necessary and right. It is clear from the (relatively limited) correspondence I receive, that people are concerned when they think that Parliamentary resources are being used to support party political activity. Public acceptance of the Communications Allowance in particular

depends on drawing a clear distinction between Parliamentary business and party political or campaigning activities. These terms are not more clearly defined in the published rules. I consider it would be helpful if they could be. And it would be helpful if the references to party political and related matters were made consistent across the rule book. I referred in a recent Memorandum to the difficulty of drawing a line between a Member using Parliamentary funds for their Parliamentary duties and using these funds for party political or campaigning activities.<sup>17</sup> More clearly defined rules in this respect would I believe help Members in drawing the necessary discretion, although I recognise that in practice the distinction is likely to remain a matter of fine judgement.

89. In terms of campaigning material, in my view, it would be over-restrictive to suggest that in their communications to constituents any expression of support by a Member for a particular policy or view, whether it be held by the Member or by their political party, is necessarily a campaigning activity. But there comes a point where a Member's advocacy of a particular policy or viewpoint becomes so intensive and so extensive that the communication of these messages changes from the statement of a position to proactive persuasion. That, in my view, becomes a campaigning activity. As such, it should not be funded from any part of the Parliamentary allowances.

90. I believe it would be unrealistic and unreasonable to expect Members of Parliament acting in their Parliamentary capacity to make no reference to any party political interest or concern in their publicly funded communications. Parliament is about politics and Parliamentary communications cannot sensibly be shorn of all political content. The test for communications funded from Parliamentary allowances should not therefore be whether the reader could identify the political persuasion of the author, but whether any party political reference is strictly necessary for the recipient to understand the business on which the Member has been engaged in their capacity as their elected Member of Parliament.

91. On this interpretation, party political references, gratuitously and unnecessarily introduced into publicly funded communications would be a breach of the rules. So, while the context is all important, it should rarely be necessary to identify the political persuasion of the government of the day, nor of the local council or of the individuals whom the Member refers to—for good or ill. Any reference which might be thought to be party political should be seen to be essential to an understanding of the central point of the communication and that point should not be motivated by party political advantage.

92. I consider there should be a more demanding standard set for proactive communications funded by the Communications Allowance than for reactive letters sent using a Member's centrally provided Stationery Allowance. This is because for the former the Member should have full control of the message and should be careful to use public funds to tell constituents only about their work as a constituency Member of Parliament and not about their party political activities. Provided stationery however is used to

respond to an approach from a constituent and it may be necessary for a Member to make party political points to respond effectively to that approach. But gratuitous party references should still be avoided. The test might be whether the party political reference is necessary in order to deal adequately with the issue the constituent has raised.

### ***Responding to web material***

93. This complaint raised the question of whether the provided stationery allowance can be used to respond to issues raised by a constituent other than by a letter. I agree with Ms Taylor that it would be unreasonable to interpret the rule for the use of provided stationery as meaning that it can only be used when the Member has received a letter in hard copy and I have no evidence that it is so interpreted. Members should be able to use centrally provided stationery to respond to specific issues raised with them by a constituent whatever the medium used, for example during a meeting, telephone conversation or in an e-mail or website posting. But it has to be a matter specifically raised by the constituent to whom the response letter is sent.

### ***Arrangements for advising Members on stationery and communications***

94. At present provided stationery and pre-paid envelopes are administered by the Facilities Department. The Communications Allowance (and the Incidental Expenses Provision) is administered by the Department of Resources. This means that there are separate departments advising Members, depending on whether they are using or intend to use provided stationery or stationery funded from their Communications Allowance. That seems to me less than satisfactory. I consider Members would be greatly facilitated, and the risk of inadvertent breach considerably reduced, if there could be a single source of advice for Members on all Parliamentary funded communications.

95. The rules themselves are also quite difficult to access and to reconcile. The rules relating to the Incidental Expenses Provision can be found in the Green Book published in July 2006. The rules for the Communications Allowance and use of House stationery can be found in a document issued by the then Department of Finance and Administration and the then Department of the Serjeant at Arms in April 2007. The April 2007 guidance runs to an initial seven page document, plus five annexes together running to a further 31 pages, including a new section of the Green Book. Any one issue can require the Member or their staff to check through more than one annex. I welcome the House's decision that the Green Book should be reviewed and revised.<sup>18</sup> I believe it would be particularly helpful if the rules in relation to the Communications Allowance and the use of House stationery were consolidated into two new sections of the Green Book.

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<sup>18</sup> Members Estimate Committee, Third Report of Session 2007-08, HC 578; HC Deb, 3 July 2008, cols 1095-1121.

### *Recommendations*

96. Discussions on the propriety of the use of stationery and postage may seem to some a long way from the higher ethical issues which should underpin any standards system. But Members' communications are central to the service they provide to their constituents and stationery and postage remain important in enabling them to do so. It is right public funds should be available to carry Members' communications on Parliamentary business to their constituents. But public funds made available to Members for this purpose should not be used to support them in communicating on party political or campaigning issues. This in my view is of fundamental importance in the operation of the House's standards system and in its acceptability to the public at large. The wider proposals for consideration coming out of this complaint will, I hope, help the House in clarifying these issues and in providing a clearer and more easy to follow set of funding rules to support their Parliamentary communications.

97. In conclusion, therefore, I suggest for consideration by the House, that:

- i) The necessary restrictions against using Parliamentary allowances to fund party political or campaigning activity are clarified in the Green Book;
- ii) Members should be able to use provided stationery to deal with specific issues raised by a constituent whatever the medium used;
- iii) There should be a single source of advice within the departments of the House for all stationery issues;
- iv) The rules on the Communications Allowance and the use of House stationery should be consolidated into two new sections of the Green Book.

*6 November 2008*

*John Lyon CB*

# Written evidence received by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

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## 1. Letter to the Commissioner from Mr James Wharton, 10 April 2008

Further to our email correspondence please find enclosed originals of documentation, copies of which were provided previously.

I enclose a copy of my original e-mail to you and would be obliged if it could be considered as the basis for this complaint.

I look forward to receiving your comments.

*10 April 2008*

Email to: Standards Commissioner, 2 April 2008

I am not sure how best to make a complaint about what I am concerned may be the misuse of Parliamentary Stationary and postage by my Labour MP opponent, Dari Taylor MP (Stockton South).

I attach copies of various correspondence which was sent out across the Stockton South constituency, using Parliamentary stationary and postage, prior to the “non election” last year.

Please find attached a 2 sided letter sent unsolicited to residents in Thornaby along with a “join Labour” form that went with it [letter (c) and enclosure].

A 2 sided letter sent unsolicited to residents in Yarm (from the wording I presume those who were canvassed as Labour supporters previously) [letter (d)].

A 2 sided letter that went to residents in Ingleby Barwick [letter (b)]. The local independent Councillor wrote to Dari Taylor challenging some points made and in her reply it is clear that the letter was sent to all houses in the streets she lists [letter (e)]. She seems to think it is ok to say “I was in x street one day” and use that as an excuse to write to everyone there. She then sent a copy of her reply to [the Councillor’s] letter to all the residents with a further covering letter! [letter (f)]

I have blanked out specific addressees for obvious reasons (apart from the independent [Councillor]) but have originals of all the letters in my possession.

I am particularly concerned at the way parliamentary resources are being used to target known Labour voters and to promote party political points (letter (d)). I am further concerned regarding the practice of writing to all people in an area both before and after a “street surgery” and wonder, especially given the nature and content of those letters (letter (a)).

I would be obliged if you could provide any guidance as to what, if any, course of action is available to me to tackle what I consider to be the misuse of taxpayers funds for party political purposes.

## 2. Letter (a) to a constituent in Ingleby Barwick from Ms Dari Taylor, 20 August 2007

I was very pleased to have had the opportunity to speak to many local residents during my recent street surgery in your area of **Ingleby Barwick**. During the surgery the following queries regarding local issues were brought to my attention:-

- **Traffic calming**
- **Youth facilities**
- **Anti Social Behaviour**

- **Secondary School provision**

I have been informed that Stockton Borough Council is discussing, with Ingleby Barwick Town Council, priorities for **pedestrian crossings and traffic calming** in Ingleby Barwick. The next crossing is going to be installed on **Ingleby Way** later this year. Other suggested crossings (to be agreed) are **Beckfields Avenue and Barwick Way near Ingleby Mill School**. You should also be aware that Stockton Borough Council has a Community Engineer who works with the Parish/Town Councils to indicate priorities within the environmental traffic calming budget. This can also include 20 mph speed limit signs requested by a number of residents. I would therefore suggest you contact the **Parish Council on [ ]** asking for a consultation to be carried out and to indicate your exact requirements.

As promised I have spoken to Stockton Borough Council's Anti Social Behaviour Team and Cleveland Police referencing your concerns about teenagers congregating at the area of the shops and other areas of the estate. I have been asked to give you the contact telephone number for the **Anti Social Behaviour Team Supervisor which is [ ]**. **Alternatively, you can contact your Neighbourhood Policing Team office on [ ] or PC [ ] and his team, based at [ ] on [ ]**. The above groups are working hard to **reduce anti social behaviour** on the streets of Ingleby Barwick. The belief is that by working **with parents and in partnership with the public** a reduction in anti social behaviour can be achieved. However, they need the help of residents who should contact them on the above telephone numbers to report any and all incidents of anti social behaviour.

A number of residents mentioned the fact that **All Saints School** is only a 600 place school as opposed to a larger school that would allow **all** children from Ingleby Barwick to attend. This request is totally understandable but at this time it is unattainable. The National Inspectorate has the job of **making sure that schools provisions match the child population**. When an appropriate distance travelled is factored into this equation the outcome was that Stockton Borough Council could only build a 600 place school. Conyers, **Egglecliffe, Thornaby including St Patrick's** ensured that there were sufficient school places for the South Stockton child population. A second crucial factor that informed this decision referenced the **excellent quality of education** available to local children, a quality that would have been seriously damaged if the 300 children attending both Egglecliffe and Conyers (600 in total) were taken away along with their funding. I am aware that **travel to school presents a problem** but I believe now, as I did in 1999 when the decision to build was considered, that a 600 place school with room to grow if the **child population grows in South Stockton**, is a valuable addition to the community of Ingleby Barwick. A Government policy which I believe all will approve of is the long-term ambition of ensuring that all state pupils have access to the levels of support and opportunity currently available to pupils in the private sector. In his March 2007 Budget, the Chancellor confirmed that education spending in England (which stood at £29 billion in 1997 and is £64 billion in 2007/8) will rise to £67 billion in 2008/9, £70 billion in 2009/10 and £74 billion in 2010/11. **This means that cash spending per pupil, which was £2,500 in 1997, will rise to £6,600 by 2010—continuing to narrow the gap in investment per pupil between state and private schools.**

**The Labour Government's 10 year Youth Strategy** was recently launched with the long term goal of establishing **facilities for young people in every community**, providing enjoyable and purposeful activities in their free time, which can help them develop and gain new skills. The Strategy is funded with **money specifically allocated to young people** and will support projects and facilities which the young people themselves propose. The strategy builds on the investment in Every Child Matters, Youth Matters and the Youth Opportunities fund. **This will mean £184 million of new money in addition to the £495 million of continuing funding specifically available to young people**. I am keen that young people feel that they are valuable to, and have a positive impact on, our society. I believe that this strategy, which involves an **unprecedented level of investment**, will achieve this goal. I am sure you will be pleased to hear that within the above strategy and following **consultation with young people in the area a youth café facility to include internet facilities, x-box, play station etc is to be provided within the next few months**. This is in addition to the plans for **Romano Park** which will include a **skate board park and a chariot style BMX track**. The park proposals were the subject of extensive public consultation by the Labour Council last year. There was clear support for the development, with the installation of a **new play area** identified as a priority.

Finally, I am conscious that in visiting some 250 houses during an on-street surgery, it is not always possible to record every single issue raised on the doorstep. **If you feel that a personal concern of yours has not been addressed here, please do not hesitate to contact my office on [ ]**.

20 August 2007

### 3. Letter (b) to two constituents in Ingleby Barwick from Ms Dari Taylor MP, 18 September 2007

I was very pleased to have had the opportunity to speak to many local residents during my recent street surgery in your area of **Ingleby Barwick**. During the surgery the following queries regarding local issues were brought to my attention:-

- **Traffic calming**
- **Youth facilities**
- **Anti Social Behaviour**
- **Secondary School provision**

I have been informed that Stockton Borough Council is discussing, with Ingleby Barwick Town Council, priorities for **pedestrian crossings and traffic calming** in Ingleby Barwick. The next crossing is going to be installed on **Ingleby Way** later this year. Other suggested crossings (to be agreed) are **Beckfields Avenue and Barwick Way near Ingleby Mill School**. You should also be aware that Stockton Borough Council has a Community Engineer who works with the Parish/Town Councils to indicate priorities within the environmental traffic calming budget. This can also include 20 mph speed limit signs requested by a number of residents. I would therefore suggest you contact the **Parish Council on [ ]** asking for a consultation to be carried out and to indicate your exact requirements.

As promised I have spoken to Stockton Borough Council's Anti Social Behaviour Team and Cleveland Police referencing your concerns about teenagers congregating at the area of the shops and other areas of the estate. I have been asked to give you the contact telephone number for the **Anti Social Behaviour Team Supervisor which is [ ]**. **Alternatively, you can contact your Neighbourhood Policing Team office on [ ] or PC [ ] and his team, based at [ ] on [ ]**. The above groups are working hard to **reduce anti social behaviour** on the streets of Ingleby Barwick. The belief is that by working **with parents and in partnership with the public** a reduction in anti social behaviour can be achieved. However, they need the help of residents who should contact them on the above telephone numbers to report any and all incidents of anti social behaviour.

I have received a response from **Chief Constable [ ]** referencing a police station at Beckfields parade in Ingleby Barwick. The following is a quote from the Chief Constable. "The property offered was to be charged at £20,000 per annum, a cost not budgeted for and an amount that could better be spent on **extra officers on-street**. Cleveland Police has invested in increasing their **Neighbourhood Police Model**. Residents across Cleveland, including Ingleby Barwick will see a **highly increased Police presence** with dedicated police teams." Additionally, I have contacted IBIS Councillors enquiring whether they have any funding for a police station in place, to date I have not received a response.

A number of residents mentioned the fact that **All Saints School** is only a 600 place school as opposed to a larger school that would allow **all** children from Ingleby Barwick to attend. This request is totally understandable but at this time it is unattainable. The National Inspectorate has the job of **making sure that schools provisions match the child population**. When an appropriate distance travelled is factored into this equation the outcome was that Stockton Borough Council could only build a 600 place school. Conyers, **Eggescliffe, Thornaby including St Patrick's** ensured that there were sufficient school places for the South Stockton child population. A second crucial factor that informed this decision referenced the **excellent quality of education** available to local children, a quality that would have been seriously damaged if the 300 children attending both Eggescliffe and Conyers (600 in total) were taken away along with their funding. I am aware that **travel to school presents a problem** but I believe now, as I did in 1999 when the decision to build was considered, that a 600 place school with room to grow if the **child population grows in South Stockton**, is a valuable addition to the community of Ingleby Barwick. A Government policy which I believe all will approve of is the long-term ambition of ensuring that all state pupils have access to the levels of support and opportunity currently available to pupils in the private sector. In his March 2007 Budget, the Chancellor confirmed that education spending in England (which stood at £29 billion in 1997 and is £64 billion in 2007/8) will rise to £67 billion in 2008/9, £70 billion in 2009/10 and £74 billion in 2010/11. **This means that**

**cash spending per pupil, which was £2,500 in 1997, will rise to £6,600 by 2010—continuing to narrow the gap in investment per pupil between state and private schools.**

The Labour Government's 10 year Youth Strategy was recently launched with the long term goal of establishing **facilities for young people in every community**, providing enjoyable and purposeful activities in their free time, which can help them develop and gain new skills. The Strategy is funded with **money specifically allocated to young people** and will support projects and facilities which the young people themselves propose. The strategy builds on the investment in Every Child Matters, Youth Matters and the Youth Opportunities fund. **This will mean £184 million of new money in addition to the £495 million of continuing funding specifically available to young people.** I am keen that young people feel that they are valuable to, and have a positive impact on, our society. I believe that this strategy, which involves an **unprecedented level of investment**, will achieve this goal. I am sure you will be pleased to hear that within the above strategy and following **consultation with young people in the area a youth café facility to include internet facilities, x-box, play station etc is to be provided within the next few months.** This is in addition to the plans for **Romano Park** which will include a **skate board park and a chariot style BMX track.** The park proposals were the subject of extensive public consultation by the Labour Council last year. There was clear support for the development, with the installation of a **new play area** identified as a priority.

Finally, I am conscious that in visiting some 250 houses during an on-street surgery, it is not always possible to record every single issue raised on the doorstep. **If you feel that a personal concern of yours has not been addressed here, please do not hesitate to contact my office on [ ].**

*18 September 2007*

#### **4. Letter (c) to a constituent in Thornaby from Ms Dari Taylor MP, September 2007**

I have been asked by some residents what has the Labour Government done for Thornaby, so I thought it was time I wrote a letter outlining the investment we have benefited from. Whilst I am pleased with what has happened so far I will remain determined to fight for more accepting that in 1997 the year I was elected to Parliament Thornaby had received little, if any, investment from a Conservative Government.

Some of the investment in Thornaby is easy to see:

- **Mandale Regeneration Project.** In funding terms the Government's body known as the Housing Corporation, along with a private developer (Haslam Homes) has funded this regeneration to the tune of £37 million. Of course without the tremendous hard work of the officers of the Local Authority and the support of a Labour Council this project of excellent houses supported by a very pleasing environment would not have taken place. This is in addition to £25 million invested in council homes to meet a decent standard specification.
- **Alleygates erected mostly in Victoria achieving a much safer local environment.** To date the Labour Council has invested £189,000 in gates. This has been complemented with Government investment which has achieved five dedicated Police Community Support Officers, four Enforcement Officers and seven Community Police Officers. The joy for me is that the burglary rate has reduced by 59% since 2003.
- **Three Sure Start Centres.** These provide childcare, early years education, health services and support and advice for parents. We have seen significant investment in three old school buildings, spread throughout Thornaby, which some residents thought would be demolished. A visit to any of them is highly recommended. Any parent who hasn't considered taking their young child to one is, in my terms, missing out. Sure Start Stockton has been told by the Government that they will receive a further £19.6 million to expand this service. This is good news, as we all know everyone deserves a good start in life.
- **A New Medical Centre which received £4 million investment from the Government.** This as you know brought two practices and a pharmacy together and additionally provides minor surgery services, opticians, podiatry services, physiotherapy, psychiatric and counselling services.

- **Increasing quality in all local schools.** The investment has been significant with £54 million spent on Primary education in Thornaby since 1997. Teachers, and we are lucky in Thornaby because these are highly professional, no longer need to run jumble sales with parents associations to provide books etc. In ten years they have achieved a 20-30% increase in their pupil's number and letter capabilities (Maths and English as we older ones would say!)—a tremendous achievement. In both Secondary Schools equal success is seen where young 16 year olds more and more achieve five A\*- C GCSE passes. In 2006 the figure was 36% in 2007 this figure has increased to 46%. This again is a tremendous achievement. This success is to be further supported. The Government has made a commitment to increase the spending on each child so that it is equal to the amount spent on children in private education. Just to prove to you Labour does what it says—in 1997 £2,360 was spent on each pupil and in 2007 this had increased by 88% to £4,430 per pupil, by 2010 this will be over £6000 per pupil. Again, in my terms essential investment if we want, as I do, to develop each young persons talent giving them a future from which the whole community benefits.

I haven't mentioned employment. The fact is 96.9% of people are now in paid employment many supported by the Government through Tax Credits that can be worth between £60-£150 a week. This means the overall economy of Thomaby is significantly more healthy than in 1997, more people with money to spend. This leads me to say that without a Labour Government Thornaby Town Centre would not be in the process of redevelopment. The fact is shops only stay open when people have money to spend. Thanks must go to the Local Council who has worked tirelessly for ten years with the developers Thornfields. Just in case you thought otherwise I too have been involved with the developers from the start and remain as helpful as I am requested to be.

I have listed the main investment that Thornaby has benefited from. In my terms whilst there is more to fight for my Labour Government, in support of a Labour Council, have delivered in a very positive way for Thornaby. I am sure that you will have a list of policies that you want to see Thornaby benefiting from—please drop me a line. I will, as you know, positively respond to all suggestions.

*September 2007*



- Stockton South Constituency

Dear Resident

Hope you don't mind but many local people have asked me— 'How do I join the Labour Party?'....so I am enclosing this freepost return Membership/Supporters "Show of Interest" form.

If you are interested—please return this form to me and I will delighted to formally make you a member or supporter.

**Member or Supporter of the Labour Party**

Please tick as appropriate

Membership                       Supporter

If you wish to become a member the cost is:

£3 per month for someone in full time employment

£1 per month for unwaged, pensioners, young people under 22 and students.

If you wish to be a supporter there is no cost, simply tick the supporters box.

As a member or supporter you get: Magazines - newsletters - Invitation to Policy Forums where you can have a direct say on Labour Party Policy - invitations to socials.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Name:.....

Address:.....

.....

Telephone Number:.....

**Freepost 9964  
109 Lanehouse Road  
Thornaby-on-Tees  
TS17 8AB**

## 5. Letter (d) to two constituents in Yarm from Ms Dari Taylor MP, 5 October 2007

I am in the process of contacting residents that I know in the past have been, and I hope remain, Labour supporters. I am aware that I have not been in touch with you as much as you or I would like. However, as I have 69,000 constituents to contact the logistics of this presents serious difficulties for me in retaining regular contact.

I have, as you will hopefully remember, published an annual Parliamentary report which will have been delivered to your home. If you didn't see the 2007 report please let me know and I will send you a copy. In the report I outlined my major activities and main parliamentary involvement over the last year.

In policy terms there are difficult and easier areas. The easier areas first. I have been very pleased with the employment activity in our constituency. We have seen a considerable rise in the numbers in paid employment. This is especially the case for young people where only 1.1% of the 3.1% registered unemployed are young people. The Government has complemented this activity by introducing the "Modern Apprenticeship" which is now being added to by the new school curriculum which will provide vocational education for those who choose this route from the age of 14 to 19. It has taken my Government a long time to get to this point but again I hope you would accept that the first priority had to be to sort out problems that reflect the fact that in 1997 just over 50% of those seeking work, that is registered unemployed, were either illiterate or semi-literate. This group had similar problems with numeracy. Today we are seeing a marked improvement in primary school results with regard to both of these areas of education and clearly this is giving all 11 year olds a much better start in secondary schools This can be seen for example in Thornaby where a 10% increase in GCSE A\* to C results was achieved this year.

Whilst there is a fair amount of criticism about the NHS I would say that from my fairly extensive experience this is unfair. It is not just the fact that we have seen a significant investment in both University Hospital North Tees and James Cook—Middlesbrough, but we have witnessed through the LIFT programme a movement of medical services into areas of high deprivation such as Parkfield and Thornaby, thus engaging much more convincingly with local people and as such improving their health and lifestyle. It is very easy to say that £30 billion has been invested nationally in the NHS as though this was the whole picture.

The fact is that the situation is significantly better in terms of the way in which cataract, cancer, orthopaedic (hip/knee replacement) services have changed the lives of many locally, especially the elderly, in the most profound way. Of course, the problem referencing dental services remains but I think we are winning on this policy area in Stockton South.

Now to the more difficult areas. The most obvious references the deployment of the British Armed forces in Iraq. I voted to deploy troops in this area. I thought that this was the prime way to get rid of Saddam Hussein and a regime of tyranny and threat. I am very disappointed to say to you that whilst I saw the deployment as a success, the fact is in terms of peace and security the achievement is significantly less. Winning the hearts and minds of Shias and Sunnis and stopping the insurgency coming mainly from Iran has eluded the multi allied task force. It is time that this policy was reviewed and I believe the Prime Minister will be considering how to reduce the numbers deployed whilst remaining supportive of the Civil Iraqi authorities. Sadly for all of us we have invested a considerable amount in Iraq in terms of people and money and achieved less than was ever considered to be possible.

A final point for the moment references immigration and asylum. The fact is that immigrants contribute a net increase to Britain's GDP of approximately £2.5 billion per annum and comprise 2% of Britain's workforce. Asylum seekers tell the most horrendous stories that describe their experiences of multi abuse which includes rape. They also outline ways in which they would like to be part, even for a short time, of life in the UK. Some are professional people, many have skills and most have the desire to live in a peaceful country and be a part of a supportive community. I have been very disappointed that my Government has been more inclined to support the Daily Mail's version than my actual experience of Immigration and Asylum.

In my terms whilst there is more to fight for the Labour Government has delivered in a very positive way. I have highlighted only a few issues and policies leaving out important areas, such as, climate change and Third World Debt. I will of course respond to any policy ideas that you want to see introduced or changed.

*5 October 2007*

## **6. Letter (e) to a Councillor in Ingleby Barwick from Ms Dari Taylor MP, 23 October 2007**

Firstly the letter to constituents was not standard it was in response to an On-Street Surgery that I, along with my team did. We spoke to residents in:

Priorwood Gardens

- Rowallane Gardens
- Acorn Bank
- Rainham Close
- Owletts
- Springhill Grove
- Grosvenor Court
- Strome Close

Nunnington

- Benningborough Gardens
- Fountains Avenue
- Marsden Close
- Avebury Close
- Malham Grove

Brecon Crescent

- Sugar Loaf Close
- Dinas Court
- Cennon Grove

In all of these streets 50% of the residents were at home and in some cases more than 70% were at home. I more than object to you imputing my integrity.

Point two. I believe in the Politics of reality and truth. All Saints, according to the National Inspectorate of Schools, will remain a 600 place school. This will only change if the child population in Thornaby, Ingleby Barwick, Yarm and Eaglescliffe increases. I may not like, you will clearly not like, the fact that an Independent Inspectorate will determine school building. For the record if it was not for my persistence with a Labour Government and Council there would be no comprehensive school at all in Ingleby Barwick. A fact that is on record.

Point three. In response to your comments on the Youth Café and Romano Park, the only funding that is available comes directly from the Labour Government (through Youth Matters and the Youth Opportunities Fund) and previously a Labour Lead Council. If of course you have private funding which I have not been made aware of, then please tell me and I will retract my statement.

Finally, previous to 1997 (ten years as opposed to your statement of twenty six) the UK had a Conservative Government. Public funds were slashed and at a premium—maybe you are too young to remember.

I will be putting all this information out in Ingleby Barwick. Thank you for giving me the opportunity.

*23 October 2007*

## 7. Letter (f) to two constituents in Ingleby Barwick from Ms Dari Taylor MP, 26 October 2007

Please find enclosed a response I have sent to one of your [ ] Councillors who implies that I did not conduct an on-street surgery in your street. I most certainly believe in the politics of truth and delivery.

As you can see from my letter I strongly object to my integrity being questioned. The three on-street surgeries I organised took place in Ingleby Barwick between early August and late September. I along with a small team, attempted to contact all residents on yours and other streets. I have 69,000 people to represent in Parliament. Three Saturday mornings a month I visit different parts of my constituency listening to the concerns of people I represent. After this listening activity I contact all organisations referenced by constituents, hoping to achieve a response which resolves a problem, or an explanation which outlines why a resolution is not possible. This exercise involves several contacts. A letter saying I am conducting the surgery, a letter saying 'sorry we missed you' if residents are not in, a personal letter to all the people I spoke to outlining their issues and how I am actioning them and finally a letter to all the people in the streets I visited explaining all the queries that I handled and what has happened due to my work on their behalf.

I believe I do my best to represent the people of Stockton South. I do not expect all people to share my politics but I do expect my honesty and integrity to be acknowledged.

PS. I was told during one of my recent street surgeries that [ ] claim to have funding to provide a police station for Ingleby Barwick. I asked all the [ ] Councillors whether this 'fund' existed and, if it did, where it had come from. None replied. This fact is conspicuously missing from [the Councillor's] email to me.

26 October 2007

## 8. Letter to Ms Dari Taylor MP from the Commissioner, 23 April 2008

I would welcome your comments on a complaint I have received from Mr James Wharton, who alleges that you have misused your Parliamentary allowances in order to send unsolicited letters for party political purposes to certain residents in your constituency.

I attach copies of Mr Wharton's letter of 10 April confirming the basis of his complaint, of his emails of 2 and 10 April, and of the material about which he is complaining, which comprises six letters, the Parliamentary first class pre-paid envelopes in which letters [a] and [f] were received, plus a Freepost form inviting residents to show interest in joining the Labour Party which was sent with letter [c]. (The notation system I have used to identify these letters is different to that used by Mr Wharton in his original email.)

In essence, Mr Wharton's complaint is that the use of House stationery carrying the Portcullis emblem and prepaid envelopes for these communications may have been contrary to the rules of the House relating to the sending of unsolicited correspondence and the prohibition on the use of allowances for party political purposes.

The relevant rules of the House in relation to this complaint are as follows:

Paragraph 14 of the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament provides:

*"Members shall at all times ensure that their use of expenses, allowances, facilities and services provided from the public purse is strictly in accordance with the rules laid down on these matters, and that they observe any limits placed by the House on the use of such expenses, allowances, facilities and services."*

The rules on the use of Parliamentary stationery and postage are set out in the booklet entitled *The Communications allowance and use of House Stationery*, published and sent to all Members in April 2007.

Paragraph 5 of Appendix 4 of this booklet, under the heading *Use of the House emblem* says:

5. *The principal emblem of the House is the crowned portcullis. ... The designs and symbols of the House should not be used for purposes for which such authentication is in- appropriate, or where there is a risk that their use might wrongly be regarded, or represented, as having the authority of the House.*

Paragraph 7 on **Original House stationery** says:

7. *Original House stationery, however it is acquired, should not, in any circumstances, be used for the following purposes:*

...

b) *in connection with fundraising for the benefit of a political party, advocating membership of a political party, or supporting the return of any person to public office;*

Paragraph 9 says:

9. *If you wish to use original House of Commons stationery to send to people on issues on which they have not previously contacted you, you must purchase it from the suppliers. Alternatively you may photocopy stationery which includes the crowned portcullis and the words "House of Commons".*

In the same Appendix, Paragraph 14 on **Pre-paid envelopes** says:

14. *Pre-paid envelopes must not be used...*

c) *in connection with fund-raising for the benefit of a political party or supporting the return of any person to public office...*

h) *for correspondence with constituents on issues on which they have not previously contacted you or on which they have contacted you only at your own instigation.*

Paragraph 18 provides:

18. *You are encouraged to use second-class pre-paid envelopes. First-class envelopes should only be used for priority mail.*

If the preparation or despatch of these letters was funded via the communications allowance, or undertaken by staff paid from your staffing allowance, then the rules relating to the use of that allowance are relevant. Paragraph 7 of Appendix 2 to the April 2007 booklet provides:

7. *No party political or campaigning material is allowable in any part of a publication funded, wholly or in part, from the allowance.*

Paragraph 6.10.1 of the Green Book includes in the list of expenditure not allowable from the staffing allowance:

*Staff who are employed on party political duties or non-Parliamentary duties.*

I would welcome your comments on Mr Wharton's complaint, taking account of the relevant rules of the House. In particular, it would be helpful if you could let me know:

1. how you came to use the stationery and postage you did for each of these six letters;
2. whether you believe the use of the House of Commons emblem in particular for the letter sent with the "How do I join Labour" form was in accordance with the rules and whether you believe the use of original stationery and pre-paid envelopes for these communications was in accordance with the rules.
3. how many copies of each letter (and the form) were sent and to whom?
4. how each was distributed (whether by hand or post). If the latter, please confirm whether first class pre-paid envelopes were used, and if so why;
5. how did you provide and fund the stationery, printing and despatch of each of the letters and the Freepost provision? Were any costs met by the Communications Allowance?

6. did staff funded through your allowances contribute to the preparation or despatch of any of this material? If so, what level of staff did you use and what is your estimate of the time they spent on this work?
7. were you in touch at any time with either the Department of Finance and Administration (now the Department of Resources) or the Serjeant at Arms (now the Department of Facilities) to seek advice prior to despatch of the letters?
8. if, as Mr Wharton suggests, you have subsequently sent other letters of this type using postage stamps, how were these prepared and funded, and why did you decide to use stamps and not pre-paid envelopes?
9. how many similar despatches have you sent using original parliamentary stationery and pre-paid envelopes in each of the last three years?

Once I have your response I may need to seek advice from the Department of Resources and the Department of Facilities before deciding how to proceed. I am therefore copying this letter and the attachments to them for information only at this stage.

I am enclosing a note I send all Members who are the subject of a complaint, which sets out the procedure involved. If at any point you would like a word about the complaint please contact me at the above address or give me a telephone call. I have written to Mr Wharton to let him know that I have accepted his complaint.

*23 April 2008*

## **9. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Dari Taylor MP, 28 April 2008**

Thank you for your letter referencing an allegation of misusing Parliamentary allowances to send unsolicited mail for party political purposes to residents within my constituency.

Please accept the following response:-

1. Letter to [ ] and [ ] dated 18 September 2007 [letter (b)]. Letters sent to 50—100 people. This referenced the number of people I or my team spoke to during an on-street surgery. It was a response to the issues and concerns raised by constituents hence a pre-paid envelope was used.
2. A letter to a Councillor dated 23 October 2007 [letter (e)]. This was a response to an allegation outlined on his and IBIS's (Ingleby Barwick Independent Society) website, an internet forum, which will not allow a person to respond. The letter points out the streets I visited during an on-street surgery. It was a response consequently I used a pre-paid envelope.
3. A letter to [ ] and [ ] dated 26 October 2007 [letter (f)]. This was a response to between 50 and 100 constituents who I had met on an on-street surgery. I was responding to an allegation made by an opponent, an Independent Councillor [ ] that I did not do an on-street surgery. He was imputing my integrity and honesty. I thought I had the right to reply. It was sent to all I or my team met on the on-street surgery. As it was a response letter it was in a pre-paid envelope.
4. Letter to [ ] and [ ] dated 5 October 2008 [letter (d)]. This was post paid by me and sent to 100—120 people.
5. Letter to [ ], September 2007 [letter (c)] delivered to 100—200 (best guess) hand delivered by a small team of volunteers. This enclosed a response sheet on white paper, no portcullis was used.
6. [ ] letter dated 20 August 2007 [letter (a)], 50—100 and as previously stated was dependent on who was at home and spoken to during the on-street surgery. As it is a response to the issues brought to my attention by constituents this was sent by pre-paid envelope.

n.b. The Red Portcullis paper (4 boxes—1000 sheets) was purchased by me during the financial year 2005-06 (the best indication of usage) and was used in all letters in this group that had a red portcullis. The invoice was

not kept as previously no one has requested seeing the paperwork. The green formal House of Commons paper was paid for by the IEP allowance.

I have done all that I can to communicate with constituents within the rules of the House of Commons. I attempt at all times to live within the rules concerning the usage of House of Commons stationery and postage. Whilst this is of little concern to you please believe me on-street surgeries are hard work and I regularly with my team resent giving up another Saturday to work in this way.

You asked a number of questions and I believe I have responded to how many letters were sent, to whom and for what purpose. Additionally I have responded to question 4 referencing by hand or by post.

- With reference to question 5, the FREEPOST provision is provided by my constituency party.
- The communications allowance has been used to send two letters out one to Ingleby Barwick and one to Thornaby, both sanctioned by House of Commons staff sent to approximately 12,000 in Thornaby and 8,500 in Ingleby Barwick (copies enclosed). I have enclosed for your attention a response received from [ ] stating that my letters were within the rules.
- In response to question 6 my permanent staff are absolutely separate from Labour Party and constituency volunteers. All party material was, and is, administered after hours (6 pm) prepared, printed and despatched by volunteers and not my staff.
- In response to question 7, I have only recently asked validation staff with reference to the use of the communication budget to check two letters. This is the only time I have asked the Finance team to check the content of letters to constituents.
- Question 8 references the cost of postage stamps. Again let me stress I (or my constituency party) fund postage stamps that are used on letters that are not parliamentary business. Volunteers help to print, fold and stuff envelopes.
- Question 9, not the easiest of questions to answer in terms of the last three years. I attempt to carry out an on-street surgery once a month for 5 months (max) of the year, weather permitting (not achieved last year). The extent of contact obviously varies on each and every occasion as pointed out on the previous page. In terms of the general letters that reference my Parliamentary and Government life sent to [ ] and [ ] [letters (c) and (d)], these are examples of one off letters sent to a section of my constituency (the first time I have used this approach—it references my difficulty in representing and communicating with a 69,000 electorate). I repeat, I paid the postage and bought the red portcullis paper used when not official Parliamentary business.

I believe I have answered all your questions but want to stress that I do all I can to ensure I work within the rules of Parliament. I also want to say that on maybe a maximum of four occasions a complaint has been made about me sending unsolicited mail under Parliamentary privilege. In response to criticism I have paid the appropriate postage costs as recommended by the House authorities. As an MP for 10 years I believe that making as I say four mistakes (max) suggests that I do all I can to remain within the rules of House.

I hope you will accept that only when I believe I was officially right to respond I have used a prepared Green Parliamentary letterhead. Inevitably there will be a few mistakes made when visiting up to 150 houses during an on-street surgery. Attempting to note accurately who was actually spoken to during the visit is difficult when a five member group is involved. This is said especially as I tend to be the slowest member as constituents want to speak to me.

If you need any further information I will be pleased to provide it.

*28 April 2008*

## 10. Agreed summary of complaint

- (a) 20 August 2007
- Letter sent to between 50 to 100 constituents—all of whom Ms Taylor or her team met but not all of whom raised each of the 4 points addressed in the letter. Ms Taylor says the letter was a response to issues raised by those who received her letter. Ms Taylor accepts that the letter to the complainant was a mistake made by a volunteer who accompanied her on her street surgery since she had not met either Ms Taylor or a member of her team. Some similar mistakes in dispatch may possibly have been made.
- Letter refers to “Labour Government’s 10 year youth strategy” and to consultation by the “Labour Council”. Ms Taylor was asked consistently what the Government was doing on youth leisure and secondary education and this was her response.
- Crested stationery bought from Ms Taylor’s IEP account. First-class pre-paid envelopes provided from stationery allowance.
- No Parliamentary staff time used. All work done by volunteers.
- Dispatch not checked with House authorities—Ms Taylor considers not necessary for a response letter.
- (b) 18 September 2007
- Letter sent to between 50-100 constituents—all of whom Ms Taylor or her team met but not all of whom raised each of the 4 points addressed in the letter. Ms Taylor says the letter is a response to issues raised by those who received her letter. Some copies of the letter may possibly have been sent by mistake to constituents who did not meet either Ms Taylor or a member of her team.
- Letter refers to “Labour Government’s 10 year Youth Strategy” and to consultation by the “Labour Council”. Ms Taylor was asked consistently what the Government was doing on youth leisure and secondary education and this was her response.
- Crested stationery bought from Ms Taylor’s IEP account.
- First-class pre-paid envelopes provided from stationery allowance.
- No Parliamentary staff time used. All work done by volunteers.
- Dispatch not checked with House authorities—Ms Taylor considers not necessary for a response letter.
- (c) September 2007
- Original House of Commons crested paper used. Purchased by Ms Taylor from own resources and not Parliamentary funds.
- Plain uncrested envelopes also bought from Ms Taylor’s own resources.
- Attachment promoted membership of the Labour Party.
- Text of letter identifies local benefits from Labour Government policies.
- Sent to 100-200 constituents. Delivered by volunteers.
- No Parliamentary staff time used.
- (d) 5 October 2007
- Letter to “Labour supporters” on Government policies sent to 100-120 constituents.
- Green crested stationery and plain uncrested envelopes bought by Ms Taylor personally—no Parliamentary funding used.
- Post paid by Ms Taylor and not from any Parliamentary funds.
- No Parliamentary staff time used.
- (e) 23 October 2007
- Letter sent in response to Councillor’s criticisms of Ms Taylor on Ingleby Barwick Independent Society’s website. (Ms Taylor notes IBIS is a political party.)
- Used crested stationery bought from Ms Taylor’s IEP account.

First-class pre-paid envelope provided from stationery allowance.  
No Parliamentary staff time used.  
Dispatch not checked with House authorities—Ms Taylor considers not necessary for a response letter.

- (f) Letter sent to between 50 to 100 constituents—all of whom Ms Taylor or her team had met during her street surgery—explaining her use of street surgeries and enclosing a copy of document (e). Ms Taylor considers this response letter was within the rules on the use of Parliamentary stationery. Some copies of her letter may possibly have been sent by mistake to constituents who had not met either Ms Taylor or a member of her team.  
26 October 2007 Crested stationery bought from Ms Taylor's IEP account.  
First-class pre-paid envelopes provided from stationery allowance.  
No Parliamentary staff time used.  
Dispatch not checked with House authorities—Ms Taylor considers not necessary for a response letter.

Note Letters similar to (a) and (b) sent 5 times a year to between 50 and 100 constituents.  
All crested stationery bought from Ms Taylor's IEP account—with the exception of examples (c) and (d).  
All pre-paid envelopes provided from stationery allowance.  
No Parliamentary staff time used on any of these communications.  
Dispatch not checked with House authorities for any of these communications—Ms Taylor believes not necessary under the rules.

## **11. Letter to the Acting Director of Operations, Department of Resources, from the Commissioner, 10 June 2008**

I would welcome your comments and advice on a complaint I have received against Ms Dari Taylor MP about her use of House stationery and prepaid envelopes for certain communications she sent to some residents in her constituency.

I copied to you my letter of 23 April to Ms Taylor inviting her comments on the complaint; together with the complainant's letter of 10 April, his emails of 2 and 10 April, and of the material about which he is complaining, which comprises 6 letters, a Parliamentary first class prepaid envelope in which letters [a] and [f] were received, plus a freepost form which was sent with letter [c]. I enclose further copies of that correspondence. I enclose also a copy of Ms Taylor's letter to me of 28 April, with her attachments marked 'for information'. Following that letter, I have prepared a summary of her responses so that we could all be clear about the circumstances which she describes in relation to each of the dispatches complained of. Following further correspondence with Ms Taylor (I attach for information copies of my letters to her of 8 and 28 May, and of her replies of 21 May and 5 June) I have agreed with Ms Taylor the accuracy of the attached summary which I hope may be helpful.

In the light of this, I would welcome your comments on the complaint and in particular whether, in your view, there has been a breach of any of the rules of the House which you administer and, if so, the rules or rule in question, if possible with reference to the rules as numbered in the 2007 booklet 'The Communications Allowance and use of House Stationery'. Any other comments you wish to make would, of course, be very welcome.

I would be most grateful for your help on this matter.

*10 June 2008*

## 12. Letter to the Head of Client Relations, Facilities Department, from the Commissioner, 10 June 2008

I would welcome your comments and advice on a complaint I have received against Ms Dari Taylor MP about her use of House stationery and prepaid envelopes for certain communications she sent to some residents in her constituency.

I copied to you my letter of 23 April to Ms Taylor inviting her comments on the complaint; together with the complainant's letter of 10 April, his emails of 2 and 10 April, and of the material about which he is complaining, which comprises 6 letters, a Parliamentary first class prepaid envelope in which letters [a] and [f] were received, plus a freepost form which was sent with letter [c]. I enclose further copies of that correspondence. I enclose also a copy of Ms Taylor's letter to me of 28 April, with her attachments marked 'for information'. Following that letter, I have prepared a summary of her responses so that we could all be clear about the circumstances which she describes in relation to each of the dispatches complained of. Following further correspondence with Ms Taylor (I attach for information copies of my letters to her of 8 and 28 May, and of her replies of 21 May and 5 June) I have agreed with Ms Taylor the accuracy of the attached summary which I hope may be helpful.

In the light of this, I would welcome your comments on the complaint and in particular whether, in your view, there has been a breach of any of the rules of the House which you administer and, if so, the rules or rule in question, if possible with reference to the rules as numbered in the 2007 booklet 'The Communications Allowance and use of House Stationery'. Any other comments you wish to make would, of course, be very welcome.

I would be most grateful for your help on this matter.

10 June 2008

## 13. Letter to the Commissioner from the Acting Director of Operations, Department of Resources, 3 July 2008

Thank you for your letter of 10 June concerning the use of parliamentary allowances by Ms Taylor.

This is a somewhat involved case and I shall deal with each piece of correspondence, as they relate to the use of the Communications Allowance (CA), in date order as in your most useful summary.

First, notification of any on-street surgeries would be a legitimate charge against the CA, as too would any associated cost for delivery.

**Letter (a) (20 August 2007)**—As a response to an on-street surgery we feel that this would normally be a charge against the CA and could have been funded entirely from this allowance. However, the inclusion of comparisons in spending since the election of a Labour Government in 1997, and reference to 'Labour Government' and the 'Labour Council' initiatives takes it outside the rules and therefore could not be charged to the CA. (*The Communications Allowance and the use of House Stationery*, page 21/22, Para. 15)

**Letter (b) (18 September 2007)**—For the same reasons as for letter [a], this could not be funded from the CA.

**Letter (c) (September 2007)**—This letter could not be paid for from the CA as it deals extensively with the achievements of the Labour Government and the Labour Council; in addition the inclusion of a membership leaflet is outside the rules (Page 20, Para. 5). The Department of Facilities can comment on the use of the portcullis.

**Letter (d) (5 October 2007)**—As with letter [c], this letter falls firmly outside the scope of parliamentary allowances as it is targeted at known Labour supporters.

**Letter (e) (23 October 2007)**—It does not seem unreasonable for a Member of Parliament in these circumstances to correspond with a local councillor using House of Commons Stationery; however this is perhaps more a matter for the Department of Facilities.

**Letter (f) (26 October 2007)**—Again this appears to be a matter for the Department of Facilities. As it concerns the Member’s personal rebuttal of allegations made by a political opponent, I do not consider this to be letter that could be funded from the CA, likewise the enclosure of letter [e].

In essence all of the publications fall outside of the rules for the use of the CA and as such any funded from parliamentary resources would breach our rules. However, Ms Taylor does not appear to have charged any of the costs to the CA. She has stated that some of the paper used had been purchased from the Incidental Expenses Provision (IEP): although this appears to have been a small quantity it would be outside the rules on the use of parliamentary allowances.

Ms Taylor states that no staff time was used in the preparation or delivery of the letters and so no cost has been incurred from the Staffing Allowance; we have no information that would indicate the contrary to be the case.

Ms Taylor makes reference to sending two further letters using the CA. I can confirm that these were sent to my staff in March 2008 for review and that, following alterations, both were agreed and paid for from the CA.

I hope that this covers all of your questions, but if you have any matters that need further clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

*3 July 2008*

#### **14. Letter to the Commissioner from the Acting Director of Operations, Department of Resources, 15 July 2008**

Thank you for your letter of 3 July in which you seek clarification of mine of the same date; in particular, my comments about letters [e] and [f].

As I understand the situation, a local Councillor, [ ], was critical of Ms Taylor on his website; she responded to this criticism by (A) writing directly to [the Councillor] (letter (e)) and (B) writing to a number of residents (letter (f)) attaching a copy of letter (e).

What I indicated in my letter of 3 July is that using House of Commons stationery for letter (e) does not necessarily breach House rules, but that this is primarily a matter for the Department of Facilities. The rules in regard to political communications on page 33 of the booklet *The Communications Allowance* and the use of House stationery (relating to the use of House stationery) are not expressed in the same way as those on pages 21-22 (relating to the Communications Allowance). In this case I would not make a distinction between stationery obtained from the stationery allowance and that claimed from the IEP.

I can also confirm that letter (e) could not have been funded from the Communications Allowance (CA) as it was a single piece of correspondence and therefore not in the scope of this allowance. It may be a fine judgement, but I have concluded that, as the response to Mr Narroway was a personal rebuttal, which did contained party political comment, using parliamentary allowances to distribute it more widely was not acceptable and that letter (f) was therefore also outside the scope of both the IEP and CA.

I hope this clarifies the matter.

*15 July 2008*

#### **15. E-mail to the Commissioner from the Director of Accommodation Services, 12 September 2008**

As you know, I have very recently taken over responsibility for stationery from [ ]. Since then I have spoken to [ ] and reviewed the complaint against Dari Taylor MP. My advice is as follows:

(a) 20 August 2007

This letter should not have been sent out in pre-paid envelopes. This is because the correspondence was instigated by Ms Taylor and is not specific to issues raised by those who she wrote to. The letter does not claim

that the recipient was actually spoken to. It may be that this correspondence would have been permissible under the Communications Allowance. This is a matter for the Department of Resources and I am sure you will already have sought their advice.

(b) 18 September 2007

As above

(c) September 2007

The rules state that if a Member wishes to use original House stationery then it must be purchased from their own resources (rule 9) Rule 7, however, states that original House Stationery, however acquired, should not be used to advocate membership of a political party. Given the facts I think it is possible to argue two alternative cases. These are either that the letter on House Stationery did not of itself advocate party membership or that the letter by association with the enclosed Membership/Supporters' "Show of Interest" form did advocate such membership. I am inclined to take the former view. However, I am also of the opinion that this issue should be clarified when the regulations are next revisited.

You may wish to be aware that in 2007 the Serjeant at Arms received a complaint that Mrs Taylor had wrongly used prepaid envelopes and House stationery to send out correspondence following a constituency surgery and that she had to repay the costs from her allowances. I am sending copies of the correspondence to you under separate cover.

(d) 5 October 2007

This is not a breach of the rules as the paper was purchased by the Member and is not advocating membership of a political party or supporting the return of any person to public office.

(e) 23 October 2007

I understand that this letter from Ms Taylor is in response to material about her placed on a web site by Councillor [ ] which neither you nor [the Head of Client Relations] has been able to review. Assuming this is the case I think that, whilst this could be seen as an unsolicited letter from Ms Taylor, the use of a pre paid envelope is justifiable here under Appendix Four paragraph 10 which states such use is allowed in replying to "letters received...". I doubt the drafters of the stationery rules had considered how to respond to web material. I do not think this sets a difficult precedent since the use of pre-paid stationery to correspond with anyone other than the author or authors of such web material would clearly fall into the category of unsolicited correspondence. Again, the issue might be clarified when the regulations are revisited.

(f) 26 October 2007

This letter would appear to be a communication mainly dealing with giving information to residents in relation to street surgeries and the remarks made by the Councillor. This should not have been sent out using pre-paid envelopes as it was not specific about issues raised by the individuals and information about surgeries is not something which can be given out via pre-paid envelopes.

I hope this is helpful.

*12 September 2008*

## **16. Letter to constituent from Ms Dari Taylor MP, 12 February 2007**

I was very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to many local residents during a recent street surgery in **Elm Tree with [ ] and [ ] your local Labour Party candidates for the 2007 local election.** The following community queries regarding local issues were brought to our attention:-

- **Play facilities**
- **Car Parking**
- **Anti Social Behaviour**

A number of residents asked about **play facilities** for children in the **Elm Tree area**. Stockton Borough Council has recently announced very **specific plans for providing a Sure Start Children's Centre** to be built alongside the existing community Centre. The plans involve spending **up to £600,000 extending the existing community centre** providing ante natal, nursery and play facilities. The community centre will also be redeveloped and reconfigured to provide **better facilities** for children and adults in the Elm Tree area. Work will commence in **April 2007 with completion in September/October**. I am very pleased to inform you of **ongoing investment** in Newham Grange Park that will also provide improved play facilities. Finally, [ ] and [ ] are campaigning for the **Youth Bus** to visit the area on a more regular basis—it is currently visiting once every other Tuesday.

[ ] and [ ] are working with your Labour team have asked Stockton Borough Council **engineers to see what can be done to ease the parking problems in Lowick Close**. [ ] is well aware of the issues—after all he shares them with his neighbours in the area. **They have also asked if small paved areas adjacent to the garages behind the houses in Lauder Close can be removed to ease congestion and provide better access to the garages**. We will keep you up to date with any and all developments.

An outbreak of **vandalism** in the Lauder Close/Lowick Close area saw about eight vehicles damaged. Stockton Borough Council's enforcement team and Cleveland Police have been asked to improve patrols in the area. The Elm Tree area is covered by **PC [ ] and PCSO [ ]** who can be contacted on [ ] or by leaving a note at Medina House. Additionally, the **Enforcement Officers available to respond to any and all anti social behaviour issues in Elm Tree**. They can be contacted on [ ] from 8.30 am—midnight.

Many local people asked me about the Child Trust Fund (CTF). This has just been celebrated, almost two years since the fund was announced by Gordon Brown and opposed. This was opposed, like the rest of the Government's family friendly policies, by the Tories. The Liberal Democrats even described The Trust it as a 'gimmick'. Yet the CTF was introduced by Labour to encourage saving and give every new-born child a financial asset when they reach 18 ..... it could be used, among other things, to pay for access to Higher Education or as a deposit on a house

There are still 1,311 CTF accounts yet to be opened in Stockton South. If you (or anyone you know) became a parent after September 2002 and have not yet opened an account for your child, you should do so as soon as possible. For more information, ring my office on 604546 or log on to [www.childtrustfund.gov.uk](http://www.childtrustfund.gov.uk).

Meanwhile, the Tories have proved yet again that are still the same party they ever were. They recently refused to back more of the Government's family-friendly measures, including extending paid holiday entitlement to ensure that Bank Holidays are additional to, not included in, employees' annual leave entitlement. We've heard plenty of warm words from the Tories, but we are yet to see a policy that supports people on less income or social benefits.

Finally, we are conscious that in visiting some 250 houses during an on-street surgery, it is not always possible to record every single issue raised on the doorstep. **If you feel that a personal concern of yours has not been addressed here, please do not hesitate to contact me, [ ] or [ ] on [ ]**.

*12 February 2007*

## **17. Letter to the Serjeant at Arms from a local Councillor in Stockton on Tees, 9 March 2007**

I have been contacted by a number of constituents over the last few months about letters they have been sent from the Member of Parliament, Dari Taylor MP. These letters are on House of Commons official notepaper, are unsolicited, and political in content. They are sent on what appears to be House of Commons postage paid envelopes. Understandably there is concern about public money being spent in this way.

I am enclosing one of the letters that has been given to me, with the permission of the recipients. They are happy for you to see the name and address to verify the facts, but do not want their name and address disclosed, unless with their prior consent. They do not mind the name of the street being disclosed.

Other addresses where I have had complaints include Melksham Square, Meldrum Square and Markse Lane, all in Stockton on Tees.

I would be grateful if this can be investigated and dealt with please, in the interests of public probity and use of public funds. I await your reply.

*9 March 2007*

### **18. Letter to the Assistant Serjeant at Arms from Ms Dari Taylor MP, 15 March 2007**

I received your letter stating that I had sent a constituent correspondence constituting an abuse of House regulations. Of course, I apologise for doing this. Hopefully you will understand that I do a street surgery every Saturday and this means that I will knock on the doors of 150—200 households asking them if they have any concerns which I should handle. I do this with my staff and also three volunteers. It is inevitable that we make mistakes believing we have spoken to people when we have not.

I will, of course, send you the postage money if you think this is appropriate.

*15 March 2007*

### **19. Letter to Ms Dari Taylor MP from the Assistant Serjeant at Arms, 29 March 2007**

Thank you for your letter of 15 March which we received on 22 March.

The House stationery and pre-paid envelopes cannot be used for a circular letter of this kind, even following visits by yourself and your team (please find enclosed a copy of the rules and the guidance leaflet). This kind of correspondence can be sent out using your IEP and as of 1 April it can be sent out using your Communications Allowance.

Please can you let me know the numbers of this letter which were sent out so that you can be invoiced for the costs of the paper, envelopes and postage. You can then pass this to the DFA to have it paid from your IEP.

Our office is very happy to offer guidance on these matters and revised rules approved by the Members Estimate Committee will be available shortly in the light of the approval of the Communications Allowance. Do let me know if we could be of assistance to you or your staff.

I look forward to hearing from you.

*29 March 2007*

### **20. Letter to the Assistant Serjeant at Arms from Ms Dari Taylor MP, 19 April 2007**

Thank you for your letter of 30 March, which I received on 11 April, referencing a complaint by a constituent regarding my use of House of Commons stationery.

Whilst I am happy to confirm that I sent out 25 letters following this street surgery, I am frankly of the belief that you can charge the cost of these letters to one account and not to the other represents bureaucratic nonsense.

I am of course in no position but to accept your ruling. I do, however, see it as a complete nonsense.

*19 April 2007*

## 21. Letter to Ms Dari Taylor MP from the Commissioner, 16 September 2008

I have now received advice from the House authorities in respect of the complaint against you about your use of Parliamentary stationery and allowances for six examples of correspondence with your constituents between August and October last year.

I wrote to you about this initially on 23 April, and again on 8 May, 22 May and finally 10 June with you writing to me on 28 April, 21 May and 5 June. My last letter enclosed a copy of the agreed factual summary of your response which I sent to the House authorities. I enclose a further copy of this agreed summary.<sup>1</sup>

I have now heard back from the House authorities. I attach a letter of 3 July from the Acting Director of Operations in the Department of Resources and a further letter of 15 July clarifying his advice. I attach also an e-mail of 12 September from the Director of Accommodation Services in the Facilities Department, along with copies of your correspondence with the then Assistant Serjeant at Arms between February and April 2007 about a similar complaint.

Taken together, the advice of the House authorities is as follows:

1. Example (a) (letter of 20 August 2007)—this letter should not have been sent out using stationery bought from your IEP account (because of its party political content); nor should first-class pre-paid envelopes from your provided stationery allowance have been used as, under the rules, this was not correspondence with constituents in connection with an issue on which they had previously contacted you (Appendix Four, paragraph 11(d) of the stationery rules issued in April 2007). The letter's recipients did not therefore raise all the issues reported in the letter, nor was each recipient necessarily spoken to;
2. Example (b) (letter of 18 September 2007)—the House authorities draw the same conclusion as with Example (a);
3. Example (c) (letter of September 2007)—This letter could not have been sent using House of Commons funded stationery or envelopes and I understand from you that it was not. Under the rules, you may only use crested notepaper bought from your own resources when the letter using the crest does not advocate membership of a political party. The Director of Accommodation Services notes that there are two perspectives on this letter. On the one hand it would be possible to argue that the letter of itself did not advocate Party membership; on the other, by association with the Thornaby Labour Party form enclosed, it did do so. The latter would be contrary to paragraph 7(b) in Appendix Four of the stationery rules issued in April 2007. The Director is inclined to the first view. It is however for me as Commissioner to form an independent opinion on issues like this. But before I do so I should welcome your comments;
4. Example (d) (letter of 5 October 2007)—the House authorities' advice is that this communication did not breach the rules: it was permissible to use original House stationery (bought from your own resources) for this letter since the content was not contrary to paragraph 7(b) of Appendix Four to the April 2007 rules. It would not have been permissible, however, to use Parliamentary allowances for the cost of the preparation, notepaper or postage for this communication and I understand that you did not do so;
5. Example (e) (letter of 23 October 2007)—the Director of Accommodation Services advises that in his view the use of a prepaid envelope is justifiable under paragraph 10 of Appendix 4 to the April 2007 rules, since you were replying only to the author of a website entry which was the equivalent of a letter received by you. The Acting Director of Operations considers it acceptable for the IEP to have been used for the cost of the notepaper for this letter given that it could have been funded from your Parliamentary stationery allowance;

6. Example (f) (letter of 26 October 2007)—the Director of Accommodation Services takes the view it was a breach of the rules to use prepaid envelopes for this dispatch since the correspondence was not in connection with an issue on which those receiving the letter had previously contacted you (paragraphs 10, 11(d), 13 and 14(h) of Appendix Four of the April 2007 rules). The Acting Director of Operations considers that the letter, and the inclusion of your letter to [the Councillor], should not have been funded from your IEP account since it contained party political content.

I would welcome your comments on this advice. In particular, I would be grateful to know:

- whether you accept the advice of the House authorities in respect of each of the dispatches which are the subject of this complaint and, if not, your reasons;
- your comments on your earlier correspondence with the then Assistant Serjeant at Arms who explained to you that House stationery and prepaid envelopes may not be used for circular letters such as the one you sent last year;
- how you understood the rules on the use of prepaid envelopes as explained in the Assistant Serjeant at Arms' letter of 29 March 2007; and why you understood your more recent correspondence to be permissible.

I appreciate that we are in the recess, and this letter has had to await my own return to the office, but if you could let me have a response within the next three weeks, I would be most grateful. If you would like a word about any of this, please give me a call.

I am copying this correspondence for information to the Director of Operations in the Department of Resources and to the Director of Accommodation Services in the Facilities Department.

*16 September 2008*

## **22. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Dari Taylor MP, 22 September 2008**

Thank you for your letter of 16 September 2008.

My response to the advice you have received from the House authorities is as follows:

Example (a) (letter of 20 August 2007)—the 'party political content' is not requesting support, it was in fact responding to a criticism made of Government policy. Surely I have a right to do that! Secondly, the fact that one, maybe two, mistakes are made during an on-street surgery and the judgement is that I have broken the rules of the House is harsh. I attempt by initiating on-street surgeries to speak with, listen to and represent the views of my constituents. I would say that this is the essence of democracy and would hope that tolerance would be expressed when the odd mistake is made and acknowledged. Being proactive in support of a community is seriously difficult and hard work. I was of the belief that if the intention was honourable, the act was honourable. I am frankly dismayed and disappointed with your conclusion. If I had asked constituents to agree with me or vote for me, that would have been political and, as such, an unacceptable use of Parliamentary stationery.

Example (b) (letter of 18 September 2007)—I make the same response as above.

Example (c) (letter of September 2007)—Re your statement: 'the letter of itself did not advocate Party membership....[but] by association with the Thornaby Labour Party form enclosed, it did so'. The fact that my name is on this letter (and the thousands that leave my office) does thus mean it is associated (closely) with the Labour Party. Thus if the second view, that this letter was inappropriate, is the final decision - is it the case that every letter I sign is believed to be political, and could be defined as breaking the rules of the House? Every Member of the House, I would suggest, would be seen as breaking the rules of the House if this judgement is accepted.

Example (d) (letter of 5 October 2007)—no response required.

Example (e) (letter of 23 October 2007)—no response required.

Example (f) (letter of 26 October 2007)—Please accept the response I made to Examples (a) and (b).

I have always accepted the rules on the use of Parliamentary stationery and pre-paid envelopes. I have never deliberately set out to ignore or infringe these rules.

I feel I need to add that I work hard, I do not just sit in an office. I work fastidiously and tirelessly to know and represent my constituents. I additionally know from my professional background that working the streets, or energetically and enthusiastically contacting constituents matters little when people define their party preference or when they cast their vote during elections. Thus the implicit concern that I am using Parliamentary stationery to further my political ends is, I believe, misplaced. I equally believe that the objections you have received from the prospective Conservative Parliamentary candidate for Stockton South has been sent with one purpose in mind—to achieve political support by using your conclusions, if critical, in whatever media will print or record them to his own political advantage.

I will be away from Parliament on an Intelligence & Security Conference until 12 October, leaving today—Monday 22 September. I would ask you to come and see how I work. I am not an exception, many Members work as hard using the same and different contact activity. With this information, I believe the House authorities will judge more effectively, tolerating the odd mistake Members make.

Finally, I have calculated that in time taken, stationery and postage used, this exercise—which I have found thoroughly undermining even though I am sure that was not the intention—has cost the House in excess of £150 and this could well be an underestimate.

*22 September 2008*

## **23. Letter to Ms Dari Taylor MP from the Commissioner, 25 September 2008**

Thank you for your letter of 22 September with your response to the advice I had received from the House authorities about this complaint. I am most grateful to you for such a prompt reply.

I should say at the outset that I have myself formed no conclusions on this complaint. My letter was an attempt to summarise the advice I had received from the House authorities.

I am grateful to you for making it clear that you do not accept that you have breached the rules of the House in respect of any of the communications identified by the complainant, although you accept that one or two of your letters following your on-street surgeries were sent to people whom you or your team had not met.

I think I have now all the information I need to conclude this complaint. I appreciate the stress this inquiry has caused you and I am grateful for your assistance with it. The next step is for me to prepare a Memorandum to the Committee on Standards and Privileges. I will show you the factual sections of that Memorandum. I will then come to my own conclusions and submit the full Memorandum to the Committee. The Clerk of the Committee will show you that full Memorandum before it is considered by the Committee.

I was grateful for your offer to visit your office, but I do not think I need put you to that further trouble and will follow my normal procedure of collecting written evidence (which I now have from you and the Department) and preparing my Memorandum and conclusions.

I note that you have not in your letter responded to my request for comments on your earlier correspondence with the then Assistant Serjeant at Arms who took the view that House stationery and pre-paid envelopes from your provided stationery allowance may not be used for the circular letter you sent in January last year, although in her view this kind of letter could at that time have been funded from your Incidental Expenses Provision.

I am now copying your letter to the Department of Resources and the Facilities Department for any final comments they may wish to make.

I shall then prepare the factual sections of my Memorandum, which I will send to you, before I prepare my conclusions.

Thank you for your help with this.

*25 September 2008*

## **24. Letter to the Commissioner from the Department of Resources, 16 October 2008**

Thank you for your letter of 25 September 2008 concerning the complaint against Ms Taylor.

I can confirm that Ms Taylor paid from her own resources for the cost of the stationery and the pre-paid envelopes used for her letter of February 2007. The cost was £10.79. She did not draw upon the Incidental Expenses Provision for this correspondence.

Our records show that the payment was made by cheque from Ms Taylor's personal bank account.

I hope this is helpful.

*16 October 2008*

## **25. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Dari Taylor MP, 22 October 2008**

Thank you for your letter of 17 October 2008, enclosing a copy of your Draft Memorandum on your investigation into my 'conduct'.

I accept the content of your Memorandum, however, remain thoroughly unhappy with the persistent statement (made frequently and again [in paragraph 54]) that I sent correspondence to constituents who had not contacted me on a specific issue. The fact is that the response I sent referenced issues raised on the doorstep with me as the Member of Parliament by constituents who live within the immediate vicinity. If this was not the case, the responses I sent would be meaningless and lack professional intent. It would additionally be a waste of my time (which is limited to say the least) to 'invent' issues that are of no relevance to local residents.

I would additionally point out that, each and every day, I receive countless telephone requests for assistance and advice. I have no correspondence from these constituents to prove that this contact took place. This is equally the case for the significant number of people who stop me in the street, or whilst shopping, asking for my help. Am I outside the rules in responding to these people?

I reiterate that I have always remained or attempted to remain within the rules of the House on correspondence with constituents—my record over 11 years proves that. Clearly from your response to me some of the rules are ambivalent and need to be thought through or re-written. Finally, I have accepted that I have made mistakes—the amount of valuable contact (in democratic terms) I engage in, makes that fact inevitable. I would have thought that simply charging me the 'appropriate' amount for the mistakes in April—as opposed to the engagement in hours of correspondence over 7 months that has cost the House significantly more than a repayment I would have to make as reparation for my mistakes—would have been the sensible way forward.

*22 October 2008*

## Appendix 2: Letter to the Clerk of the Committee from Ms Dari Taylor, 10 November 2008

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1. I support all the recommendations made by John Lyon CB referenced on page 33.
2. My response to his (John Lyon CB) overall conclusions are:—
  - a. his reference to my statement “nonsense” sound aggressive but it refers to a response I received that, if I had used the Communications Allowance rather than the IEP my letter would have been acceptable. His reform of this confusing situation I believe will be valuable
  - b. his reference to the use of 1<sup>st</sup> class postage. I accept blame but frankly all ordering of House of Commons stationery is done by my staff. I rarely see or think about pre paid envelopes—I and my staff will in the future!
  - c. his reference to party political or campaigning requiring clarification I support. Reference page 31 line 8 to 11, many of the rules are ambivalent
  - d. his belief that the words Government or Council should not include Labour/Conservatives or Liberal suggest a lack of knowledge in local people which I believe is not the fact
  - e. his ref to the Communication Allowance supporting proactive letters he believes are more acceptable within the rules. In terms of public information I would disagree with this on two counts: first this is a very expensive form of communication and secondly the content of the letters are more anodyne or not of relevance to the person receiving them, these letters (I believe) are a waste of public funds. (I will use the CA because it has been decided this form of communication is valuable and non political—both conclusions I believe are wrong)
  - f. his reference to, with implicit criticism, is that after an on street surgery the “same issue” constitutes my response. I used to find this peculiar I now accept it. If one resident brings up the issue of ‘dog dirt’ they invariably all do. The reference to and criticism of the use of Labour Government issues again invariable references what is in the national Press. Add to this his (John Lyon) statement “correspondence was not specific to the issues raised by those to whom she wrote” in terms of on street surgeries the relevance to local people inevitably counters this statement. Additionally, the Thornaby letters content was a response to the criticism I met on street, in Asda etc.
  - g. his reference to the (Members of Parliament) “central service they provide” should command public funds. I totally agree with and would say that the funds for staff in no way accommodates that requirement

In personal terms I have always attempted to stay within the rules of the House of Commons, eleven years and few complaints supports that statement. I have responded to each and every letter I have received ..... It has taken many house (this document of 33 pages has taken me 1 hr 30 mins) to achieve an effective response. I have been seriously concerned with the length and depth of this investigation. I accepted months ago I could have made mistakes and was willing to pay the appropriate sum as recompense, as well as, accepting although disagreeing with some of the conclusions. In an overworked

diary to have this situation (6 letters in total) hanging over me for six months and more and using upwards of £500 to investigate is seriously not proportionate to the alleged offence. On page 15 there is a reference to “staff and volunteers”. My staff were present at on street surgeries but as they take place invariably on a Saturday morning, that is, not in employment time I believe this is acceptable. Both are members of the Labour Party and volunteers – thus the use of staff is both wrong and misleading. Paragraph 43 (page 17 and 18) accurately describes my attitude and work ethic.

I thank John Lyon for all his polite communications.

# Formal minutes

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**Tuesday 11 November 2008**

Members present:

Sir George Young, in the Chair

Mr Kevin Barron	Mr Chris Mullin
Mr David Curry	The Hon Nicholas Soames
Mr Andrew Dismore	Mr Paddy Tipping
Nick Harvey	Dr Alan Whitehead
Mr Elfyn Llwyd	

Draft Report [Ms Dari Taylor], proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 12 read and agreed to.

Several Papers were ordered to be appended to the Report.

*Resolved*, That the Report and Appendices be the Eighteenth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 25 November at 9.30 am

# Reports from the Committee on Standards and Privileges in the current Parliament

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## Session 2007-08

First Report	Conduct of Mr Elfyn Llwyd, Mr Adam Price and Mr Hywel Williams	HC 94
Second Report	Conduct of Mr Norman Baker, Mr Malcolm Bruce and Mr Sadiq Khan	HC 182
Third Report	Publications funded from the Communications Allowance	HC 232
Fourth Report	Conduct of Mr Derek Conway	HC 280
Fifth Report	Conduct of Mr Peter Hain	HC 324
Sixth Report	Employment of family members through the Staffing Allowance: Proposals for consultation	HC 383
Seventh Report	Employment of family members through the Staffing Allowance	HC 436
Eighth Report	The Complaints System and the Criminal Law	HC 523
Ninth Report	Conduct of Mr Speaker	HC 559
Tenth Report	Conduct of Mr George Osborne	HC 560
Eleventh Report	Conduct of Sir Robert Smith	HC 646
Twelfth Report	Conduct of Sir Nicholas and Lady Winterton	HC 744
Thirteenth Report	Ending Dual Reporting of Donations: Interim Report	HC 989
Fourteenth Report	Conduct of Rt Hon Ed Balls and Rt Hon Yvette Cooper	HC 1044
Fifteenth Report	Additional Cost Allowance: Main Homes	HC 1127
Sixteenth Report	Conduct of Mr Mark Hunter	HC 1128
Seventeenth Report	Audit and Assurance of MPs' Allowances (Cm 7460)	HC 1138
Eighteenth Report	Ms Dari Taylor	HC 1188

## Session 2006-07

First Report	Evidence to the SSRB Review of Parliamentary pay, pensions and allowances	HC 330
Second Report	Conduct of Mr David Cameron	HC 429
Third Report	Complaints about alleged misuse of Parliamentary dining facilities	HC 431
Fourth Report	Conduct of Mr Julian Brazier	HC 682
Fifth Report	Handling of future complaints on misuse of the private dining facilities	HC 683
Sixth Report	Conduct of Mr George Galloway	HC 909
Seventh Report	Conduct of Mr Gregory Campbell	HC 992
Eighth Report	Conduct of Mr Martin Salter and Mr Rob Wilson	HC 1071

**Session 2005–06**

First Report	Conduct of Mr Jonathan Sayeed	HC 419
Second Report	Conduct of Mr John Horam	HC 420
Third Report	Conduct of Mr Tony Baldry	HC 421
Fourth Report	Pay for Standing Committee Chairmen	HC 568
Fifth Report	Electoral Administration Bill: Simplification of Reporting Requirements	HC 807
Sixth Report	Mr Stephen Byers (Matter referred on 19 October 2005)	HC 854
Seventh Report	Conduct of Mr George Galloway	HC 1067
Eighth Report	Conduct of Mr Mark Lancaster	HC 1144
Ninth Report	Lobbying and All Party Groups	HC 1145
Tenth Report	Conduct of Mr Michael Foster (Worcester)	HC 1223
Eleventh Report	Conduct of Ms Emily Thornberry	HC 1367
Twelfth Report	Conduct of Nadine Dorries	HC 1368
Thirteenth Report	Conduct of Mr John Prescott	HC 1553
Fourteenth Report	Conduct of Dr Desmond Turner	HC 1578
Fifteenth Report	Conduct of Mr Eric Illsley	HC 1579
Sixteenth Report	Review of the Guide to the Rules Relating to the Conduct of Members: Consultation Document	HC 1580