

Letter in *The Times*

Rules were broken in MPs' expenses scandal

The article by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, on MPs' expenses (23 May 2009) is based on a misconception. He writes of MPs saying when challenged that 'no rules were broken', but that widely-believed response is in fact incorrect. Rules were broken.

The House of Commons Green Book sets out the rules. It contains a large number of detailed rules, which perhaps were not broken. But these are expressly made subject to specified overriding principles, which in many cases were broken. The Green Book expressly says: 'When making claims against parliamentary allowances, Members must adhere to these principles'. The main overriding principles are:

- Claims should be above reproach.
- Claims must only be made for expenditure that it was necessary for an MP to incur to ensure that he or she could properly perform his or her parliamentary duties.
- MPs must ensure that claims do not give rise to, or give the appearance of giving rise to, an improper personal financial benefit to themselves or anyone else.
- MPs are committed to openness about what expenditure has been incurred and for what purposes.
- MPs should avoid purchases which could be seen as extravagant or luxurious.

Yours faithfully,

Francis Bennion, retired Parliamentary Counsel.