

STATEMENT BY MICHAEL GOVE MP

It is a privilege to be the Member of Parliament for Surrey Heath. Doing this job I rely on the goodwill of lots of fantastic people. They deserve the fullest possible explanation I can give of recent events.

People are rightly angry with the behaviour of individual MPs. I have made mistakes too. I apologise for them. I am sorry.

The current expenses system is rotten, needs reform and practices which have been defended as “within the rules” are wrong and need to change.

I know there are decisions I have made which are open to criticism and I accept that. I wish to set the record straight.

The allegation that I “flipped” the designation of my second home in an improper way is totally wrong. I do not mean “it was within the rules even though it was really wrong” – I mean that on this issue I believe I did the right thing – indeed the only thing I could do if I was going to comply with those rules which are correct.

My understanding of flipping is that it involves the arbitrary re-designation of properties as second homes so as to make a profit when selling them on. I did not do this. The designation changed because I physically moved home with my family – I had to change the designation or I would have been deceiving people.

But people must make their own mind up about my actions on the basis of the facts. I’m laying them out now so that individuals can form their own judgement on my decisions.

I have always followed what I believe to be the correct principle that your “principal home” should be the one in which you spend the majority of nights, and your “second home” an additional property in which you stay, less often, to carry out your parliamentary duties.

I changed the designation of my principal home in May 2006, after a year in Parliament, because my family had moved from Surrey to London. I have always been open about this move and it was covered in an interview I conducted with The Spectator magazine in September 2008.

My family lived very happily in our main home in Surrey from August 2004 until May 2006. We lived in rented accommodation throughout this period and made no claim on the taxpayer at any point in this period for any cost associated with these properties.

I was elected Member of Parliament for Surrey Heath in May 2005 and was then eligible to claim allowances for staying in London.

During the first two months of my time as a Member of Parliament I needed to stay overnight in London on several occasions to perform my parliamentary duties.

I could not use the property I owned in London at that time, because it was let out to tenants until July 2005. During that period I made no claim on the taxpayer for that home.

On three occasions in May and June of 2005 I claimed for overnight accommodation in London – on two occasions the amount for the room was less than £100 a night, on one occasion, it was £168.95

After the tenants left the property we had in London I was able to use it to stay overnight. I designated it as my second home because my family and I spent the majority of our time in Surrey. I made no further claims for hotel or other overnight stays in London.

As my designated second home I claimed for mortgage costs on the London property. I did not claim for any other running costs.

All my existing furniture had been moved from London to my rented house in Surrey in August 2004. When my London property became available for use as a second home it needed new furniture. The majority of the furniture was bought with my own money. But about £7,000 was claimed from the taxpayer.

At the time Members of Parliament were not told what the acceptable costs were, in Commons rules, for acquiring new furniture. We were simply told to submit receipts and then we would be told what was and was not allowed.

All of the items I claimed for, apart from one, were below the threshold. When I was told that one item was above the threshold and I could only be paid for part of the costs I accepted that ruling without complaint. One furniture claim was disallowed, and again, I accepted without complaint. I simply didn't know what could and could not be claimed for and simply followed the rulings given.

I also submitted a claim for a child's mattress, in good faith, which was passed by the Commons. I now realise that was an error and the payment was passed in an honest mistake. I have repaid the full costs of the child's mattress. I apologise unreservedly for that error.

All of the money I claimed from the taxpayer for furnishing a second home was claimed in my first year as an MP. I have not claimed furniture for more than one home. I only claimed because, in that year, I became the occupier of two homes to help discharge my parliamentary duties. I have not since claimed for any furniture costs.

I realise that the costs of several individual items of furniture I bought could have been lower and I understand why that is a matter of criticism. Since I have made a mistake about this and did not think about it as carefully as I ought to have done, I am going to make a repayment to the taxpayer.

All the money I received was within the rules but that isn't the point. Some of the items I claimed for haven't attracted any criticism. But that isn't the point. I want to ensure that any expenditure over which there is doubt is repaid and that is why I will repay every penny I received from the taxpayer for furniture. I will publish the full details of what I repay, down to the penny, on my website so people can see exactly what I have done.

In May 2006 the lease on our house in Surrey ran out. We had to leave our home in Surrey, and move the family back to London. The Commons rules state, rightly in my view, that your principal home should be the home where you spend the majority of your nights. In order to comply with the rules, both in letter and spirit, I changed the designation of my principal home from Surrey to London.

If I had not changed the designation of my principal home at that time I would, quite rightly, have been open to criticism for misrepresenting the true

position. That is why I believe the allegation of “flipping” is quite unfounded, indeed actively misleading.

From May to September 2006 I had no home in Surrey but my work as a constituency MP required me to spend several nights in Surrey. On two occasions during this period I claimed hotel bills for overnight stays. One bill was less than £100 but another was over £500.

The reason why I incurred the costs on the second occasion is that I had my wife and family staying with me in a hotel in the heart of my constituency after a full day of constituency events including an evening event at which my wife was expected and before another full day with constituency events at which my wife and children were expected. I chose a hotel where I knew the children could be looked after safely and disruption to family life could be minimised. However, the costs were too high and I am sorry for the misjudgement I made in choosing to stay there. That is why I am refunding the entire cost of the stay. I apologise unreservedly for that mistake.

In September 2006 I acquired a second home in Surrey. I did so because I believed that I could more effectively, and efficiently, discharge my responsibilities as an MP by having a permanent base in Surrey. It meant, and means, that I have more time to concentrate on performing my constituency and parliamentary duties.

The property was bought with a deposit from my own funds. I claimed the legal costs of acquiring the property, including stamp duty, on my second home allowance. I have not claimed stamp duty or legal costs on any other property at any other time.

Since acquiring that property I have not claimed furniture for it from the taxpayer. It has been furnished entirely at my own expense and the costs covered by the taxpayer have been the running costs - mortgage interest, utility bills, insurance, council tax and the TV licence. I have not used taxpayers' money to “enhance” or refurbish that property. I believed that since I had spent public money on second home furniture once before I should not do so again.

I think we urgently need an expenses regime which restores public confidence in politics. That means total transparency and a reduction in the amounts paid to MPs. I have always opposed the taxpayer funding of

political parties. In future, all of my expenses will be made public regardless of what system Parliament votes for so that you can see right down to the penny what I am costing you.

Ultimately, as public servants, we need to ensure that any changes command public confidence and I want to hear from my constituents what they think needs to be done.

That is why I have asked the Rev. Mark Chester of St. Paul's Church, a person entirely above party politics, to chair a public meeting for Constituents so that I can answer Constituents' questions.

The meeting will be held at St. Mary's Church Hall, Park Road, Camberley by kind permission of Rev. Martin Wainwright on Monday, 18th May at 7.30 p.m.

MICHAEL GOVE MP
13th May, 2009