

James Duddridge in £11,000 benefits row over hotel expense



James Duddridge

First published Tuesday 16 September 2014 in [News](#) Exclusive by [Ian Burbidge](#)

A TORY MP has come under fire after for claiming £11,348 of taxpayers' money, mostly on London hotels – despite having two homes in the capital.

In the latest round of MPs expenses for 2013/14, [Rochford](#) and Southend East MP [James Duddridge](#) claimed the bulk of the cash on overnight accommodation in the city, from April to December.

The rest of his claims were made up from renting a property in the city until March 2014.

According to his financial declarations, the MP owns two properties in London, which he rents out.

As an MP, Mr Duddridge is allowed to claim £14,000 to spend on accommodation in London.

MPs are not allowed to claim on properties they own, but Mr Duddridge was able to claim on renting the studio flat, despite owning two other homes in the capital.

Ukip's James Moyies, who is in line to be his party's candidate against Mr Duddridge in the general election, feels his rival's claims will infuriate taxpayers.

Mr Moyies said: "People are feeling hurt about what happened five years ago, but James is still getting welfare on the back of the taxpayer."

"First of all, he owned a flat in London which he stayed in. But he rented that out, and got a bigger flat in London on a bigger mortgage – paid for by the taxpayer and then renting that out. So he's making a tidy sum out of two properties that are appreciating in value – and he's got a nice little property portfolio paid by the taxpayer."

Mr Duddridge has claimed nightly accommodation in the capital before – and justified it by arguing he was a Government Whip and, therefore, stayed later as a result.

However, this was withdrawn in 2012 and this is the biggest accommodation claim he has made in a single financial year.

According to the Government, the latest the Commons sits is 10.30pm on Mondays and Tuesdays.

The last train on the Greater Anglia line is at 11.59pm and the last train on the [c2c](#) line back to Thorpe Bay is 12.31am.

Mr Duddridge said: "Since 2010 I have stayed in hotels when working late in London.

"More recently, I have rented a studio flat in accordance with the Independent Parliamentary Standards authority."

He was paid a base salary of £66,396.

Out of all the other south Essex MPs, only [David Amess](#) claimed for accommodation costs in London – £256.

Dave Murray, founder of the antibedroom tax campaign group, [Basildon](#) Residents' Against Bedroom Tax, said: "It's one rule for the rich and another for the poor.

"I know it is within the rules, but morally it is indefensible.

"If you compare this to someone being screwed out of £16 a week because they have a little box room in their house, then it is sickening."



Stephen Metcalfe, South Basildon and East Thurrock MP

South Essex MPs - we don't want a rise

SOUTH Essex MPs have denounced a proposed pay rise for themselves, saying now is the wrong time for it.

The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has proposed a 9 per cent base salary increase for MPs.

It would boost their wages to about £74,000.

The organisation last week reaffirmed plans to continue with the rise, despite public sector workers being stuck on a 1 per cent increase.

Prime Minister David Cameron spoke out against the proposals last year, but the rise is set to go ahead after next year's general election.

However, Stephen Metcalfe, Tory MP for South Basildon and East [Thurrock](#), admitted: "I don't think it is the right thing to do.

"There is the whole pay constraint in the public sector, so for someone to propose an increase on our behalf is wrong.

"At the moment, it is not appropriate."

MPs are currently paid about £66,000.

The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, set up in the wake of the expenses scandal of 2009, sets the wages for MPs now, taking it out of their hands.

Marcial Boo, the chief executive of the organisation, said MPs did an important job and should not be paid a “miserly amount”.

But [Mark Francois](#), Tory MP for [Wickford](#) and [Rayleigh](#), said: “In view of the difficult economic circumstances we have been through over the last few years, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority might do better to reconsider these proposals, rather than to press on with them.”

[John Baron](#), Basildon and [Billericay](#)’s Tory MP, pointed out that the organisation was making a raft of other changes, including scaling back MP’s pensions.

However, he did not reveal whether he thought the proposed increase was right. He said: “The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority’s overall objective is that, taken in their entirety, these changes will cost the taxpayer no more than previously.”

None of the other south Essex MPs responded to the Echo for a comment on the proposed rise.