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Committee on
Standards and Privileges

Nadine Dorries

Fourth Report of Session 2010–11

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.

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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.

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The current staff of the Committee are Mr Steve Priestley (Clerk), Miss Rhiannon Hollis (Second Clerk) and Ms Jane Cooper (Committee Assistant).

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Nadine Dorries

Introduction

1. We have received from the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards the report of his investigation of a complaint made in June 2009 against Nadine Dorries, the Member for Mid Bedfordshire. The complainant, Mr Michael Barnbrook, who at the time was a law and order spokesman for the British National Party, told the Commissioner that in his view Ms Dorries had breached the rules of the Additional Cost Allowance by claiming second home expenses in respect of her constituency home, which Mr Barnbrook said was in fact her main home.¹ In support of his complaint, Mr Barnbrook drew the Commissioner's attention to an article published in the *Daily Telegraph* of 26 June 2009, in which Ms Dorries was described as having said that she spent only spare weekends and holidays away from her constituency home.²

2. The Commissioner's report of his investigation was submitted to the Committee in the form of a memorandum, which is published at Appendix 1 to this Report. In accordance with the Committee's usual procedure, we supplied Ms Dorries with a copy of the Commissioner's memorandum and invited her to give evidence, in person or in writing. Ms Dorries chose to submit written evidence, which is published at Appendix 2.

The Commissioner's findings

3. The complainant told the Commissioner that Ms Dorries had breached the rules by claiming expenses for her constituency home. In the complainant's view, comments she had made in the press showed that this constituency home was the one where she spent most of her time, and was in fact her main home.³ The Commissioner found that the constituency home was not Ms Dorries' main home, and did not uphold the complaint.⁴ Whilst investigating the complaint, the Commissioner also found that Ms Dorries had breached the rules by failing to notify the Department of Resources of two changes to the address of her main home.⁵ The Commissioner does not regard this breach as serious.⁶

4. The rules relating to the claiming of second home expenses by Members are set out in the Commissioner's memorandum.⁷ In essence, during the relevant period, a Member could claim an allowance for a home which was not his or her main home. Members were required to notify the Department of Resources of any change in the address of either their main or additional home. Until March 2009, the location of a main home would, according to the Green Book, "normally be a matter of fact" and would normally be the place in which the Member spent "more nights than any other." From 1 April 2009, the location of the main home was "for a Member to determine."

¹ Appendix 1, paragraph 6

² Appendix 1, paragraph 2

³ Appendix 1, paragraph 6

⁴ Appendix 1, paragraph 162

⁵ Appendix 1, paragraph 173

⁶ Appendix 1, paragraph 175

⁷ Appendix 1, paragraphs 9 to 24

5. According to a best estimate produced by the Commissioner, and based on information Ms Dorries supplied to him, Ms Dorries spent the great majority of her nights in her main home in the Cotswolds.⁸ Ms Dorries did not confirm that she agreed with the Commissioner’s best estimate, but told him that, during the period in question, she had spent most nights of the week when the House of Commons was sitting, and almost every night when it was not sitting, at her main home.⁹ In addition, Ms Dorries told the Commissioner that the Cotswolds was the place that she and her family regarded as home.¹⁰ The area had always been the centre of their family life.¹¹ She told the Commissioner that the constituency home was used “as a means of maintaining a base in my constituency in order to assist with my duties as an MP”.¹²

6. That picture of Ms Dorries’ pattern of use of her two homes was broadly confirmed by the evidence of four neighbours who lived near to Ms Dorries’ constituency home. One constituency neighbour told the Commissioner that she “only occasionally” saw Ms Dorries or her car at the house;¹³ another told the Commissioner Ms Dorries was “hardly ever” at the house.¹⁴ A third neighbour confirmed the picture, saying that he had seen Ms Dorries “on a maximum of 20 occasions over the last two years”, and that she spent “weekends and holidays elsewhere.”¹⁵

7. Two people who knew Ms Dorries in the Cotswolds also corresponded with the Commissioner. One witness, who helped Ms Dorries with moving house and with transporting her children and pets whilst she was away, told the Commissioner that Ms Dorries would spend a few nights a week at the constituency house, and had never asked him for help over the weekend or during the summer—suggesting she was at her main home at those times.¹⁶ Ms Dorries’ general practitioner, who had been her family doctor since 1996, told the Commissioner that Ms Dorries and her family spent most of her time in the area; he saw her and her family regularly and could say “with certainty that their lives are very much based in and around this area.”¹⁷

8. The evidence of one neighbour from Ms Dorries’ constituency differs markedly from that of all the other witnesses. This neighbour, called neighbour 1 in the Commissioner’s memorandum, told the Commissioner that the constituency house was “very much the ‘family’ home where [she] lived with her daughter/daughters and the family pets.” He estimated that Ms Dorries spent about 80% of her time at the constituency house.¹⁸

9. Ms Dorries told the Commissioner that neighbour 1 had “apparently spent the last six months living in France”, meaning that he had limited opportunity to observe her use of

⁸ Appendix 1, paragraph 147

⁹ Appendix 1, paragraph 148

¹⁰ Appendix 1, paragraph 34

¹¹ Appendix 1, paragraph 38

¹² Appendix 1, paragraph 35

¹³ Appendix 1, paragraph 69

¹⁴ Appendix 1, paragraph 72

¹⁵ Appendix 1, paragraph 87

¹⁶ Appendix 1, paragraph 118

¹⁷ Appendix 1, paragraph 74

¹⁸ Appendix 1, paragraph 64

the constituency house.¹⁹ Two of her constituency neighbours confirmed this point.²⁰ Neighbour 1, however, told the Commissioner he had only recently purchased a house abroad and that during the period being investigated he had been well placed to notice how much Ms Dorries used the constituency house²¹. In addition, Ms Dorries suggested that neighbour 1 might have been paid by the *Daily Telegraph* or influenced by a representative of the newspaper in his comments.²² That suggestion was firmly denied by neighbour 1.²³

10. The evidence of Ms Dorries and her other neighbours and that of neighbour 1 could not be reconciled. Whilst he does not question the good faith of the witness, the Commissioner notes that personal observation is “bound to give no more than an impression” of the way in which a neighbour uses a property. The Commissioner records that he therefore decided to accept the evidence of all the other witnesses in preference to that of neighbour 1.²⁴ He concludes that Ms Dorries “has established that she spent more nights in her Cotswold homes than anywhere else, including in her constituency home.”²⁵ He also finds no other reason not to regard the Cotswolds as Ms Dorries’ main home.²⁶

11. Comments made by Ms Dorries on her blog suggested that she spent the majority of her weekends in the constituency, whilst she had told the Commissioner that nearly all weekends were spent in her main home.²⁷ Ms Dorries explained to the Commissioner that her blog contained fiction and “poetic licence” as well as fact, and that she used it to reassure her constituents of her absolute commitment to the constituency.²⁸ She had also been concerned to maintain “some degree of a private life”. She stated that, although she was often in the constituency at weekends, as she had said on her blog, that did not mean she slept there.²⁹

12. During the course of his investigation, the Commissioner found that Ms Dorries had not declared to the Department of Resources two changes to the address of her main home. She had left her original main home in January 2007 when she separated from her then husband. After that, she rented properties in Stratford-on-Avon, spending time in three different rented properties before buying a home in the Cotswolds, some two years and nine months after leaving her initial main home. Only the second of the three rental properties was formally declared to the Department of Resources.³⁰

13. Ms Dorries told the Commissioner that she had kept the Department informed at all times, and that she had taken advice from the Department “every single step of the way”. She said the Department had advised her that she did not need to change her designated

¹⁹ Appendix 1, paragraph 44

²⁰ Appendix 1, paragraphs 69 and 72

²¹ Appendix 1, paragraph 66

²² Appendix 1, paragraphs 84 and 128

²³ Appendix 1, paragraph 122

²⁴ Appendix 1, paragraph 164

²⁵ Appendix 1, paragraph 163

²⁶ Appendix 1, paragraph 165

²⁷ Appendix 1, paragraph 131

²⁸ Appendix 1, paragraph 81

²⁹ Appendix 1, paragraph 132

³⁰ Appendix 1, paragraph 171

main address until she knew where her new permanent home would be.³¹ The Department informed the Commissioner that it was “entirely possible” that Ms Dorries had been advised in that way, but that it would have regarded that situation as “strictly temporary”.³² It was only after a request from the Department that Ms Dorries informed it of the second of her three addresses.³³

14. Ms Dorries told the Commissioner that she had initially regarded the move to the rented home as temporary. She also explained that the omission had happened at a time when she had to deal with “massive upheaval” in her family life, and had been under considerable work pressure in her Parliamentary role. She had launched a major campaign to change abortion law, “which took over almost every day of my life.” She had also been “one of the four MPs mentioned in the No 10 Smeargate e-mails [...] which resulted in an extraordinary amount of invasive media attention, adding more stress to what was already a very tense and difficult situation.” There had also been health problems in her close family.³⁴

15. The Commissioner comments:

I agree with the Department that it would be unreasonable to expect Members to notify the Department of a change in the designation of their main home in the immediate aftermath of a domestic upheaval which required them to leave that home. [...] The length of that initial period [after which a declaration should be made] depends on personal circumstances. In Ms Dorries’ case it seems to me that that initial period should have ended soon after the signing of the rental agreement for her first property in Stratford-upon-Avon in January 2007. [...] Of course, like any person, her personal circumstances could have changed during any of those years, as they did for the final rental. But the prospect of such a possible change should not absolve a Member from the responsibility of keeping up to date the formal notification to the Department of the location of their main home.

The Commissioner concludes that Ms Dorries breached the rules by failing to notify the Department of either her first or third rented main home. He finds no evidence that her omissions had any effect on the claims which Ms Dorries made against her Parliamentary allowances.³⁵ He does not regard the breach as serious.³⁶

16. The Commissioner comments in his memorandum on the length of time Ms Dorries took to provide some information he requested. He notes that it took her fourteen weeks to supply an estimate of the number of nights she spent in each of her properties after his initial request, and six months to supply a consistent estimate. He records his disappointment at the fact Ms Dorries did not recognise that such estimates were necessary to his investigation.³⁷ The Commissioner expresses the view that Ms Dorries was

³¹ Appendix 1, paragraph 50

³² Appendix 1, paragraph 95

³³ Appendix 1, paragraph 98

³⁴ Appendix 1, paragraph 112

³⁵ Appendix 1, paragraphs 171 to 173

³⁶ Appendix 1, paragraph 175

³⁷ Appendix 1, paragraph 166

unrealistic in expecting her right to privacy to extend to concealing the “broad details” of her accommodation arrangements, whilst claiming the Parliamentary accommodation allowance to which she was entitled.³⁸ The Commissioner accepts Ms Dorries’ explanation of the comments she made on her blog, but notes that they “provided a misleading impression of her arrangements”, as did her comments about her use of the constituency home reported in the newspaper article which was referred to in the original complaint.³⁹ The Commissioner also states that his inquiries were “complicated and extended” by Ms Dorries’ criticisms of neighbour 1.⁴⁰

17. The Commissioner records that he has submitted a memorandum to the Committee on this case “principally so as to reinforce the importance I attach to Members responding promptly, fully and openly to the questions which I necessarily ask of them so that I can judge a Member’s conduct on the basis of the best evidence available”.⁴¹

Ms Dorries’ evidence

18. Ms Dorries wrote to the Committee clerks and has confirmed that she would like her letter to be treated as evidence to the Committee. With regard to her failure to declare the two changes of rented main home address, she writes:

[the Commissioner] has described this breach as not serious; however, it is a breach. At the time I was in the midst of dealing with a number of very serious personal issues. My prime concern at this time was the management of my case load and maintaining my constituency and Parliamentary duties. I regret that certain elements of paperwork did not receive due attention and I would like to wholeheartedly and most sincerely apologise for this breach of House rules.⁴²

19. Ms Dorries goes on to note that the memorandum from the Commissioner states that her main home is “apparently” still in the Cotswolds. She asks for that wording to be removed, as it “suggests doubt ... of which there is none.”⁴³

20. Ms Dorries also takes issue with the comments made by the Commissioner about the length of time she took to supply the information he requested. She asks for these comments to be removed, saying that:

[the Commissioner] did not ask for information regarding a neighbour at my main home location until a considerable time into the inquiry. I was incredibly frustrated at the length the inquiry took [...] fifteen months is much too long a time period to sustain without personal ill effect. I did inform the Standards Commissioner some three months ago that I was going to raise with the

³⁸ Appendix 1, paragraph 169

³⁹ Appendix 1, paragraphs 167 and 168

⁴⁰ Appendix 1, paragraph 170

⁴¹ Appendix 1, paragraph 176

⁴² Appendix 2

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Committee my concern that this inquiry had taken so long, however, it appears many inquiries take this length of time.⁴⁴

21. Finally, Ms Dorries takes issue with the Commissioner's comments about her use of her blog, where he says that it "gave information to its readers, including Ms Dorries' constituents and party supporters, which provided a misleading impression of her arrangements as the Member of Parliament for the constituency".⁴⁵ Ms Dorries says that the comments are "strongly worded and incorrect."⁴⁶

Conclusions

22. We agree with the Commissioner that Ms Dorries has shown that her constituency home was indeed her second home, and we believe he is therefore correct in deciding not to uphold the original complaint.

23. We agree with the Commissioner that Ms Dorries did breach the rules of the House when she failed to declare the addresses of her first and third rented main homes to the Department of Resources. We understand that at such a difficult time, the completion of a declaration form would not have been foremost in anybody's mind; however, once Ms Dorries had signed a rental agreement for a year, she ought to have declared her new address. She should also have declared her third rented main home. The rules of the Green Book are clear on this requirement. We note that the Commissioner found no evidence that those omissions had had any effect on Ms Dorries' claims against her Parliamentary allowances. We agree with him that this breach of the rules was not a serious one, and we are pleased that Ms Dorries has apologised for it "wholeheartedly and sincerely". We make no recommendation on this point.

24. Ms Dorries does not agree with the comments made by the Commissioner about her use of her blog. She states that his description of comments made on the blog as "misleading" is "strongly worded and incorrect." We accept that Ms Dorries used the blog to reassure her constituents of her commitment to them, and also to protect her own privacy. We do not feel, however, that the Commissioner's comment is unfair. There are discrepancies between some of the information that appeared on Ms Dorries' blog and the information she supplied to the Commissioner during the investigation. The Commissioner was quite correct in seeking an explanation of the differences, in order to form a judgement about the complaint. It is right that he sets out in his memorandum his conclusions about which information he could rely on.

25. We understand that Ms Dorries feels that some of the information in the Commissioner's memorandum about her family breaches their right to privacy. We are sympathetic to this concern and we respect the right of Ms Dorries and her family to a private life. However, we consider that all the information which the Commissioner records in his memorandum is necessary to explain why he reached the conclusion he did.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Appendix 1, paragraph 167

⁴⁶ Appendix 2

We also note that, when the Commissioner wrote to Ms Dorries at the start of his inquiry, he included a copy of a note of guidance. The note includes the following explanation:

The Commissioner will include in his report the Member's version of events and views, both in the body of the report and as annexes. Any evidence which a Member supplies can therefore be expected to become public, although the Committee is normally sympathetic to requests for the deletion of confidential and personal information where it can protect privacy without jeopardising the public interest in knowing the facts on which the Committee has based its conclusions.⁴⁷

Ms Dorries should, therefore, have been aware that information she sent to the Commissioner would probably become public.

26. Finally, we note that Ms Dorries feels that the Commissioner's comments about the length of time it took her to supply information she requested are unfair. However, we agree with the Commissioner that fourteen weeks was too long to provide initial estimates of the number of nights Ms Dorries spent at each home. We also note that it took Ms Dorries some time to resolve conflicts and lack of clarity in the answers she provided. The Commissioner states that he has submitted his memorandum to the Committee "principally so as to reinforce the importance I attach to Members responding promptly, fully and openly to the questions which I necessarily ask of them so that I can judge a Member's conduct on the basis of the best evidence available."⁴⁸ **We agree with the Commissioner that prompt, full and open responses to the Commissioner's inquiries are of great importance and we take this opportunity to remind Members of that fact.**

⁴⁷ See www.parliament.uk/documents/pcfs/pcfsprocednote3.pdf, paragraph 25

⁴⁸ Appendix 1, para 176

Appendix 1: Memorandum from the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

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Complaint against Ms Nadine Dorries MP

Introduction

1. This memorandum reports on my inquiries into a complaint that Ms Nadine Dorries, the Member for Mid Bedfordshire, claimed expenses against her Additional Costs Allowance for a property in her constituency which was in fact her main home.

The Complaint

2. On 26 June 2009 Mr Michael Barnbrook wrote to me saying that he wished to register a formal complaint against Ms Dorries.¹ The complaint related to an article of the same date in the *Daily Telegraph*. Mr Barnbrook enclosed a copy of the article,² which stated that Ms Dorries had admitted that she only spent spare weekends and holidays away from her designated “second home”, a flat in her constituency on which she had claimed £18,000 in rent. It also said that Ms Dorries had stated that her youngest daughter and her pet dogs lived at that property. Mr Barnbrook said that, if this were correct, Ms Dorries was in clear breach of parliamentary rules relating to the Additional Costs Allowance, “*which state that the main residence is the property where a Member spends more nights a week than any other*”.

3. Mr Barnbrook said that this raised the question whether Ms Dorries’ designated “second home” was her main residence, “*in which case she should not be able to use the second home allowance for its upkeep*.” He said that he had not submitted evidence “*because I am not aware that Miss Dorries has repudiated the comments attributed to her*.”

4. The *Daily Telegraph* article said that Ms Dorries had “*initially refused to state where her other house was, but later said it was another rented property near her former marital home in the Cotswolds. There is no reference to such an address in any of her expenses files*.”

5. I replied to Mr Barnbrook on 30 June 2009.³ I noted that he had told me that he had not submitted evidence since he was not aware that Ms Dorries had repudiated the comments attributed to her. I pointed out, however, that I was required to consider whether the complainant had provided me with sufficient evidence to justify at least a preliminary inquiry into whether the Member had breached the rules. I told Mr Barnbrook that, to meet that requirement, he needed to submit the evidence which supported his complaint, along with an explanation of how he believed Ms Dorries had breached the rules of the House.

6. Mr Barnbrook wrote to me on 2 July 2009.⁴ He said that in his letter of 26 June⁵ he should have said was that there was no need for further evidence, as he considered that Ms Dorries was admitting to breaching the rules in relation to the second homes allowance.

¹ WE 1

² WE 2

³ WE 3

⁴ WE 4

⁵ WE 1

Mr Barnbrook said that Ms Dorries was quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* as saying that she only spent spare weekends and holidays away from her designated second home. He said that the rules stated that the principal home was where a Member spent “*more nights a week than any other*”. He continued, “*By her own statement [Ms Dorries] is suggesting that she spends most of her time at her designated second home, which under the Commons rules would make it her principal home.*”

7. Mr Barnbrook recalled my comments in the report relating to my investigation of Ed Balls MP and Yvette Cooper MP, where I had said, “*If a Member has his or her family living permanently in their constituency home then it would clearly seem to be a matter of fact that the Member’s main home is in the constituency.*”⁶ Mr Barnbrook said that Ms Dorries was quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* as saying that her youngest daughter and pet dogs lived at her second home. “*By your own submission that would make it her principal home. Taking into account the above comments, together with the admissions made by Ms Dorries, I would suggest that there is sufficient evidence to instigate at least a preliminary investigation into my complaint.*”

8. I wrote to Mr Barnbrook on 7 July to let him know that I had accepted his complaint.⁷ I pointed out that the full paragraph in my report to which he had referred was as follows:

“I do not believe that, given the particular circumstances of these two Members, the identification of their main home is a simple matter of fact. It is possible to imagine circumstances when that part of the rule clearly applies. If a Member has his or her family living permanently in their constituency home and has modest accommodation in London big enough only for themselves, and which they use only when Parliament is in session, then it would clearly seem to be a matter of fact that that Member’s main home is in the constituency.”

I said that, as the paragraph made clear, that statement was of course based on the particular circumstances of the Members whom I had investigated.

Relevant Rules of the House

9. 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.”

10. The rules in relation to parliamentary allowances were set out in successive editions of the Green Book. The versions relevant to this inquiry are the July 2006 and March 2009 editions.

11. In his introduction to the July 2006 edition, the then Speaker wrote:

⁶ Committee on Standards and Privileges, Fourteenth Report of Session 2007-08, *Conduct of Ed Balls and Yvette Cooper*, HC 1044, paragraph 78

⁷ WE 5

“Members themselves are responsible for ensuring that their use of allowances is above reproach. They should seek advice in cases of doubt and read the Green Book with care. In cases of doubt or difficulty about any aspect of the allowances or how they can be used, please contact the Department of Finance and Administration. The Members Estimate Committee, which I chair, has recently restated the Department’s authority to interpret and enforce these rules.”

12. The scope of the Additional Costs Allowance, the allowance relevant to my inquiry for the period up to 31 March 2009, is set out in paragraph 3.1.1 as follows:

“The Additional Costs Allowance (ACA) reimburses Members of Parliament for expenses wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred when staying overnight away from their main UK residence (referred to below as their main home) for the purpose of performing Parliamentary duties. This excludes expenses that have been incurred for purely personal or political purposes.”

13. The eligibility criteria are set out in paragraph 3.2.1 as follows:

“You can claim ACA if:

- a You have stayed overnight in the UK away from your only or main home, and*
- b This was for the purpose of performing your Parliamentary duties, and*
- c You have necessarily incurred additional costs in so doing, and*
- d You represent a constituency in outer London or outside London.”*

14. Some general principles applying to the Additional Costs Allowance are set out in paragraph 3.3.1 as follows:

“You must ensure that arrangements for your ACA claims are above reproach and that there can be no grounds for a suggestion of misuse of public money. Members should bear in mind the need to obtain value for money from accommodation, goods or services funded from the allowances.”

15. The rules relating to the location of overnight stays are set out in paragraph 3.4.1 as follows:

“If your main home is in the constituency, you can claim ACA for overnight stays in London—or in another part of the constituency if reasonably necessary in view of the distance from your only or main home. Please contact the Department of Finance and Administration for information on such arrangements.

“If your main home is in London you can claim for overnight stays in the constituency.

“If your main home is neither in London nor the constituency you can choose in which of these areas to claim ACA.”

16. The definition of a “*main home*” for the purpose of the Additional Costs Allowance is set out in paragraph 3.11.1 as follows:

“When you enter Parliament we will ask you to give the address of your main UK home on form ACA1 for the purposes of ACA and travel entitlements. Members are expected to locate their main homes in the UK. It is your responsibility to tell us if your main home changes. This will remain your main home unless you tell us otherwise.”

“The location of your main home will normally be a matter of fact. If you have more than one home, your main home will normally be the one where you spend more nights than any other. If there is any doubt about which is your main home, please consult the Department of Finance and Administration.”

17. The requirement for Members to report changes in the location of their main or second homes is set out in paragraph 3.12.1 as follows:

“If you change the location of your main or second home please let us know promptly, as it may affect your ACA claim. For example, if your constituency is outside London and you move your main home from the constituency to London, this will mean that you can no longer claim ACA in London.”

18. From April 2009, the House replaced the Additional Costs Allowance with Personal Additional Accommodation Expenditure (PAAE). The relevant rules for PAAE were set out in the March 2009 edition of the Green Book.

19. Section 1.3 of this Green Book sets out a number of fundamental principles applicable to all claims against parliamentary allowances. They included the following:

“Claims should be above reproach and must reflect actual usage of the resources being claimed.

“Claims must only be made for expenditure that it was necessary for a Member to incur to ensure that he or she could properly perform his or her parliamentary duties.

...

“Members 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.

“Members are committed to openness about what expenditure has been incurred and for what purposes.

...

“The requirement of ensuring value for money is central in claiming for accommodation, goods or services—Members should avoid purchases which could be seen as extravagant or luxurious.”

20. The purpose of PAAE is set out in paragraph 2.1.1 as follows:

“PAAE is available to reimburse Members for the additional expenses necessarily incurred in staying overnight away from their main home for the purpose of performing their parliamentary duties...”

21. Eligibility for PAAE is set out in paragraph 2.1.2 as follows:

“PAAE can be claimed if the principles set out in Part 1 have been complied with, and

— If your main home is in the constituency, for overnight stays in London

— If your main home is in London, for overnight stays in the constituency

— If your main home is neither in London nor the constituency, you can choose in respect of which of these areas to claim PAAE”

22. Paragraph 2.1.3 gives examples of expenditure appropriate to be claimed as PAAE. Paragraph 2.1.3.1 sets out what is appropriate in respect of rent or mortgage interest as follows:

“In respect of one additional home in either London or the constituency:

Either

— Rent

— The cost of a deposit (although this must be repaid when the deposit, or a proportion thereof, is returned)

Or

— Mortgage interest

— Increase to mortgage costs (interest only) to pay for refurbishments; to extend the lease; or to purchase the freehold

And

Legal and other costs associated with obtaining (and selling) (for example, stamp duty, removal expenses, valuation fees)”

23. The documentation required for PAAE claims is set out in paragraph 2.1.5 as follows:

“Members are required to provide the Department with the address of their main home when they enter Parliament by completing form PAAE1. Members must inform the Department if the address of either home changes. This information is essential to ensure the proper assessment of a Member’s PAAE and travel entitlements. Save in exceptional circumstances ... Members may only change the respective designations of main home and additional home once in any year.”

24. Section 4 of the Green Book (Definitions) define the expressions “*main home*” and “*additional home*” in the following terms:

“*Main home*’ is the term used in the Green Book for the term ‘only or main residence’ as used in the applicable Resolutions of the House and the relevant legal provisions. It is for a Member to determine where his or her main home is based on his or her circumstances. It must be in the UK.”

“*Additional home*’ means the home, not being the Member’s main home, in respect of which a Member is entitled to claim PAEE. It must be in the UK.”

My Inquiries

25. I wrote to Ms Dorries on 7 July 2009.⁸ I asked her in particular to identify, with dates, the location of her main home, and her second home for ACA purposes, including any changes to their locations, since her election to the House in 2005. I also asked Ms Dorries to set out her reasons for identifying those properties as her main and second homes, and the reasons for any changes she had made to these identifications, and to set out what advice, if any, she had taken from the House authorities before or after she had determined the location of her main and second homes.

26. I asked Ms Dorries to estimate, drawing on her diaries and other information as necessary, the number of nights she had spent in her main home, in her second home and in other locations in each financial year or part year since her election in 2005. I also asked her to let me know the basis of these statistics and, recognising the passage of time, how reliable she considered them to be. I asked Ms Dorries to confirm whether she had been accurately quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* of 26 June when she was reported to have “*admitted that she only spends spare weekends and holidays away from her designated second home*”.⁹ Finally I asked Ms Dorries to set out the claims she had made against the Additional Costs Allowance for her second home in each financial year or part year since she was elected, together with copies of her claim forms and supporting documentation if available.

27. Ms Dorries replied to me on 27 July.¹⁰ On my questions about the Additional Costs Allowance, Ms Dorries said she had forwarded to me her expenses “*up to the date they are available in order to assist with your inquiry*.”¹¹ She said that when she became an MP in 2005 she had initially rented a room at a central London club on sitting nights and then rented a flat in Westminster. She had “*then transferred the allowance to a rented property in [her] constituency*”, the address of which she gave. She told me, “*I spend approximately 150 nights per year in my constituency home*.” Ms Dorries said that her main home had been a property in Gloucestershire, the address of which she gave, from 2005 to 2007, and “*to*

⁸ WE 6

⁹ WE 2

¹⁰ WE 7

¹¹ Not included in the written evidence. The information provided by Ms Dorries was a series of spreadsheets which summarised briefly her ACA claims for hotels, rent and premises costs from 2005–06 to 2007–08.

date” was a property in Stratford-upon-Avon, the address of which she also gave.¹² In response to my question as to whether she had been accurately quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* article, Ms Dorries commented, “*By free weekends, I of course mean weekends when I do not have surgeries and official duties.*”

28. On 30 July I wrote again to Ms Dorries.¹³ I said that in my letter of 7 July¹⁴ I had set out five other areas on which I needed information from her besides details of her ACA claims. I also said that the information Ms Dorries had given me in her letter of 27 July was not sufficient for me to decide how best to take this matter forward. I therefore asked Ms Dorries in particular for more precise information on the dates (as opposed to the year) between which she had her room in the central London club and her flat in Westminster, the date when she had taken over the rented property in her constituency, and the date when she had moved from her first home to her current one. I also asked why she had identified her first and second main home as her main homes and the reason why she had initially identified her second home as being in London and subsequently changed her designation to her rented constituency home. I also asked whether she had rented that home before she had started claiming for it, and what advice, if any, she had taken from the House authorities about these arrangements.

29. I told Ms Dorries that the number of nights she had spent in her main home would, under the rules of the Green Book, be an important factor in helping to resolve this complaint. I also told her that the estimate she had given me of nights in her constituency home was too broad and did not account for nights she had spent in her main home. I asked her, therefore, to let me have her estimate of how many nights she had spent in her constituency home in each financial year since she had been elected in 2005; the number of nights she had spent in her main home for the same periods; and the number of nights she had spent elsewhere. I also asked Ms Dorries to tell me the basis on which she had made these estimates, with any documentary evidence she had to help substantiate it. I said I assumed that she had diaries which showed her appointments, which might be helpful in substantiating her estimates. However, I also said I readily recognised that any documentary evidence she might have was unlikely to be conclusive and that her response would be her best estimates for each year, based on what she knew of her normal pattern, diary information and her own recollection.

30. Finally, I said to Ms Dorries that I took it from what she had said that the *Daily Telegraph* quotation was accurate, subject to the clarification she had given me, and that the implication of the quotation was that she stayed overnight in her constituency home unless she was on holiday or did not have a weekend surgery. I told her that once I had her estimates of her overnight stays, I might need to ask her to explain how that statement was consistent with the normal expectation of the Green Book rules that Members should spend more nights in their main home than anywhere else.

¹² In later evidence, Ms Dorries said that she had also previously occupied two other properties in Stratford-upon-Avon. I refer to all three properties at paragraph 37 below. The property Ms Dorries referred to here is the property identified in that paragraph as Address 3 in Stratford-upon-Avon.

¹³ WE 8

¹⁴ WE 6

31. Ms Dorries replied to me by e-mail on 4 August.¹⁵ She said that the ACA claims she had previously sent me would “*quite clearly show both the dates and the fact that only one property was claimed for using my ACA at any time.*”¹⁶ She said that she had only ever rented using the ACA, and had not bought, “*and therefore the reasons for changing address do not apply in terms of ‘flipping’.*” She said that the address of her main home had changed because of her marriage breakdown and the requirement for the family home to be sold. The central London club, the Westminster flat and then the constituency home had all been paid for using the ACA, one after the other. She “*obviously had no accommodation when I first arrived in London as an MP and had no choice but to use an hotel.*”

32. Ms Dorries said that she had not rented the constituency home before she rented it using the ACA and previously had “*no property whatsoever*” in the constituency. She commented, “*I would have no reason to have had any property in my constituency before becoming an MP as I had lived in Gloucestershire for the previous 20 years.*” Ms Dorries said she had changed her ACA address from London to her constituency, as she “*had promised my Association during my selection that I would make a home base in the constituency, and made the same pledge to my constituents during the general election campaign.*” She said that she now resided at the constituency address “*in tandem with the parliamentary cycle, this is how I broadly estimate my nights.*” She continued, “*However, I do not spend every parliamentary sitting night in the constituency. I spend an occasional Monday and /or Tuesday evening in London, depending upon the votes during the weeks Parliament sits. This arrangement is private and does not involve any claim to the Fees Office.*” In response to my request for more specific information than she had given in her letter of 27 July about the number of nights she had spent in her respective homes, Ms Dorries said that “*in 2007 and 2008 I spent many fewer nights in the constituency home and many more nights in my main home than my estimate*” as her daughter then attended a school in Gloucestershire. She estimated that “*this year I will spend approximately 200+ nights per year in my main home.*” Ms Dorries said that she had sought advice from the Fees Office “*every step of the way ... I have always sought advice and always remained within the guidance laid out in the Green Book, whilst at the same time exercising my own judgment, ie, I chose to rent and not buy in the constituency as I felt this was easier to explain to my Association and electorate.*”

33. I replied to Ms Dorries on the same day, 4 August.¹⁷ I told her that she had not yet provided me with all the information I had sought in my letter of 30 July,¹⁸ drawn from my letter of 7 July,¹⁹ as I was sure she would recognise. I pointed out to her that I needed as full an answer as possible in order to take forward my inquiries.

34. On 8 October Ms Dorries e-mailed to me an analysis which she said had been based on her office diary, her personal diary and her daughter’s diary, of where she had spent her nights from her election to the House in May 2005 to the end of 2008–09.²⁰ She did not

¹⁵ WE 9

¹⁶ See also paragraph 37 and footnote 11 above for a summary of the material Ms Dorries sent.

¹⁷ WE 10

¹⁸ WE 8

¹⁹ WE 6

²⁰ WE 11

claim it to be “*absolutely 100% accurate*”, but said that it was “*as accurate as is possible.*” The information she gave is summarised in the table below:

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Nights at main home</i>	<i>Nights in constituency</i>	<i>Nights in London</i>	<i>Nights elsewhere</i>	<i>Total</i>
2005–06	186		31	16	233
2006–07	208	111		45	364
2007–08	222	98		45	365
2008–09	199	121		45	365

In addition to the night count, Ms Dorries emphasised that “*to my family and I, the Cotswolds is our home*”.

35. Ms Dorries responded formally to my letter of 4 August²¹ on 11 November, following reminders from and discussion with my office.²² She apologised for the delay in responding, which she said had been because “*it took longer than anticipated to retrieve some of the information required*”. Ms Dorries enclosed “*as much of my diary as Outlook would allow*”.²³ For the first few pages she had highlighted her journeys to and from home, her appointments in Gloucestershire and the nights she had slept in the constituency home. She said that her constituency home was “*there as a means of maintaining a base in my constituency in order to assist with my duties as an MP both in Parliament and the constituency.*” She continued, “*If I had intended to move my family permanently into Bedfordshire, I would have used the ACA to buy a more comfortable house than the sparsely furnished rented house I use at present...*” Ms Dorries also said that she had “*used none of the ACA to buy furniture for my rented constituency home other than a very basic cooker and a kettle.*”

36. Ms Dorries said that the pattern of properties in respect of which she had claimed against the Additional Costs Allowance since she had entered the House in 2005 was as shown in the table below:

<i>Period</i>	<i>Location of property</i>
May 2005–June 2005	Carlton Club
June 2005–December 2006	[Westminster flat]
October 2006–January 2007	Carlton Club (including two nights in [named hotel])
January 2007–Present	[First constituency address] (rented)

Ms Dorries commented that “*The frequency of nights I spent in the Carlton Club, when using it before renting the constituency home, is, interestingly, consistent with the nights I spend in the constituency house.*” She also said that, as a result of a security issue with the Westminster flat, with the knowledge and agreement of the Fees Office, she had transferred to staying once again at the Carlton Club from October 2006 “*until I rented the constituency house from 31 January 2007*”.

²¹ WE 10

²² WE 12

²³ Not included in the written evidence

37. Ms Dorries said that her main homes since she had entered the House had been as shown in the table below:

Period	Location of property
May 2005–January 2007	[Gloucestershire, Address 1]
January 2007–January 2008	[Stratford-upon-Avon, Address 1]
January 2008–January 2009	[Stratford-upon-Avon, Address 2]
January 2009–December 2009	[Stratford-upon-Avon, Address 3]
September 2009–Present (Permanent address)	[Gloucestershire, Address 2]

38. Ms Dorries said that she had viewed on the Fees Office computer the record of the conversations she had had with the Fees Office. She commented, “*I must have spoken to [a named official] and others at least 20–25 times over the last four years, however, there are only five records of conversations logged*”. Summing up, she commented, “*With regard to the Telegraph article, I am constantly between a rock and a hard place. With political opponents baying at my heels telling my constituents I care nothing for Bedfordshire and spend all of my time in Gloucestershire, and the Daily Telegraph attempting to portray that I spend none of my time in Gloucestershire and all of my time in Bedfordshire. The truth is that as a mother who has three daughters still living full time with me at home, I spend my time where my children are. To my children, their home ... is based around [first Gloucestershire village], and will continue to be the case. Where they are, I am.*”

39. Having considered all the information which Ms Dorries had provided about her overnight stays, including making a detailed study of the information she had provided in her Outlook diary for 2008–09 and the eight months from April to November 2009 which she had sent with her letter of 11 November,²⁴ I wrote to her again on 15 December to seek further information on the pattern of those stays.²⁵ I told her that the diary entries were not such as to allow me to identify with any reliability where she was likely to have spent her overnights. I noted that there were just 11 occasions in 2008–09 and 6 occasions in 2009–10 where she had recorded constituency appointments either in the evening or in the morning or (on 1 occasion in each year) both. I also noted that the markings made by her in her diary to show her estimate of her constituency nights and journeys to and from her main home gave the following estimated pattern of nights:

Financial year	Nights in main home	Nights in constituency
2008–09	62	81
2009–10*	No clear number	33

* To November 2009

I commented that, even for 2008–09, the figures only added to 143 nights overall—just over a third of the nights that year—although they did suggest that she was spending more nights in her constituency home than in her main home. I also noted that there was, of course, no diary information for any of the previous years.

²⁴ WE 12

²⁵ WE 13

40. I told Ms Dorries that I therefore concluded that her diaries did not provide a reliable guide to the number of overnight stays in her main home and in her constituency home. I noted, though, that in her e-mail of 8 October,²⁶ Ms Dorries had provided the following estimates:

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Nights at main home</i>	<i>Nights in constituency</i>	<i>Nights in London</i>	<i>Nights elsewhere</i>	<i>Total</i>
2005–06	186		31	16	233
2006–07	208	111		45	364
2007–08	222	98		45	365
2008–09	199	121		45	365

41. As Ms Dorries' diaries did not help in corroborating or complementing these detailed estimates, I asked her how she had come to establish them. I also asked her a number of specific questions about each of the years. In respect of 2005–06, I noted that there were 98 nights missing (taking account of the General Election, there were 331 nights to be accounted for that year²⁷) and asked Ms Dorries if she could complete the estimates so that they totalled 331 nights. I also asked her, in doing so, to confirm her initial estimate²⁸ that she had spent no overnights in her constituency. In respect of 2006–07, I asked her whether she had spent any nights in her London home that year as until January 2007 that had been her second home—and the one on which she had made claims against the Additional Costs Allowance. I also told Ms Dorries that, if she had spent nights in her London home, she would need to adjust her estimates for nights in her main home and in her constituency. Finally, I asked her to reconsider her estimate of the number of nights she had spent in her constituency home in that year, as it was not clear to me how she could have spent 111 nights there when she had only begun to rent it in January 2007.

42. In respect of 2007–08, I asked Ms Dorries whether she had spent any nights in London. I pointed out that the estimates suggested that she had spent no nights in London. I noted, however, that she had said in her blog of 16 May 2009²⁹ that “*Sometimes, on the very late week nights I stay in London...*” and had said in her e-mail to me of 4 August³⁰ that she spent “*an occasional Monday and/or Tuesday evening in London*”. I said that if she had in fact done so, she would need to adjust her estimates of the number of nights spent in her main home and in her constituency. In respect of 2008–09, I asked Ms Dorries whether she had also spent no nights in London in this year, despite what she had said in her blog and e-mail referred to above, and that if she had indeed done so, she would again need to revise her estimates of the number of nights she had spent in her main home and in her constituency. In respect of 2009–10, I asked Ms Dorries for her estimate of the number of nights she had spent in her main home, in her constituency home and elsewhere (including any nights in London) as she had not so far provided me with such estimates and it was not possible to take this information from the Outlook diary which she had sent me.

²⁶ WE 11. See also paragraph 34 above.

²⁷ Reckoned from Thursday 5 May 2005, the date of the General Election.

²⁸ WE 11

²⁹ Not included in the written evidence. Ms Dorries' blog may be accessed at <http://blog.dorries.org/>

³⁰ WE 9

43. I also told Ms Dorries that, while I did not propose to publish the detail in her diaries, I might need to publish her estimates of the total number of nights she had spent in London, the constituency, her main home and elsewhere in each of the years in question. I said that the reason I was asking for this information was that before I came to a view on the complainant's allegation that she had spent "*only spare weekends and holidays*" away from her second home I needed to arrive at a reasonable estimate of the number of nights she had spent in her main and second homes.

44. Ms Dorries replied on 25 January 2010.³¹ She sent with her letter a further print-out of her diaries which she said she had made easier to understand "*by removing my travel arrangements and simply highlighting the nights I believe I have slept at my main home*". She also said that it had come to her attention that "*a Daily Telegraph journalist has been telephoning people who live in proximity to my constituency house ... They have also had someone knocking on doors in [the constituency, in Gloucestershire and in Stratford-upon-Avon]. I am aware that they may have persuaded a neighbour who lives in France and only stays in [the constituency] for a short period of time, to make a submission to you.*" She continued, "*The last time I saw this neighbour was in June last year and the time before that during the snow last February...*"³² I would like to clarify that this neighbour does not have a front door on the same road as my house, even though they are [a near neighbour]. Their property is at the rear, which is where the front door is positioned and is entirely occluded by large plants and conifers... They have no view of my front door and cannot see me when I enter or leave the property. They could not honestly say that they have seen me more than a handful of times over the last two years." Ms Dorries went on to say, "I would also like to question whether or not their submission to you, which is also in the hands of the Telegraph, perhaps motivated by the Telegraph, can be considered as evidence to your inquiry when it has been published and is in the public domain before the inquiry has been concluded ... Can you accept a letter of evidence from someone who has apparently spent the last six months living in France and has only seen me on two occasions in twelve months?"

45. Ms Dorries also said that she had "*asked for and given permission to*" her general practitioner to write to me in support of her submission.³³

46. In response to my question as to how she had come to establish the detailed estimates of where she had spent her nights given that her work diary did not provide the necessary information, Ms Dorries commented, "*I am now a single parent who works long and complicated hours with personal commitments which are absolutely rigid. My diary planning on a week by week basis, the organisation of my [family commitments] means that almost every aspect of my life is planned down to the last second. As a backbench opposition MP, my diaries are not as specific as they would be if I were a Government Minister. I am afraid that I have no option other than to provide you with verifiable evidence which is personal in nature in order to make my case.*"

47. Ms Dorries said that, when she did not have a rented property in the constituency and used the ACA to pay for hotel accommodation in London, "*the number of nights I spent in*

³¹ WE 14

³² I summarise the initial evidence given by this neighbour at paragraph 64 below.

³³ See WE 28. This evidence is summarised at paragraph 74 below.

hotels were also very few with the majority of my nights being spent at home.” She also said that, when she entered the House in 2005, she had two daughters attending school in Gloucestershire. She commented, “*It was necessary given my domestic situation ... for me to travel home as much as possible ... It was not unusual for me to leave Westminster at 10.30 pm and arrive home at 12.15 in order to be at home for the next morning.*”

48. Ms Dorries went on to say that her youngest daughter “*now attends [a school] in the constituency two and a half days a week during term time.*” She commented, “*I am at home every Friday, Saturday and Sunday night as I have [family commitments] on a Saturday and sometimes Sunday morning and during the holiday/recess period ...*” Ms Dorries also said that she “*was absent with permission from the Whips from late night voting completely throughout October, November and December [2009] ... I managed to maintain my normal constituency and non-voting parliamentary duties from my main home.*”

49. Ms Dorries said that, following her separation from her husband, the family home (which was also her main home for parliamentary allowance purposes), had been placed on the market. Ms Dorries commented, “*Whilst this process took place, with the initial thought in mind that it would only take a matter of months, my husband rented a house for the girls and I ...*”³⁴ She continued, “*Due to the process taking much longer than expected, we had to rent for longer than we initially thought. This was necessary as my daughter attended the local school and both of my other daughters who still live with me had commitments in the area—we maintained our normal day to day lives and routine in exactly the same way we had been doing so in the marital home. Our local commitments remained the same and we continued with our usual family routine.*” Ms Dorries continued, “*The rented homes were substantial houses.*”³⁵ Other family members have relocated their lives in order to live near to us, hence my inability to move everyone and relocate to Bedfordshire. Recently, my personal caring commitments and responsibilities have extended beyond my children. We rented within a 12 minute drive from my daughter’s school.”

50. Ms Dorries told me that “*Throughout this process the Fees Office were fully aware of the situation and I explained what was happening every single step of the way*”. She continued, “*It was upon advice from the Fees Office that [the first Gloucestershire address] remained listed as my main home until the legal situation had sorted itself out. Indeed, I informed them of the change of my main home address in 2007 and 2008. The main home address has now been changed from [the first Gloucestershire address] to [the second Gloucestershire address]. It was upon their advice that I left the situation as it was until I knew where our new permanent main home address was going to be.*” She continued, “*I have checked with the Fees Office and asked how many of our conversations were recorded—it appears hardly any and that the only recorded conversations were those relating to mislaid invoices etc. If all conversations had been recorded I would be able to provide the records as supplementary evidence to this letter.*”

51. Ms Dorries said that the rented properties in Stratford-upon-Avon “*were substantial, expensive properties with a garden.*” She commented that her situation was “*quite clear. My*

³⁴ Ms Dorries said that she ceased to occupy the family home in Gloucestershire in January 2007—see paragraph 37 above.

³⁵ These properties were in Stratford-upon-Avon—see paragraph 37 above for the details.

constituency house was an extremely modest, rented, mostly un-furnished or carpeted mid terraced property ... on a main high street with no garden. Only one room contained any furniture and a requested interview with the Sunday Telegraph meant transporting in boxes of books and ornaments and a couple of pictures to make the place look lived in. The Sunday Telegraph journalist saw through this and commented on the sparsity and dustiness of the house and the fact that the post hadn't been picked up from the mat for two weeks." Ms Dorries said that she had "then described it as my 'post divorce bolt hole' even though I wasn't yet divorced in order to give the impression to my constituents that I did in fact live there and to convince the journalist that I did." Ms Dorries added that the property "didn't have any curtains downstairs and I did not claim any expenses to provide any or any furniture as I used the house only as an office and to sleep in."

52. Ms Dorries said that she *"often posted comments on my blog relating to [name of town] in my constituency."* She continued, *"Since I first rented in the constituency, I made a song and dance about being at the property. I have mentioned it on my blog a number of times."* Ms Dorries commented, *"This was done to comfort my Association. The previous MP only visited the constituency occasionally—sometimes only as often as once every six weeks—and they were keen that I reversed that impression ... The fact that it took me two years to move was becoming an issue which I had to address."* Ms Dorries added that she *"did consider buying using the allowance, but took the decision that it just didn't 'feel' right—as [the landlord] has properties available for long term rent this appeared to be an ideal solution and one which was hassle free for me. I was selected for my constituency the weekend the election was called in 2005 and my opponents make much of the fact that I was 'parachuted in' ... Communicating the fact that I was around [town in constituency] and had made the effort to move my second home from London to the patch and to take the commute in with my constituents was an important process in letting my constituents know I am totally committed to Mid Bedfordshire. Whenever I have been at church, the local pub, or interviewed in the patch I have mentioned it on my blog."*

53. In concluding her general comments, Ms Dorries commented that *"the fact remains that I have never at any time assumed my situation of renting whilst in between selling and buying main homes was acceptable until I had checked it with the Fees Office and received assurance that the situation was perfectly acceptable and within the rules"*. She said that she *"had absolutely no idea how to navigate around [the] expense/allowances process and sought advice every step of the way ... I have never acted upon my own instinct but on the basis of very clear instructions provided to me by the Fees Office on a very regular basis."*

54. Turning to the specific questions I had asked in my letter of 15 December,³⁶ Ms Dorries said that she had not spent any nights in her constituency in either 2005–2006 or 2006–2007. As regards my question as to how Ms Dorries could have spent 111 nights in the constituency home in 2006–07 when she had only begun to rent it in January 2007, she commented, *"My PA completed the box and I think she may have misunderstood what I said."* In response to my question about the number of nights Ms Dorries had spent in London in 2006–07, 2007–08, 2008–09 and 2009–10, Ms Dorries commented, *"If I have attended a dinner and have had an alcoholic drink and someone is with my youngest*

³⁶ WE 13

*daughter at home, I very occasionally stay in London. This never happens on more than 6–8 nights in a whole year and is very ad hoc. I will adjust all years to reflect.*³⁷

55. Ms Dorries reiterated that she had provided a diary print out for 2008–2009, in which she had clearly marked *“the nights I know I definitely slept at my main home”*. In respect of 2005–2006, Ms Dorries said that she had entered Parliament for her first day on 10 May 2005 and, according to her expenses, had spent 31 nights in London that year. She also said that *“The remainder of the time I slept at my main home apart from 16 days elsewhere. I spent 0 nights in the constituency.”*

56. Ms Dorries said that *“on closer examination”* of her 2008–09 diary she had *“also revised my estimates for this year”*. She continued, *“I have revised other years to include the nights I stay in London.”* The detailed table provided by Ms Dorries in respect of the years 2006–07 to 2009–10 and reflecting all her revisions is reproduced below:

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Home</i>	<i>London</i>	<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Elsewhere</i>
2006–07	208	112	0	45
2007–08	223	10	89	44
2008–09	235	9	97	24
2009–10	218	3	37	42

In respect of 2009–10, Ms Dorries commented, *“I have provided a number of nights. My time at the constituency house was focused in May and June as I had a large number of AGM etc to attend and my daughter had exams.”*

57. Ms Dorries went on to say that *“The truth is that I don’t keep a record of where I sleep and when. I have a pattern. My travel arrangements are complicated as I often travel to the house after I have dropped my daughter off, work from the constituency office and then leave for London. Although I sometimes spend the day in the constituency house/office, I don’t actually sleep there. As mentioned above, I know I am always at home on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday. If I have anything to attend in the constituency I always drive home afterwards.”*

58. Ms Dorries also told me that *“a few weeks ago”* she had moved her constituency home to a different property.

59. I replied to Ms Dorries on 2 February.³⁸ I told her that I would be working through her revised diary entries and the supporting information she had given, and would be back in touch with my conclusions. I also sought to clarify the apparent discrepancy in respect of her pattern of nights in 2006–07 between information she had given on 8 October 2009³⁹ and that given in her letter of 25 January.⁴⁰ I asked her for more information as to how such

³⁷ See also paragraph 56 below.

³⁸ WE 15

³⁹ In the table which I sent Ms Dorries with my letter of 15 December 2009 (WE 13), I had identified from her e-mail of 8 October (WE 11) that she had in 2006–07 spent 111 nights in her constituency. The information given in the table in her letter of 25 January (WE 14) in effect transposed this to London. Ms Dorries had told me that her PA, who completed the box, may have misunderstood what she had said (see paragraph 54 above).

⁴⁰ WE 14

an error had occurred and how she had failed to notice it before submitting the information.

60. I wrote to Ms Dorries again on 9 February, having analysed the further information she had supplied in her letter of 25 January, including the diary evidence.⁴¹ I told her that I needed to ensure that I had reliable information on which to base my decision about the complaint, and therefore asked her some further questions, particularly in relation to the areas where her latest evidence had differed from earlier submissions. I therefore enclosed with my letter a table⁴² which identified the estimates of her overnight stays as given in her e-mail of 8 October,⁴³ in her letter of 25 January⁴⁴ and in the highlighted days in the diary extracts she had sent me with that letter. I asked her for the reasons for the variations in her estimates. In particular, I reiterated the request I had made on 2 February in respect of 2006–07 for more information about how the error had occurred in identifying on 8 October that she had spent 111 nights in the constituency when her letter of 25 January had identified these as, in effect, London nights. In respect of 2007–08, I asked Ms Dorries why she had omitted the 10 London nights from her e-mail of 8 October, and whether these nights accounted for the 9 night reduction in the constituency figure provided with her letter of 25 January.

61. In respect of 2008–09, I asked Ms Dorries why the estimates in her letter of 25 January differed so apparently markedly from those in her e-mail of 8 October—namely, 36 more nights in her main home, 24 fewer nights in her constituency home, 9 nights in London where there were none before and 21 fewer nights elsewhere. I also asked Ms Dorries how the overnight stays highlighted in her diary could be reconciled with her own estimates in her letter of 25 January. I noted that the diary evidence showed 214 nights in her main home, 21 fewer nights than her estimate, and that it was unclear what 23 of the highlighted entries for August 2008 and February 2009 signified in terms of the location of Ms Dorries' overnight stays.

62. As to Ms Dorries' pattern of overnight stays in her main home in 2008–09, I noted that her letter of 25 January said that she had spent Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights in her main home and that she had highlighted these in her diary. However, I also noted that there were an additional 76 main home nights on other days of the week highlighted in her diary, on average between one and two further nights each week, and asked if there was any pattern to these additional weekday nights. I also asked Ms Dorries if she could explain how, according to her diary highlights, she had spent each night in September 2008 in her main home when, according to her blog entry of 15 May 2009,⁴⁵ her daughter had attended school in her constituency from September that year. In respect of 2009–10, I asked Ms Dorries also to provide me with diary highlights for the remaining months beyond April 2009,⁴⁶ to set against the estimates she had provided in her letter of 25 January.⁴⁷

⁴¹ WE 16

⁴² WE 17

⁴³ WE 11

⁴⁴ WE 14

⁴⁵ Ms Dorries' blog may be accessed at <http://blog.dorries.org/>

⁴⁶ Ms Dorries had included diary highlights for April 2009 in the marked print-out she had sent me.

⁴⁷ WE 14

63. I also asked Ms Dorries, in the light of the evidence she had now given me, about statements that had been attributed to her in a *Daily Telegraph* article of 18 May 2010,⁴⁸ and in particular about the following excerpts:

“But when questioned by the Daily Telegraph about her second home, she posted a message on the Internet in which she admitted her daughter goes to school in the area, she keeps her pet dogs there and she spends many of her weekends working there.

“[Ms Dorries] wrote, ‘My children stay with me when I am in the constituency. I keep the dogs at the constituency address as I am often there on my own and it confuses them being moved around.’”

I asked Ms Dorries to assist me in reconciling these statements—if accurately quoted—with her letter of 25 January, in which she had said, *“I know I am always at home on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday. If I have anything to attend to in the constituency I always drive home afterwards.”*⁴⁹ I also asked her whether some or all of her children and her dogs travelled with her between homes on each occasion and, if not, who looked after them when they were in her constituency home without her.

64. One of Ms Dorries’ constituency neighbours, referred to in this memorandum as neighbour 1, had written to me on 22 January 2010.⁵⁰ He said that *“further to a recent meeting with [name of reporter]⁵¹ of the Daily Telegraph”,* he had *“been asked to write and confirm”* three points they had discussed. The first was that Ms Dorries had been their next door neighbour for two and a half years *“until she recently moved to another property in [town in constituency]”*. The second was that he believed that Ms Dorries’ original constituency home *“was very much the ‘family’ home where [Ms Dorries] lived with her daughter/daughters and her family pets”*. The neighbour commented, *“She spent most of her time here with various members of the family.”* The third was to quantify the amount of time Ms Dorries and her family resided at the property. The neighbour commented that he believed this to be *“approximately 80%. This included weekdays, weekends, school and university breaks, with the exception of four to six weeks during the summer recess when some or all of them went abroad.”*

65. I replied to this neighbour on 2 February 2010.⁵² I asked whether he could confirm whether the estimate of 80% of Ms Dorries’ time in her constituency property was an estimate of the proportion of the nights she had spent there each year or whether this estimate also covered her daytime use of the property. I also asked for confirmation that, if the estimate was of the proportion of nights which Ms Dorries had spent in the property, he believed that, with the exception of her six-week break in the summer recess, Ms Dorries had spent every night of the last two and a half years in her constituency property. I also asked, if the estimate was of Ms Dorries’ daytime use of the property, for his further estimate, if he could reliably provide it, of the proportion of her nights which he believed

⁴⁸ Not included in the written evidence

⁴⁹ WE 14

⁵⁰ WE 18

⁵¹ This is the reporter Ms Dorries subsequently referred to by name in her letters to me of 1 March and 15 March. See WE 30 and WE 32 and paragraphs 76 and 84 below.

⁵² WE 19

Ms Dorries had spent at the property, if possible in each relevant financial year. I also asked him to confirm the basis on which he had formed his conclusions, including how frequently he had been in his own property at the relevant times, together with any supporting evidence he might be able to provide. In this latter context, I told this neighbour that other witnesses had suggested that he also had a home in France and was away from the area most of the time.⁵³ Finally, I asked him to confirm the start and end dates for the 2½ year period to which he was referring.

66. The neighbour replied on 18 February.⁵⁴ He said that statements that he and his wife spent most of their time in France were “*untrue*”. The neighbour commented, “*We did not in fact purchase our holiday cottage in France until the end of 2008 by which time [Ms Dorries] had already been our neighbour for just over 18 months*”. He said that in 2009 he had spent three weeks there in February/March, the first visit following its purchase, five weeks in May/June “*during which I returned home twice each time for five days*”, two and a half weeks in August “*which coincided with the Dorries household summer holiday*”, and two weeks at Christmas. The neighbour also set out the observations he had made when approached by the *Daily Telegraph*. These were that it was “*quite obvious*” that Ms Dorries and her family used their constituency home “*as the main family home*”. The neighbour commented, “*The dogs lived there permanently and her daughters came home regularly from university and school frequently ... Her youngest daughter lived there in 2009 as she attended school locally.*” The neighbour also said that he was unable to quantify the exact number of days or nights Ms Dorries had spent at the house “*since this would be impossible to do in the absence of a private investigator or a surveillance camera*”. He added, “*Our house and my studio adjoins what was her property on two sides and consequently we were acutely aware of her and her family’s presence whenever they were there. If [Ms Dorries] is supposed to have her main home elsewhere, she most certainly did not spend much, if any, time there!*”

67. The neighbour concluded his letter by saying, “*Whilst the above is background information for your enquiry, I do not wish to be a witness. I have only passed these comments as an adjoining neighbour and a taxpayer deeply concerned about the misuse of parliamentary expenses. I merely wish to be a responsible citizen without being dragged into this government expenses inquiry.*”

68. I replied to the neighbour on 22 February.⁵⁵ In response to his statement that he did not wish to be a witness to this inquiry, I said that I could only take account of his information if it was given to me by him as a witness. This was because it would not be fair for me to take into account information which I could not disclose to the Member of Parliament and the Committee on Standards and Privileges, or if necessary subsequently publish after the conclusion of my inquiry. I also said that I considered the information he had given me was relevant to my inquiry as it addressed the question of how many nights Ms Dorries had spent in her constituency property, which was material to the outcome of my inquiry. I also noted that information which he had subsequently sent me in evidence in his letter of

⁵³ See the evidence of neighbour 2 (WE 22) and neighbour 3 (WE 25). The relevant evidence is summarised at paragraphs 69 and 71 below.

⁵⁴ WE 20

⁵⁵ WE 21

22 January⁵⁶ had already been published. I told the neighbour that I would, therefore, be showing the correspondence to Ms Dorries for any comments she might wish to make and, subject to any further representations he might wish to make about confidentiality, that I would expect his letters to be published along with the other evidence I received in the course of my inquiry.

69. A second constituency neighbour, referred to in this memorandum as neighbour 2, had written to me on 23 January.⁵⁷ She said that she lived across the road from Ms Dorries *“and only occasionally see the car parked outside or the MP going in or out of the house. Myself and my husband walk our dog and drive our car past our MP’s house every day.”* She continued, *“Only one of her neighbours is permanently in residence. The others have a house in France where they spend most of their time. I would like to state that the comment ‘she spends 80% of her time’ at the house is ‘entirely untrue’. If this was the case, I would certainly know.”*

70. I replied to neighbour 2 on 2 February.⁵⁸ I asked her if she could reliably provide me with an alternative estimate of the number of nights which she believed Ms Dorries had spent at this property, ideally by financial year, together with any information about the basis of that estimate. Neighbour 2 replied on 9 February.⁵⁹ She explained that she walked her dog every morning between 6 and 8.30 am, and the same times in the evening. She said that Ms Dorries had to park her car on the road, and *“my husband and I constantly comment on her car not being there, because we had assumed she lived there all the time”*. She added, *“So as a percentage of a year, I would say 10%, and of a week, 15%. We see her car most often on a Friday morning and occasionally the odd day in the week”*.

71. I had also received a letter from a third constituency neighbour, referred to in this memorandum as neighbour 3, on 25 January.⁶⁰ He said that he lived in a terraced row of houses, in the property directly adjoining Ms Dorries’ house. He commented that it was *“the only property which has a front door next to hers ... Her kitchen and our living room are next to each other”*. He added, *“Ms Dorries has no carpets and so not only do we see her car pull up when she arrives and leaves, we can hear her. We can hear the sound of the water running, the kettle filling and the switch being switched on and off. We can hear almost every word if she has her daughter with her as the walls are so thin. We can also hear her walking up and down the stairs.”* He added, *“When she does arrive at the house it is often very late at night ... When she leaves it is usually very early, well before our children leave for school. Sometimes I see her arriving early in the morning and then she leaves later in the day but she doesn’t return.”*

72. Neighbour 3 went on to say that it *“would be absolutely true for me to say that [Ms Dorries] is hardly ever here and I hardly ever see her. If I had to put a number on it I would say I have seen her about twenty times over the last year. When she isn’t going to be at the house for long periods of time she lets us know so that we can keep an eye out. She was away*

⁵⁶ WE 18

⁵⁷ WE 22

⁵⁸ WE 23

⁵⁹ WE 24

⁶⁰ WE 25

from the house from the beginning of July until October right the way through but we did see her during the day sometimes. She said she was coming to collect post and work in the office which she has in the house.” He also said that “She often brings her dog with her and sometimes her daughter. When she comes back late at night she always gets out of the car alone.” He added, “There are neighbours on the other side but they have a house in France and are away most of the time. They have only been here for about three weeks out of the last six months that I can recall.”

73. I replied to neighbour 3 on 2 February 2010.⁶¹ I asked if he could provide me with a little more information about Ms Dorries’ pattern of stays, and, if he could reliably provide it, an estimate of the number of nights which Ms Dorries had spent at the property, ideally by financial year. He replied on 17 February.⁶² He said that he was the only person who could identify a pattern *“as I am the only person who could see her going in and out of her front door”*. He said that Ms Dorries was *“never here at weekends but is often there during the day on a Friday. She tends to be here mid week, often coming back late at night. She often arrives on a Monday morning with a bag but not always, sometimes it’s on a Tuesday.”* He went on to say, *“From July to October she isn’t here at all at night but sometimes she is during the day. I haven’t really seen her that often but when I do it is usually on a Monday morning, Friday day time or late on a weeknight.”*

74. Ms Dorries had told me in her letter of 25 January⁶³ that her general practitioner would write to me, which he did on 26 January 2010.⁶⁴ He said that he had been the family doctor to Ms Dorries and her family since he had taken up practice in 1996 in the village where she originally had her Gloucestershire home, and that they had remained as patients of his practice there despite Ms Dorries winning her parliamentary seat in 2005. He commented, *“I am of the opinion that Ms Dorries spends most of her time in this area as she simply does not want to be away ... for longer than is absolutely necessary ... I see Ms Dorries ... either in my practice or out and about on a regular basis. I can say with certainty that [the family’s] lives are very much based in and around this area ...”* He continued, *“I cannot truthfully provide you with numbers. What I can say is that knowing what I do, it would seem very unlikely that Ms Dorries has spent the majority of her time anywhere other than in this area since 2005, as much as her job permits.”*

75. I wrote to Ms Dorries on 23 February, and sent her copies of the witness evidence I had received from her neighbours, and from her GP.⁶⁵

76. Ms Dorries replied to my letters on 1 March.⁶⁶ As regards the evidence of neighbour 1, Ms Dorries said that she refuted all the claims that he had made in his letter. She commented, *“The last time I saw [neighbour 1] was at least a year or so ago and before that I have probably seen them a handful of times over a period of two years. They fail to mention the most important fact that their house did not have any view of mine and that they could*

⁶¹ WE 26

⁶² WE 27

⁶³ WE 14

⁶⁴ WE 28

⁶⁵ WE 29

⁶⁶ WE 30

not see whether I was in or not. Neither could they hear, as the house is actually on [name of road]. With regard to the other neighbours, particularly my next door neighbour who has a clear open view of my property and sees my every move in and out, I assume he has not spoken to [name of reporter]⁶⁷ and therefore his evidence can be considered as untainted, credible and honest.” She said, “I have been informed that the Daily Telegraph have approached residents and ‘aggressively’ sought poor opinion of myself.”

77. Turning to the specific points I had raised in my letter of 9 February,⁶⁸ Ms Dorries said that the original figure she had given for constituency nights in 2006–07 had been given because she had asked her PA “to make and complete the table. She simply put the 111 nights in the wrong box.” She continued, “As you can see from the earlier estimate she has slipped over the box. She completed the table from a hand-written note I gave her with the figures written in columns.” Ms Dorries commented, “It was obviously an error as **I did not have or claim for a house in the constituency until some way into 2007 and therefore could not possibly have claimed for 111 nights for 2006–07 as there was no constituency property to claim against.**” As to the figures for the number of nights she spent in London after she had acquired her constituency property, Ms Dorries commented, “I have no idea how many nights I spend in London as they are so few and far between. I mentioned 10 as a generous estimate. They may or may not be on nights I would normally stay in the constituency, I have no idea.”

78. With regard to my questions as to why her successive estimates of her pattern of nights in 2008–09 had varied so markedly, and about the apparent discrepancies in respect of the same year between her estimates and the diary evidence, Ms Dorries commented, “I have explained before that as a backbench opposition MP it is absolutely impossible for me to provide you with accurate assessment of where I stay and when using my diaries and my work commitments; however, I can provide you with a pattern which I did with the recent diary print out I sent you. Any variation in numbers which has arisen has done so via my attempt to be overly specific, which as I have said is impossible and gives rise to unnecessary confusion.” She continued, “I know I always sleep at home on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday—almost always on a Thursday and often on a Monday. If it is a one line whip I will work from home, or drive to the constituency during the day, especially during term time over the last year or so to drop and collect [my daughter].”

79. In response to my inquiry about an apparent discrepancy between Ms Dorries’ diary highlights, which indicated that she had spent each night in her home in the Cotswolds in September 2008 and her blog entry of 15 May 2009 which said her daughter attended a school in her constituency from September 2008, she commented, “The journey to [name of school] from my main home was one hour and 30 minutes ... However, due to [family circumstances], [my daughter] rarely attends school more than two days per week and when she did do she would travel from the constituency house.”

80. As to my enquiry about Ms Dorries’ diary highlights, she commented that these “are the nights I spent on holiday away from both my main and constituency home. I can be certain about this and therefore felt confident in identifying those nights.”

⁶⁷ This is the reporter referred to in paragraph 64 above.

⁶⁸ WE 16

81. Ms Dorries also commented on her weblog. She said, “*My blog is 70% fiction and 30% fact. It is written as a tool to enable my constituents to know me better and to reassure them of my commitment to Mid Bedfordshire. I rely heavily on poetic licence and frequently replace one place name/event/fact with another. In the light of the bullying onslaught of the Daily Telegraph I used my blog to its best effect in reassuring my constituents of my commitment to Mid Beds. My commitment is absolute and is always my first consideration regardless of where I sleep at night. However, I have always been aware that should my personal domestic arrangements become the knowledge of my political opponents, they would be able to exaggerate that to good effect. Hence the reason for my blog and my need to reassure my constituents.*”

82. In response to my enquiry about whether some or all of her children and her dogs travelled with her between homes on each occasion and, if not, who looked after them when they were in her constituency home without her, Ms Dorries commented, “*My dogs are looked after by myself and various family members.*” Finally, Ms Dorries enclosed a picture which she said was of her constituency property “*as you will have seen the picture taken of the constituency home in the Daily Telegraph*”.⁶⁹

83. I replied to Ms Dorries on 3 March 2010.⁷⁰ I included with my letter a table, reproduced below, which I believed set out the best evidence that she could give me about her overnight stays, and summarised the basis on which I had compiled it.

Nadine Dorries MP: analysis of overnight stays

Year	A. Nights at main home	B. Nights in constituency	C. Nights in London	C. Nights elsewhere	Totals
2005–06 (from 10 May)	279	0	31	16	326*
2006–07	208	0	112	45	365
2007–08	223	89	10	44	366
2008–09	235	97	9	24	365
2009–10 (to 25 January)	218	37	3	42	300

Note: 2005–06 figures are taken from Ms Dorries’ e-mail of 8 October, modified by her letter of 25 January 2010. All other information is taken from her letter of 25 January 2010.

*Calculated from 10 May 2005, Ms Dorries’ first day in Parliament (see paragraph 55 above).

I asked Ms Dorries to confirm that she was content with this. I said that I assumed that Ms Dorries’ diary highlights had been mistaken in showing her spending every night in September 2008 in her main home when she had said in her letter of 1 March⁷¹ that she had taken her daughter to school from her constituency home on two days a week. I also noted that, while Ms Dorries had identified in her letter of 1 March who looked after her dogs she had not answered my question about whether all of her children and her pets travelled with her between her two homes. In view of the allegation made against her, I

⁶⁹ Not included in the written evidence. Ms Dorries said in her e-mail of 22 March (WE 37) that this was in fact a picture of her current property in Gloucestershire—see paragraph 89 below.

⁷⁰ WE 31

⁷¹ WE 30

asked whether her children and the dogs normally stayed at one or other home, or normally travelled with her between the two.

84. Ms Dorries replied on 15 March.⁷² She first commented again on the evidence of Neighbour 1, which she continued to refute, saying that his comments were “*very untrue*”. She commented, “*I have learnt since I wrote my last letter that there has been a period of time when [neighbour 1 and his wife] have sold and re-bought in France and that they may be stretching the facts, possibly with encouragement from [name of reporter]. They also, apparently, spent a long period of time in Portugal between October and December last year when I had assumed they must be at the house in France.*”

85. In response to my specific enquiries, Ms Dorries said that she “*was not mistaken*” in showing that she had spent every night in her main home in September 2008. She commented, “*If I am not in Parliament, I drop my daughter at school, work in the constituency house/office or the Shefford office and then collect her and go home. On the odd occasion we sleep at the constituency house in September, if I have a dinner or evening function to attend.*” She said that, for her daughter, staying in the constituency home “*is not a comfortable experience. She would much rather we spent the hour+ driving home ... School finishes at 3.20 we are usually well home for 5.*”

86. In response to my enquiry as to whether all her children and her pets travelled with her between her two homes, Ms Dorries said that her eldest daughter lived in a flat elsewhere but often travelled home to help. She said that her second daughter “*has lived between home and [name of town] where she attended university since 2006 ... She is now also living in the flat at [address].*” Ms Dorries added, “*Neither of the older girls ... have ever ‘lived’ in my constituency house.*” Ms Dorries also said that “*the dogs are usually, but not always, wherever [the youngest daughter], I, or both of us are*”.

87. A fourth constituency neighbour of Ms Dorries, referred to in this memorandum as neighbour 4, wrote to me on 15 March.⁷³ He said that he had “*a direct and clear view from my kitchen window into the kitchen window and rear access of the Member’s house.*” He commented, “*I have personally seen Nadine Dorries on a maximum of 20 occasions over the last two years. I am aware that she spends the weekends and holidays elsewhere.*” I replied on 16 March,⁷⁴ and asked this neighbour how reliable he considered his estimate to be; whether he considered that all or some of those occasions involved overnight stays by Ms Dorries and, if so, the basis of that conclusion; and whether he considered it possible that Ms Dorries would have been able to use the property, and stay overnight in it, without him having observed her presence there. The neighbour replied on 19 March.⁷⁵ He commented in response to my questions, “*I provide this information in good faith. I am happy to confirm that my estimate of 20 days is reliable, but I am unable to specify in any great detail the length of time spent by Ms Dorries on each occasion. It could have been possible for Ms Dorries to stay at the property and for me to have not been aware, but unlikely.*”

⁷² WE 32

⁷³ WE 33

⁷⁴ WE 34

⁷⁵ WE 35

88. A fifth constituency neighbour of Ms Dorries, referred to in this memorandum as neighbour 5, wrote to me on 18 March.⁷⁶ He believed that Mrs Dorries did stay in the constituency house “on some weekday nights”. He commented, “There was a change in the pattern of her being in [the town], as she was not around for long periods of time including weekends, which I think may be as a result of what I understand to be parliamentary recess.” He was “confident” of the accuracy of his statement.

89. Ms Dorries e-mailed me on 22 March with details of her new constituency home.⁷⁷ She commented that she had rented this house from 31 December 2009 because it was £2,000 per annum less expensive than her previous constituency home. She commented, “Given the attention to expenses I thought that would be a wise move.” She commented that the property was “in the middle of a woodcutting yard”. She also told me that she had spent “between 15–20 nights at the property since December”, and that the Fees Office held a copy of the lease. Ms Dorries also said that the picture she had previously sent me with her letter of 1 March was of her current Gloucestershire home.⁷⁸ She commented that “The house sleeps six comfortably. Why anyone would think I would want to spend the majority of my nights in a house located in a woodcutters’ yard and not in the Cotswolds defeats me.”

90. I wrote again to Ms Dorries on 25 March.⁷⁹ I sent her copies of the evidence submitted by neighbours 4 and 5, and told her that, in the light of what she had said in her letter of 15 March⁸⁰ about the evidence of neighbour 1, I would shortly be putting that allegation to him. Turning to the pattern of Ms Dorries’ overnight stays, I told her that I would need to come to a view on the weight I could attach to the estimates she had given me. I therefore asked her about an apparent conflict between her letters of 1 March⁸¹ and 15 March⁸² in respect of her overnight stays in her constituency house in September 2008, and to explain what the actual position was in respect of the location of her overnight stays in that month. I also asked Ms Dorries about her response to me in her e-mail of 22 March⁸³ to the *Daily Telegraph* article of 19 March.⁸⁴ This article had alleged that her “main home” was a “one-bedroomed lodge-keeper’s cottage in a small Cotswold village”, but she had said in her e-mail that it “sleeps six comfortably”. I therefore asked Ms Dorries to confirm that the photograph in the *Daily Telegraph* article was indeed of her Cotswold home, as the picture she had described as showing her constituency home, and which she had enclosed with her letter to me of 1 March,⁸⁵ appeared to show the same cottage. I also asked her, in view of the allegations in the *Daily Telegraph* to which she had referred, about the number of bedrooms, reception rooms and other facilities provided by her Cotswold property. I further asked Ms Dorries for the names and addresses of neighbours to her Cotswold home whom I could invite to give me evidence about her pattern of use of the property. Finally, I told her that, in view of the fact that I needed to resolve discrepancies in the

⁷⁶ WE 36

⁷⁷ WE 37

⁷⁸ WE 30. In that letter, she had described it as a picture of her constituency home—see paragraph 82 above.

⁷⁹ WE 38

⁸⁰ WE 32

⁸¹ WE 30

⁸² WE 32

⁸³ WE 37

⁸⁴ Not included in the written evidence

⁸⁵ WE 30

evidence I had been given before I could complete my work on this inquiry, I would need to resume it once the new Parliament had assembled.

91. Meanwhile, I had written on 3 March to the Department of Resources.⁸⁶ I asked the Department in particular whether it held any correspondence or records of other contacts with Ms Dorries which might be relevant to identifying the pattern of her overnight stays in her main home and elsewhere, and the decisions she had made about the designation of her main and second homes. I also asked if the Department could confirm the dates of the various designations Ms Dorries had made over this period, and let me have any supporting documentation. Finally, I asked the Department, on the basis of the evidence collected, for its view on the propriety of Ms Dorries' decision to designate her constituency properties as her second home. I also wrote again to the Department on 25 March,⁸⁷ enclosing extracts from Ms Dorries' letter of 15 March⁸⁸ and my reply,⁸⁹ and copies of the evidence of neighbour 4 and neighbour 5.⁹⁰

92. The Director of Strategic Projects replied to my letters of 3 and 25 March on 11 May.⁹¹ He said that the Department had on file two nomination forms (ACA1) both signed on 30 June 2005. Both nominated a property in Gloucestershire as Ms Dorries' main home and a Westminster flat as her second home. On one form, an official had marked "8 May to 8 June" and on the other "June until further notice". The Director commented, *"In fact, Ms Dorries claimed for overnight stays in hotels in London from her election until 8th June. (There were also two claims thereafter for cancelled hotel charges.) Rent and related costs on the [Westminster] property were then incurred, and were the subject of claims, from June 2005 until December 2006."* The Director continued, *"It is not entirely clear when Ms Dorries moved out of her Westminster property. The Department paid £9,775 rent in respect of rental for the flat from 20th June 2006 until 19th December 2006. However, we received a final electricity bill for £326, dated 22nd August 2006, which suggests that Ms Dorries moved out of the property around this time. The Department sought recovery of the cost of rental in letters to Ms Dorries of 30th January and 1st February 2007. The amount sought (£4,877) was in respect of the last three months of 2006. This amount was subsequently recalculated as £3,731 to represent the cost of rental up until the day before the first day on which she occupied hotel accommodation. An ACA payment to her in March 2007 was reduced to take account of this recalculated amount."*

93. The Director noted that Ms Dorries had referred to security issues in relation to the Westminster flat in a letter to me of 11 November 2009.⁹² He commented, *"We have no record of this being raised with the Department at the time, but there was no reason why a Member needed to inform the Department of the reasons for a change of address."* He continued, *"Ms Dorries started claiming for temporary accommodation (in the Carlton Club) and, initially, at [a hotel in central London] on 11th October 2006. (The House*

⁸⁶ WE 39

⁸⁷ Not included in the written evidence

⁸⁸ WE 32

⁸⁹ WE 38

⁹⁰ WE 33, 35 and 36

⁹¹ WE 40

⁹² WE 12

returned after the summer adjournment on 9th October.) On her claim form of 19th October 2006, Ms Dorries stated that her second home was now ‘hotels’ and the Department acknowledged this arrangement in a letter dated 26th October 2006. A nomination form signed on 7th November 2006 identified as her second home ‘? hotel until new flat’. Her main home remained [the first Gloucestershire address].”

94. The Director said that a new nomination form had been submitted by Ms Dorries on 25 January 2007, changing the location of her second home to a residence in her constituency. Her main home had again remained in the first village in Gloucestershire. Ms Dorries had submitted a claim on 25 January 2007 for the first set of costs in respect of the constituency property. The Director commented, “*This claim (as well as the lease) shows that she occupied the property from 1st February 2007.*” The Director noted that, in her letter to me of 11 November 2009,⁹³ Ms Dorries had said that she had occupied three different main homes in Stratford-upon-Avon (from January 2007 until January 2008; from January 2008 to January 2009; and from January 2009 to December 2009 respectively). He continued, “*She also tells you in her letter of 25th January 2010⁹⁴ that the Department was fully aware of these rental properties; that she was advised that [her first address in Gloucestershire] should remain her main home until the legal situation in respect of her separation from her husband had sorted itself out; and that she informed the Department of changes of main home address in 2007 and 2008.*” The Director commented that the Department “*did receive formal notification by a form signed on 22nd October 2007 when Ms Dorries nominated her main home as [Stratford-upon-Avon, address 2]. A handwritten note on the form stated that this was a temporary arrangement and in an e-mail to the Department of the same day she said that she was in the process of purchasing a property in [second village in Gloucestershire]. In the e-mail she also asked for correspondence to be sent to her constituency (ie second) home: the form again identified [first constituency address] as the second home.*” The Director continued, “*We have no record of having received any formal notification in respect either of [Stratford-upon-Avon, address 1] or [Stratford-upon-Avon, address 3].*”

95. The Director said that it was “*entirely possible*” that Ms Dorries was advised soon after her separation from her husband that she did not need to change the designation of her main home until the situation had sorted itself out. However, he commented, “*This does mean that there may have been a period when [her first address in Gloucestershire] was her formally designated main home but she was not, as a matter of fact, living there. The Department always tried to show some flexibility when Members encountered personal difficulties, especially when (as in this case) the issue in question was the designation of a main home, in respect of which no claim could be made under ACA. However, this would have only been regarded as a strictly temporary measure, and, as I explain later, the Department was concerned to regularise matters by October 2007 at the latest.*” The Director added that it was “*entirely acceptable*” for a main home to be rented.

96. The Director said that a further nomination form had been submitted by Ms Dorries on 29 December 2009. He said that this confirmed that her second address in Gloucestershire had become her main home, and also identified a new additional home in

⁹³ WE 12

⁹⁴ WE 14

her constituency. He also said that Ms Dorries had asked that *“all written correspondence should be addressed to her constituency home as her personal office was situated there”*. The Director said that one PAAE claim had been submitted by Ms Dorries in respect of her new additional home in her constituency, on 6 April 2010. The Director said that this was for six months rental for the property from 1 April to 30 September 2010. He added that rental on the previous additional home had been paid by the Department up to 31 March 2010.

97. The Director said that the Department also had information about Ms Dorries’ travel claims. He commented that the information in respect of rail journeys *“should be treated as less certain than that in respect of motor mileage: we cannot say with absolute certainty what each journey was, but we can deduce this information from the price of the journey, the location of purchase and the rail company used.”* He said that Ms Dorries was entitled to claim for journeys between Westminster and her constituency, between Westminster and her main home, and between her main home and her constituency. He continued, *“Between May 2005 and January 2007, Ms Dorries appears frequently to have used her travel allowances for journeys between Westminster and her main home, and between her main home and her constituency. From April 2006 to February 2007, she made no claims for journeys between Westminster and her constituency. No claim in respect of a journey to her main home [either in the first village in Gloucestershire or in Stratford-upon-Avon or in the second village in Gloucestershire] has been made since 7th February 2007. After this date, all journeys claimed by Ms Dorries (by both rail and car) appear to have been from Westminster to her constituency. Ms Dorries indicated to the Department that she would drive to Parliament and return to [her constituency address] during parliamentary sittings.”*

98. Turning to my specific questions, the Director said that the Department had *“some evidence”* in respect of Ms Dorries’ communications with the Department. He continued, *“We have on file a letter from her, dated 28th February 2007, in which she stated that [her first address in Gloucestershire] would continue to be her main residence and that she would ‘continue to commute by train from [name of station] to London, should I return to my main home during mid week’. In addition to this letter, the Department has copies of e-mails and other notes from October 2007. From these it appears that the Department pressed Ms Dorries to submit ACA1 forms on 16th, 22nd and 24th October 2007. Ms Dorries was also told on 22nd October of the Department’s concern that mail sent to her main home was being returned marked ‘addressee unknown’. This resulted in the submission of a new designation form that day. The file note records surprise that the main home designation on the form was marked as ‘temporary’. A conversation from 25th October is recorded in which Ms Dorries confirmed that the temporary main home was her former husband and daughters’ family home until a new property was finalised.”* The Director said that the activity in October 2007 *“seems to have been caused by a dispute between Ms Dorries and the Department about the refund of a deposit Ms Dorries had paid in respect of [first constituency address], as well as the return of a deposit in respect of the [Westminster] property.”*

99. The Director continued, *“I have no reason to doubt that Ms Dorries had a number of other conversations with departmental staff which have not been recorded. There is, however, nothing on file to suggest that any specific correspondence or discussion was entered into regarding Ms Dorries’s various designations, or that there was any doubt about where the*

main and additional homes were located.” He noted that Ms Dorries had e-mailed the Department on 18th October 2007 to express her concern that the Department “appears continually to misplace my forms”. The Director pointed out that the Department “holds no records on, and sought no information about, where Members spent their time”. He continued, “Up until January 2007, Ms Dorries was claiming regularly for travel to [her first Gloucestershire address], and we can therefore say from the evidence which we have that there is corroboration that this was her main home. From February 2007, we do not have travel claims which would provide this corroboration. However, she may well have chosen not to claim for travel to her main home after this date. The Department would not therefore have questioned the main home designation because travel claims to it had ceased.”

100. The Director said that the information which Ms Dorries had given me about her pattern of overnight stays (as set out in the Table which I had sent him⁹⁵) gave him “no reason” to query her designations of main and additional homes, other than the points made below. The Director’s first point was that “*Ms Dorries’s estimate that she spent only 31 nights in London during 2005–06—a period when the House sat on 133 days—may seem surprising. Since 11 of these nights were spent in hotels, then, if Ms Dorries’ estimate is correct, there could be a question about the value for money of the rental of a flat for around £12,000 for 20 nights’ usage.*” The Director commented, “*However, Ms Dorries has pointed out in her letter to you of 25th January that she had caring responsibilities which often led to her making late journeys from Westminster to her main home.*⁹⁶ *There are sometimes extenuating circumstances which mean that second home accommodation cannot be occupied for periods when the Member remains obliged to continue rental or mortgage payments. This would apply to circumstances in the Member’s personal life (such as the chronic illness of a close relative) which mean that it is not practical or opportune to occupy the accommodation for a period.*” The Director’s second point was that he was “*not entirely clear about the 112 nights in London in 2006–07 identified in the table which you sent to Ms Dorries and referred to your letter to her of 9th February and her reply of 1st March (in these, referred to as 111 nights)*”. The Director commented, “*I assume from her letter that these are the nights in respect of which claims were made (ie those spent either at the [Westminster] flat, or at hotels or the Carlton Club, or in the constituency property after it had been acquired). If this is not the case, then Ms Dorries would have been claiming for a constituency property for two months (February and March 2007) without occupying it.*”

101. The Director said that he offered no comment on the evidence which I had received from third parties about Ms Dorries’ patterns of residence. He attached to his letter a spreadsheet⁹⁷ which gave a summary of the designations of Ms Dorries’ main and additional homes as well as a full breakdown of her ACA/PAAE costs; and a monthly summary of travel claims. The Director commented, “*We are not able to break down the figures before March 2006 by month. Please note my caveat about rail journeys above.*” He also offered me copies of Ms Dorries’ signed ACA1 nomination forms.

⁹⁵ This was a copy of the table I had sent to Ms Dorries on 3 March (see WE 31). It is also reproduced at paragraph 83 above.

⁹⁶ WE 14

⁹⁷ Not included in the written evidence

102. I replied to the Director on 13 May.⁹⁸ I sent him a schedule⁹⁹ I had prepared on the basis of his letter showing Ms Dorries' formal designation of her homes from May 2005 onwards, and asked him to confirm that the summary of the evidence from the ACA1 nomination forms was accurate. I also asked him for copies of the Department's records of Ms Dorries' communications with it in 2007, as referred to in his letter, and of Ms Dorries' ACA1 nomination forms from January 2007 onwards.

103. The Director replied on 17 May.¹⁰⁰ He confirmed the accuracy of my schedule, whilst noting that the Department was unable to say whether or not Ms Dorries' use of her Westminster flat in 2006 overlapped with her hotel use. He commented, "*What we know is that rental for the flat was claimed for the second six months of 2006; that she used hotels from 11th October that year; and that she repaid the rental from the time she occupied hotels. We do not know whether she still used the flat after she began to stay in hotels.*" He also enclosed the documents I had requested.¹⁰¹ These confirmed what the Director had said in his letters.

104. The documents supplied by the Director included copies of ACA1 and PAEE1 forms, which confirmed the various designations Ms Dorries had made in respect of her main and second homes. They also included copies of correspondence about ACA claims which predated Ms Dorries' first constituency property rental, the submission of the rental agreement for that property, difficulties over reimbursement for the initial rent and deposit, and Ms Dorries' main home designation. They also included a record of fourteen contacts in October 2007 in respect of ACA matters between the Department and Ms Dorries or someone acting on her behalf.

105. Ms Dorries replied to my letter of 25 March¹⁰² on 16 May, after the new Parliament had assembled.¹⁰³ In response to my enquiry about where she spent her nights in September 2008, Ms Dorries said that her daughter returned to school in September and then left for a school trip. She commented, "*In September, Parliament is in recess, I do not work any late nights and so I travel from home to school and back again ... The fact is that I cannot be absolutely 100% accurate about any night, only my pattern of nights. We may have spent the odd night in September [in the constituency] over the last few years, however, I raise that as a possibility because I cannot be specific.*" She continued, "*We spend weekends, usually from Thursday night and parliamentary recess at home and sleep in the constituency house when Parliament sits. Sometimes, [my youngest daughter] isn't with me at all when I am working and staying in the constituency. I usually arrive back on a Monday and Tuesday after midnight and leave very early the following morning.*"

106. In respect of my request for the addresses of neighbours in the second Gloucestershire village, Ms Dorries commented, "*As you are aware, I moved into [the second*

⁹⁸ WE 41

⁹⁹ Not included in the written evidence. For a revised version, see WE 46 below.

¹⁰⁰ WE 42

¹⁰¹ Not included in the written evidence

¹⁰² WE 38

¹⁰³ WE 43

Gloucestershire address] *well after the submission of this complaint.*” She described her neighbours’ use of their properties.

107. As to Ms Dorries’ accommodation in the constituency, she said that her current accommodation was *“temporary until I take possession of a flat in order to comply with the new IPSA guidelines. When the appointment of IPSA was announced, I asked the landlord for a less expensive property than the mid terrace I rented [at the first constituency address]. The farmhouse is £2,000 less p.a. than [the first constituency address] for a number of reasons, not least because it is in the middle of a working woodcutting yard.”* Ms Dorries said that a fire door had been fitted *“to block off part of the internal accommodation to cut down on the heating cost”*. She said that her current Gloucestershire home was built on a hill and was on three levels. She provided details of her use of the accommodation. Finally, she commented, *“I have emphasised a number of times the pattern of how I divide my time between home and the constituency. I have tried to be as honest as possible which has sometimes tied me in knots as I have also attempted to answer specific questions, which is almost impossible.”*

108. I replied to Ms Dorries on 18 May.¹⁰⁴ First, I asked her to confirm my assumption, based on what she had told me, that she had spent almost all her nights in September 2008 in her main home in Stratford-upon-Avon, although she might have spent the *“odd night”* in her constituency home. Second, I said that I took it that the property shown in the *Daily Telegraph* photograph of 19 March was in fact of her current home in Gloucestershire, and assumed that her estimate that it *“sleeps six comfortably”* was achieved by using various rooms currently used for other purposes. However, I added that, as she had said, I understood that she had moved into this property in September 2009, after the period covered by my inquiry, and that I would not, therefore, be pursuing further her use of this property. I also asked Ms Dorries for details of neighbours or others who could provide me with witness evidence of her pattern of overnight stays in her previous Cotswold homes, namely, on the basis of her letter to me of 11 November 2009¹⁰⁵ the three properties she had successively occupied in Stratford-upon-Avon from January 2007 until she had moved to her second Gloucestershire home.¹⁰⁶

109. I wrote again to Ms Dorries on 19 May, in the light of the comments and other material provided by the Department of Resources.¹⁰⁷ I also attached a schedule in which I summarised the information the Director of Strategic Projects had provided about Ms Dorries’ main and second homes.¹⁰⁸ I set out in the letter some conclusions that might be drawn from this information, and some points on which I would need to come to a view, namely whether Ms Dorries should have notified the Department of the changes in each of her successive main homes when she moved from one to the other, and the timing of the designations. I asked Ms Dorries whether she accepted my summary of the evidence set out in the schedule and to let me know why (despite receiving reminders in October 2007 that she had to lodge forms with the Department) she had not ensured that the

¹⁰⁴ WE 44

¹⁰⁵ WE 12

¹⁰⁶ In September 2009

¹⁰⁷ WE 45

¹⁰⁸ WE 46

Department had fresh and up-to-date ACA1 designation forms each time she had moved her main home between January 2007 and December 2009.

110. I asked Ms Dorries if she accepted the suggestion of the Director of Strategic Resources that she might not have spent any nights in 2006–07 in the constituency property on which she had claimed rent from 1 February 2007. I also asked her, if so, why she had considered that it was acceptable to claim from February 2007 for a property which she was not to use overnight until two months later. I also asked Ms Dorries, on the basis of the pattern of her travel claims as set out in the Director’s letter, why since February 2007 she had apparently claimed for journeys to her constituency but not to and from her successive main homes, given her evidence that she had spent over 200 nights in her successive main homes in each financial year since April 2007. Finally, I told Ms Dorries that I did not propose to ask her specifically about the rental of her Westminster flat in 2005–06 or about her travel claims between April 2006 and January 2007, since these did not relate to the period covered by the complaint I was inquiring into.

111. Ms Dorries replied to my letters of 18 and 19 May by e-mail on 25 May.¹⁰⁹ As to neighbours in proximity to the Stratford-upon-Avon properties, Ms Dorries said that, because she only expected to be in each property for a short period of time, she “*didn’t particularly get to know the neighbours and besides, most of our family infrastructure remained in [the first Gloucestershire village].*” However, she told me that, when in Westminster, she did use “*the services of a neighbour who I got to know through church to help transport the girls backwards and forwards to [the first Gloucestershire village] if they were stuck when I was away.*” Ms Dorries gave me contact details for this person in Stratford-upon-Avon, referred to in this memorandum as her Cotswold neighbour.

112. With regard to the other points I had raised in my letter of 19 May,¹¹⁰ Ms Dorries said that the same answer applied to each point. She said that, when she left the marital home, she believed “*it would be a very temporary arrangement*” and they “*would move back in*”. However, she said that this did not happen, and she had explained this to an official in the Fees Office. She commented, “*Each week we thought we would be moving back to our own home. When it became apparent that this was not going to happen, we planned to move into [her second Gloucestershire address]. Unfortunately ... our situation in rented homes lasted much, much, longer than we had anticipated. At the time I was dealing with the ... massive upheaval to our lives. ... I was also having to cope with the demands of becoming a new MP and working 90 hours per week in Westminster and Bedfordshire ... In addition to this I had to cope with the demands and needs of 80,000 constituents—700 local party members—54 local councillors and local party executive and officers who all wanted time with their new MP.*” She continued, “*I launched a two and a half year campaign to lower the upper limit at which abortion takes place which took over almost every single day of my life. I was one of the four MPs mentioned in the No 10 Smeargate e-mails ... which resulted in an extraordinary amount of invasive media attention, adding more stress to what was already a very tense and difficult situation.*”

¹⁰⁹ WE 47

¹¹⁰ WE 45

113. Ms Dorries commented, *“I am afraid that the administrative requirement of providing the right details on the right day pre expenses fiasco may have become a bit lost in all of this and in terms of priorities, was very definitely not on the top of the list. This is hardly surprising ... The fact remains however, that although I may have provided anticipatory answers given with the knowledge of what I thought/hoped was about to happen at the time, I did maintain a main home for my daughters at the addresses given until the point whereby my ... situation ... allowed us to move to a permanent address in [second Gloucestershire village].”*

114. As to my enquiry about the use she had made of her constituency house immediately after renting it, Ms Dorries said, *“I did not think it was ‘acceptable’ to rent a constituency house for two months and not use it. I also did not think it was acceptable to sleep on the floor.”* She continued, *“The constituency house was completely unfurnished and without carpets or curtains. It had no cooker or fire. I am afraid that ... finding the money to provide a bed, curtains, bedding, kettle, cooker etc took some time. I arranged for some things to arrive from home, chest of drawers, desk, dishes etc but that took organising and time. I was working flat out. Unlike most MPs, I do not have a wife to organise things for me, I have to do it myself. I had also paid for the deposit on the house with my own money ... I did not furnish the house from the ‘John Lewis list’ for the same reason I did not buy a house using the ACA. The same principle applied. How could I give a bed back to the taxpayer?”* Ms Dorries went on, *“Once I had a bed, desk, curtains etc I was able to sleep over. Given all that was happening at the time, I think I did amazingly well to have got it organised in the time I did. I think two months is a reasonable amount of time, given my workload and financial circumstances to have furnished a house to a standard comfortable enough to sleep in.”*

115. Ms Dorries said that the travel arrangements from home to constituency and Westminster *“provided me with a problem”*. She commented, *“I was presented with a difficult tax bill which I could not pay as a result of having claimed travel from home to the constituency. However, I was advised that once I rented a house in the constituency, as opposed to Westminster, that I was no longer entitled to claim for travel from my main home.”*¹¹¹ She continued, *“This suited me at the time because I did not want political opponents to be able to use my travel pattern against me. Establishing a house in the constituency and regularising my travel from Mid Beds to London seemed an acceptable measure to put in place.”*

116. I replied to Ms Dorries on 27 May.¹¹² I told her that I assumed from the fact that she had not commented on the two matters I had raised in my letter of 18 May¹¹³ that the assumptions I made, about where she had spent her nights in September 2008 and the accommodation in her current home in Gloucestershire, were accurate. I also said that I assumed that she had annual rental agreements for each of the three properties she had occupied in Stratford-upon Avon, and asked her to let me know if she did not.

¹¹¹ In fact, as the Director of Strategic Projects said in his letter of 11 May [WE 40], Ms Dorries was entitled to claim for journeys between Westminster and her constituency, between Westminster and her main home, and between her main home and her constituency. See paragraph 97 above.

¹¹² WE 48

¹¹³ WE 44

117. On 27 May, I also wrote to Ms Dorries' Cotswold neighbour.¹¹⁴ I outlined the evidence Ms Dorries had given me about where she had lived from January 2007 in Stratford-upon-Avon, her normal pattern of occupation of these homes, and the arrangements she had made for her children and family pets, and the assistance she had received from him. I asked him to confirm as far as he was able the description Ms Dorries had given me of her homes in Stratford-upon-Avon and, in particular, her general pattern of overnight stays there; the use of the property by her daughters and the help he had been able to give her in terms of transport for her children where necessary.

118. The Cotswold neighbour replied on 11 June.¹¹⁵ He confirmed that he used to help Ms Dorries when she was away. He said that he *“ran the girls about and if she left the dogs behind I would walk them during the day. I would put the bins back on Tuesday and I helped her move each time until she got into the house in [second village in Gloucestershire].”* He also said that Ms Dorries *“used to ring me when she was moving, usually on a Monday morning but sometimes on a Tuesday. She would ring me when she got back, usually on a Thursday night but sometimes on a Wednesday. I never did anything over the weekend or during school holidays. In the summer she did not need me until October.”* He added, *“All the girls had things in the house but I know that the two older girls have lived in a flat in [city] for a few years now. [The youngest daughter] ... would stay behind as often as possible.”*

119. I wrote to Ms Dorries on 14 June, enclosing a copy of the evidence given by her Cotswold neighbour.¹¹⁶ I asked her, in the light of this evidence and her own, to confirm the normal pattern of her overnight stays in her Stratford-upon-Avon homes between 2007 and 2009 and, in particular whether, as her neighbour's evidence suggested, she usually left earlier after the weekend than she had suggested, but had returned earlier in the week.

120. Ms Dorries replied on 15 June.¹¹⁷ She said that this neighbour had worked for her for three days per week *“sometimes Monday to Wednesday and at other times Tuesday to Thursday.”* As to her pattern of nights, Ms Dorries commented, *“My work in Parliament is from Monday until the last vote on a Thursday night at 6.30pm. If I do come home on a Thursday night, I am still back in the constituency on a Friday morning for my surgeries etc. I also use the constituency house as an office. My pattern has been and still is the same. I spend my weekends and recess at home and I spend the nights Parliament sits in my constituency, although not every night Parliament sits, as I have previously explained. There has been the odd occasion on a one line whip Monday when I have worked from home and travelled down on a Tuesday morning, however, I usually travel down on a Monday.”* Ms Dorries also commented further about neighbour 1 in her constituency. She said that *“they have hardly been at the house since January. As I have previously stated, they live in France for half of the year.”* I replied to Ms Dorries on 16 June,¹¹⁸ and said that I had noted that she believed that she had spent slightly fewer nights in her Stratford-upon-Avon home when Parliament was sitting than her Cotswold neighbour had suggested.

¹¹⁴ WE 49

¹¹⁵ WE 50

¹¹⁶ WE 51

¹¹⁷ WE 52

¹¹⁸ WE 53

121. Meanwhile, on 18 May after the new Parliament had assembled and I had resumed my inquiries, I also wrote once again to neighbour 1 in the constituency, in the light of Ms Dorries' comments on his evidence,¹¹⁹ to show him those comments.¹²⁰ He replied on 9 June.¹²¹ He said that he was "*amazed and astonished*" by what he described as the "*alarming inaccuracies*" of the comments made by Ms Dorries. He said that the "*reference to not seeing us more than a handful of times during the course of a two year period is totally incorrect. She may not have actually engaged in conversation more than a handful of times but she most certainly saw us and we saw her on numerous occasions either outside her front door, by her car or in her courtyard which adjoined ours.*" He described her comment about his house not having any view of hers as "*unbelievable*". He commented, "*As you will see from the enclosed plan and photos,¹²² the properties are terraced Georgian houses. Her front door was immediately next to our kitchen window and therefore we could not only see her coming and going but, because of the nature in which she and her family noisily closed the front door at all times of the day and night we could also hear them in both our kitchen and our bedroom which is above the kitchen.*" He continued, "*[Ms Dorries'] bedroom at the rear of her property directly overlooked our front door and courtyard and therefore we were always aware when she was in residence ... From our courtyard we could also see into her dining room. [Address] is in fact our studio with a guest bedroom and bathroom above. [Ms Dorries'] master bedroom and bathroom adjoined this and in fact her en suite bathroom was above the studio and due to very poor sound proofing, we could hear whenever she or her family used the bathroom.*" The neighbour also said that Ms Dorries' comments regarding their French home were "*totally incorrect. We have only ever owned the one small property which, as stated in our previous letter, we purchased at the end of 2008.*" He also said that she was incorrect in having stated¹²³ that they had spent a long period of time in Portugal between October and December 2009. He commented, "*We did in fact go to Portugal for one week from 1 to 8 October for our honeymoon! From 8 October to just before Christmas (11 weeks to be precise) we were in constant residence in [name of town in constituency].*"

122. I replied to neighbour 1 on 15 June.¹²⁴ In view of the comments previously made by Ms Dorries,¹²⁵ one of which was a suggestion that he was "*stretching the facts*" possibly with the encouragement of a journalist from the *Daily Telegraph*, I asked him specifically whether the terms of his evidence in relation to his French home, or in relation to the main evidence he had sent me on 22 January,¹²⁶ had been influenced or otherwise affected by anyone else. The neighbour replied on 24 June.¹²⁷ He said he could "*quite categorically*" assure me that none of his comments had been influenced by any other person. He commented, "*The information I have given you is most certainly not 'stretching the facts' as suggested by Ms Dorries! The information I have given you with regard to our French property and the time spent there is totally accurate.*"

¹¹⁹ These were set out in her letters to me of 1 March (WE 30) and 15 March (WE 32).

¹²⁰ WE 54

¹²¹ WE 55

¹²² Not included in the written evidence

¹²³ WE 32

¹²⁴ WE 56

¹²⁵ WE 32

¹²⁶ WE 18

¹²⁷ WE 57

123. In view of the evidence given by neighbour 1, I wrote again to Ms Dorries on 1 July.¹²⁸ I said that he had taken issue with a number of points she had made about him and his evidence, and invited her to let me have any comments she might want to make on his response. I added that, subject to her response, I would then need to decide, in fairness, whether I needed to show him her comments.

124. Meanwhile, having reviewed all the evidence which she and other witnesses had given me during my inquiries into this complaint, I had written to Ms Dorries once again on 28 June.¹²⁹ I told her that the purpose of my letter was to ensure that I had consistent evidence in relation to the identification of her main home, and in particular to her overnight stays, and to ask for her help in reconciling the evidence I had received. To help achieve this, I enclosed with my letter a paper¹³⁰ which included the successive estimates she had given me as to her overnight stays for 2006–07, 2007–08, 2008–09 and the 2009–10 financial year to 25 January 2010,¹³¹ and the successive patterns she had also given for these.¹³² It also included a table setting out, in the light of the pattern of sittings of the House, an approximate number of nights that Ms Dorries might as a result have been expected to have spent in her constituency home.¹³³ The paper also compared the evidence she had given with that of other witnesses.

125. I asked Ms Dorries to let me have a response to each of the four specific matters I had identified at the end of the paper. These were whether the *Daily Telegraph* report of 26 June 2009¹³⁴ was an accurate report of statements she had made and, if so, why she had spoken as she did; why her estimates of her overnight stays had changed from July 2009 to January 2010; whether she considered that the pattern of her overnight stays which she had given me on 25 January 2010, 1 March 2010 and 15 June 2010 was sufficiently consistent with the statistics she had given me in her letter of 25 January 2010 that, subject to her answer to the following point and to confirming that her constituency home was not available to her in 2006–07 because she could not find the time to furnish it immediately, those figures should be accepted as the best assessments she could make of her overnight stays in each of the relevant years; and why the number of nights she had said on 25 January 2010 that she had spent in her constituency home in 2009–10 was much smaller than the number predicted from her pattern of use of that home and the sittings pattern of the House.

126. I wrote again to Ms Dorries on 7 July¹³⁵ to send her a revised version of the paper I had sent her on 28 June. This revised version corrected the omission in the original version of a reference to the evidence of one of her constituency neighbours,¹³⁶ and also updated the evidence in the summary in a number of respects.

¹²⁸ WE 59

¹²⁹ WE 58

¹³⁰ Not included in the written evidence. For a revised version, see WE 61 below.

¹³¹ These are set out in paragraphs 40 and 56 above. A consolidated version, reflecting what I take to be Ms Dorries' best estimates, is set out at paragraph 83 above.

¹³² See WE 9, WE 11 and WE 14

¹³³ See WE 61

¹³⁴ WE 2

¹³⁵ WE 60

¹³⁶ I was grateful to Ms Dorries for identifying this omission.

127. Ms Dorries replied to my letters of 28 June¹³⁷ and 1 July¹³⁸ on 6 July.¹³⁹ Dealing first with the four specific questions I had asked in my letter of 28 June, Ms Dorries said that she did admit to the *Daily Telegraph* that she spent spare weekends and holidays away from her second home. She commented, “*All of my weekends are ‘spare’ as Parliament does not sit at weekends. Therefore the statement concurs with the evidence I have given you which states that I spend week nights when Parliament is sitting at my constituency home and weekends and recess at my main home.*” As to why her estimates changed from July 2009 to January 2010, Ms Dorries commented that this was “*because you were asking me to be specific and I could not be so. I realised it was more accurate to provide you with my pattern than attempt to identify individual nights and then discover that I had got one wrong. I was an opposition backbencher, not a minister. I depended on and was hostage to the diaries of other family members to provide you with the specifics you required which I realised was not absolute, or appropriate.*” Ms Dorries reiterated her statement that she did not have a constituency home in 2006. She continued, “*From recollection, I believe I rented the house in April 2007 and then moved in a few months later once I had furniture, cooker etc as I am sure my expenses show*”. She added, “*You have my statement and my pattern of nights. You have evidence from I believe a fair number of neighbours in addition to my own. I have nothing else to add other than on occasion, I randomly needed to go back home for domestic reasons, however, I cannot accurately say when or how often that was.*”

128. Turning to the evidence given by neighbour 1 in her constituency, Ms Dorries pointed out that he had clearly stated in his letter of 22 January¹⁴⁰ that he had met a named *Daily Telegraph* journalist and in his letter of 18 February¹⁴¹ that he had been approached by the *Daily Telegraph*. She questioned whether, if he had not been approached, the neighbour would have written to me. Ms Dorries commented, “*He clearly states that he was approached by the Telegraph, not the other way around. So how do we know he wasn’t paid by the Telegraph? Therefore, I believe the evidence of [neighbour 1] to have been interfered with and influenced*”. She added, “*Frankly, given the Daily Telegraph reporting of the expenses issue, it is impossible for him not to have been, payment, direct influence, or not*”. Ms Dorries also said, “*[Neighbour 1] also states ... that he does not want to be a witness. No other witness states this. I believe that is because [neighbour 1] is comfortable with telling [untruths] to you in a letter, but is afraid that he may formally have to give such evidence and be challenged.*”

129. Ms Dorries went on to say, “*I am not going to respond in detail to his points raised not least because [neighbour 1] had a row of trees in front of the window to my house in order to deliberately obstruct the view from his property into mine ... In addition to this, I never used the dining room other than very early in the morning, long before my neighbours were up, or late at night when most are in bed. The window he points to on the main road and describes as [his] kitchen window has a large table in front of it, they can only see who walks past their window as they can’t stand up to it.*” She also doubted that the neighbour could know where in the house she slept, as the curtains were almost always drawn and she usually left

¹³⁷ WE 58

¹³⁸ WE 59

¹³⁹ WE 62

¹⁴⁰ WE 18

¹⁴¹ WE 20

before it was light. Ms Dorries also maintained that this neighbour “*did buy a house in France in 2008. To replace the house he sold in 2007.*”

130. Ms Dorries continued, “*I am strongly opposed to the evidence of someone who states that they do not want to be a witness and admits to having been visited and approached by the Daily Telegraph being considered. I am aware that it is impossible for you to reasonably believe [neighbour 1] and disregard the consistent information provided by others and you may think I am over reacting to the evidence sent by [neighbour 1], however, that is not the point. I strongly object to lies being given any consideration whatsoever. As an MP, all I have to offer my constituents on whose behalf I work tirelessly when they come to see me about serious issues is my reputation. It is everything. Nothing else is as important.*”

131. I replied to Ms Dorries on 8 July.¹⁴² On Ms Dorries’ first point in respect of where she spent her weekends, I drew her attention to some statements from her blog, in which she said that she spent the majority of weekends in the constituency as her job tended to be seven days a week, and to her maiden speech in May 2005, where she had referred to her constituency as her home.¹⁴³ I invited her to add or clarify anything in relation to these or any other statements on her blog. I also reminded her that she had not confirmed for me whether the figures she had given me in her letter of 25 January should be accepted as the best numerical assessments she could make of her overnight stays in each of the relevant years. In relation to her statement that she had rented the house in her constituency in April 2007, I pointed to the discrepancy with the evidence of the Department of Resources on this point, which suggested that Ms Dorries rented the property from 1 February 2007 but did not occupy it until April 2007.¹⁴⁴ As it was important for me to get these dates right, I asked Ms Dorries either to confirm the timings she had given or provide evidence to suggest they needed revising. I also noted that Ms Dorries had not offered me an answer to my final question as to why the estimate she had given me on 25 January 2010 of the number of nights she had spent in her constituency home in 2009–10 was much smaller than the number which might be predicted from her pattern of use of that home and the sitting patterns of the House. I also said that, in view of her comments about the evidence from neighbour 1 in her constituency, I would need to put her response to him.

132. Ms Dorries replied on 12 July.¹⁴⁵ With regard to her maiden speech, she commented, “*My maiden speech was made in June 2005. I took a constituency house in 2007. However, as I stated on another occasion, my second home may only be a second home, however, it is a home. It would be pretty odd to describe somewhere as ‘a place I now call my second home’ even if I had been living there at the time I made the speech. Mid Bedfordshire is, metaphorically speaking, one of my homes.*” With regard to her blog, Ms Dorries commented, “*I often made comments on my blog in order to deliberately give the impression that I lived in the constituency. Because I didn’t in fact live in the constituency, I probably went over the top. I was always very worried about people finding out that I lived in the Cotswolds and deliberately put up smoke and mirrors to prevent this happening ... I also*

¹⁴² WE 63

¹⁴³ WE 64, WE 65

¹⁴⁴ Ms Dorries had said in her letter of 6 July (WE 62) that, from recollection, she believed she rented the house in April 2007 and moved in a few months later.

¹⁴⁵ WE 67

mention in the blog that I was not going to disclose where I lived. This was also part of my intention to conceal my main home.” Ms Dorries continued, “In the blog, I state I am in the constituency at weekends. I often am. **That does not mean I sleep there.**” She added, “My predecessor visited Mid Bedfordshire about once every two months, it was an issue of much consternation with many members of my association. My comments were to reassure them of my personal commitment to Mid Beds. It was my attempt to retain some degree of a private life.”

133. Turning to the evidence of her Cotswold neighbour,¹⁴⁶ and the difference between her Cotswold neighbour’s view of her movements and her own to which I had drawn her attention, Ms Dorries commented that he “*worked for me for three days a week. I doubt he kept a diary. I think that both his and my estimates are more or less accurate, I was away most week nights when Parliament sat. Neither of us can be specific.*”

134. Ms Dorries accepted that the quote I had taken from her blog¹⁴⁷ “*was the most accurate and substantiates my position*”. She objected to my further consultation of neighbour 1 in the constituency. She reiterated her view that, having been approached by a *Daily Telegraph* journalist to write to me, the neighbour’s evidence must have been influenced. She commented, “*it could not [but] have been*”. She also reiterated that, to her knowledge, no evidence from any other neighbour concurred with it, that he did not wish to be a witness, and that he “*lives in France for most of the year*”. She commented, “*I feel very strongly about this. The question, with regard to whether he was paid is also relevant, a point [neighbour 1] is unlikely to confirm. The Daily Telegraph would not have had a story if they hadn’t persuaded him to write you. I understand the principle in law that if a journalist is in pursuit of the truth then exceptions apply; however, I do not believe that this applies if the story is printed in advance of a case being heard.*”

135. Ms Dorries said that she had checked her dates and claims and “*it was April 2007 when I began to use the constituency house, or thereabouts. I can’t remember exactly to the day how long it took me to get a bed, cooker etc in, however, it was around eight weeks.*” Finally, with regard to the 2009–10 estimate she had sent me on 25 January,¹⁴⁸ Ms Dorries commented that “*the normal approximate pattern would apply. However, later in 2009, I had an additional problem with regard to my [family circumstances] and had to travel back home ... The autumn of 2009 was unusual.*”

136. I replied to Ms Dorries on 13 July.¹⁴⁹ I reminded her that she had not yet confirmed that the figures she had given me in her letter of 25 January¹⁵⁰ were the best numerical assessment she could make of the figures for her overnight stays. Finally, I said that I would need to form my own view as to the weight to be attached to the evidence given by neighbour 1, taking into account that evidence, her comments on it, and any other relevant evidence.

¹⁴⁶ WE 50

¹⁴⁷ See paragraph 131 above and WE 64.

¹⁴⁸ WE 14

¹⁴⁹ WE 68

¹⁵⁰ WE 14

137. I had written again to neighbour 1 on 8 July.¹⁵¹ I enclosed a summary of Ms Dorries' comments on his evidence, which had been set out in her letter to me of 6 July.¹⁵² I said that, in the light of Ms Dorries' comments, I thought that in fairness I should show these to him in case he wished to comment further. I sent him on 13 July an extract from Ms Dorries' comments in her letter of the same date.¹⁵³

138. The neighbour replied on 20 July.¹⁵⁴ He said that, following the articles in the *Daily Telegraph* concerning Ms Dorries' claims regarding her constituency home, he had telephoned the newspaper and spoke to the Political Editorial Department. He commented, "*This initial contact was purely to ascertain who we should write to within the Government to express our deep concerns. This telephone call prompted a request from the Daily Telegraph to meet with [name of reporter],¹⁵⁵ as a result of which he recommended that we write to yourself.*" He continued, "***I can categorically claim that at no point were we 'influenced' by the Daily Telegraph nor has any of our evidence been 'interfered' with as suggested by Nadine Dorries. Furthermore, there was and never has been any suggestion of payment of any kind.***"

139. In response to Ms Dorries' comments regarding whether or not he and his wife could either hear or see her when in residence, the neighbour said, "*... I feel I have already made it quite clear in previous correspondence that we could very clearly see and most of all hear her, her family and her dogs.*" He also said that the reference to his house in France and the replacement of a house sold in 2007 was "*incorrect and in my view totally irrelevant. The further reference to living in France is also irrelevant. Ms Dorries moved into [first constituency address] in February 2007—18 months before we purchased our house in France.*" The neighbour added, "*I resent very strongly the continued accusations by Ms Dorries that I was encouraged or persuaded by the Daily Telegraph to write to you. To the best of my knowledge my comments to you have not been printed in the Daily Telegraph. The only reference to which I am aware was on 23 January which stated 'expenses for the second home that she was living in almost all the time according to evidence some of her neighbours are preparing to submit to a parliamentary investigation'.*"¹⁵⁶ Finally, the neighbour said that, contrary to the statement he had made in his letter of 18 February,¹⁵⁷ "*as a direct result of the latest comments and reference to 'lies' by Ms Dorries*" he was now prepared to be a witness in the inquiry.

140. I wrote again to Ms Dorries on 22 July.¹⁵⁸ I enclosed the latest evidence from constituency neighbour 1 and invited her in the light of it to make any additional factual points she wished. I also reiterated that I would obviously need to weigh his evidence

¹⁵¹ WE 66

¹⁵² WE 62

¹⁵³ WE 69

¹⁵⁴ WE 70

¹⁵⁵ This is the same person as referred to at paragraphs 64, 76, and 84 above.

¹⁵⁶ The *Daily Telegraph* article of 23 January 2010 included this quotation. It also included the following: "But some of her neighbours are set to allege to Mr Lyon that the MP spent almost all of her time there. They claimed in a written statement: 'We can confirm that she used her constituency house as her main residence, spending 80% plus of her time here ... We were aware of her presence at all times.'"

¹⁵⁷ WE 20

¹⁵⁸ WE 71

against her evidence and that of other witnesses when I came to prepare my conclusions to this inquiry.

141. Ms Dorries replied on 27 July.¹⁵⁹ She commented, *“The only response I can give you with regard to your question regarding my overnight stays is as I have maintained throughout. When Parliament is sitting I spend the weeknights in my constituency home. I spend weekends and recess at home ... My pattern is not absolute or always the same. I am not prepared to give you any absolute figure in terms of numbers regarding where I sleep as I cannot be 100% certain that it would be truthful to do so ... I think I have almost jumped through hoops in order to provide you with absolutes and I am afraid that I have to say given that you know and are aware of my pattern it is wrong of you to try and persuade me confirm a definite number. I do realise that it would make life much easier for me to do this, however, it is not right to do so unless I am completely sure.”*

142. With regard to neighbour 1 in her constituency, Ms Dorries commented, *“he states in his first letter that he could see me through the dining room window. When the large hedge is pointed out [he] changes this to the fact that he could hear me.”*

143. I replied to Ms Dorries on 29 July.¹⁶⁰ I noted her comments about the pattern of her overnight stays, and her unwillingness to give me any absolute figure in terms of where she had spent her nights, but pointed out that I had not asked her for an absolute figure. I said that, since I had first written to her I had asked her on a number of occasions for an estimate—and no more than an estimate—of the number of nights she had spent in her main home, and had done so because the number of nights spent in the property was at the time the principal qualifying test for the definition of a main home. I told Ms Dorries that I would record the estimates for her overnight stays which she had given me in her letter of 27 July 2009,¹⁶¹ in her e-mails of 4 August and 8 October 2009¹⁶² and in her letter of 25 January 2010.¹⁶³ I also said that I would note that Ms Dorries could not give me an absolute figure and would prefer me to rely on how she had divided her time and on the pattern of her overnight stays. In that context, I said that, unless she told me otherwise, I would assume that this was the pattern which she had given me in her letter of 15 June 2010,¹⁶⁴ and would reflect this pattern in my report. I added that I would also note that she had given me an earlier version in her letter of 1 March 2010,¹⁶⁵ and would need to assume also that her pattern had remained largely unchanged throughout the period in question.

Findings of Fact

144. Ms Dorries first rented a property in her constituency in 1 February 2007. She occupied it from April 2007, and continued to do so until December 2009, when she moved to another property in the constituency. Ms Dorries evidence is that she could not

¹⁵⁹ WE 72

¹⁶⁰ WE 73

¹⁶¹ WE 7

¹⁶² WE 9 and WE 11 respectively

¹⁶³ WE 14

¹⁶⁴ WE 52

¹⁶⁵ WE 30

occupy the first property immediately because she needed to furnish it. Ms Dorries claimed against both the ACA and its successor, PA AE, in respect of these properties.

145. Ms Dorries also had a property in Gloucestershire until January 2007, when she separated from her husband. Thereafter, her evidence is that she successively occupied three rented properties in Stratford-upon-Avon, each for a year at a time, from January 2007. She purchased a property in another village in Gloucestershire in September 2009. The first of the Stratford properties had been rented by her husband for her daughters and herself. Ms Dorries' evidence is that she regarded each of these properties in turn as her main home. Her evidence is that she informed the Department of Resources of changes to her main home in 2007 and 2008. And she notified the Department in December 2009 that the second Gloucestershire property had become her main home. Ms Dorries' evidence is that she acted throughout on very clear instructions from the Fees Office. In particular, she says that she was advised by the Department to maintain her nomination of her first Gloucestershire property as her main home until she knew where her new permanent main home was going to be, and that it had taken much longer than originally expected for her to make permanent arrangements. It was two years and nine months between her leaving her first Gloucestershire home and buying and moving into the second Gloucestershire home.

146. According to the records of the Department of Resources, Ms Dorries had nominated the first Gloucestershire property as her main home in June 2005. In October 2007, she changed her nomination to a property in Stratford-upon-Avon (Stratford-upon-Avon, address 2) which, according to her own evidence, she did not in fact occupy until January 2008. This change of nomination followed pressure from the Department as mail addressed to her nominated main home (the first Gloucestershire property) was being returned marked "*addressee unknown*". The Department has no record of the preceding Stratford-upon-Avon property, or the successor property, ever being nominated by Ms Dorries as her main home. In December 2009, Ms Dorries changed her main home nomination to the property in Gloucestershire, three months after she had moved into it. The Department accepts that it is entirely possible that Ms Dorries was advised soon after her separation from her husband that she did not need to change the designation of her main home until her situation had sorted itself out. It also accepts that this means that there may have been a period when Ms Dorries was not, as a matter of fact, living at her designated main residence. But the Department's evidence is that it would have regarded this as a strictly temporary measure, and it was concerned to regularise matters by October 2007 at the latest.

147. Ms Dorries is adamant that she cannot provide a precise breakdown of where she spends her nights, because she does not keep records of this. Her initial estimate, made in July 2009, was that she was spending 150 nights a year in her constituency home. On 4 August 2009 she told me that she would spend 200+ nights in her main home in 2009–10. My best estimate of her overnight stays, based on numerical estimates provided by Ms Dorries on 8 October 2009¹⁶⁶ and 25 January 2010¹⁶⁷ and examination of the diary material she supplied, is set out in the table below.

¹⁶⁶ See paragraph 40 above.

Year	Nights at main home	Nights in constituency	Nights in London	Nights elsewhere	Totals
2005–06 (from 10 May)	279	0	31	16	326
2006–07	208	0	112	45	365
2007–08	223	89	10	44	366
2008–09	235	97	9	24	365
2009–10 (to 25 January)	218	37	3	42	300

148. Ms Dorries would prefer me to rely on the information she has given me as to how she divides her time and on the general pattern of her overnight stays. Her evidence is that, throughout the period covered by the complaint (2007–2009) when the House was sitting she spent Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights in her main home in the Cotswolds, plus occasional Monday nights and some Thursday nights. The other weekday nights she spent in her constituency home. She spent the occasional night in London. Her evidence is that during the recesses, when not on holiday, she spent almost every night in her main home.

149. Ms Dorries accepts that she told the *Daily Telegraph* that she only spent spare weekends and holidays away from her constituency home. Initially, she explained that what she described as spare (or free) weekends meant weekends when she did not have surgeries and official duties. Subsequently, she said that all her weekends were “*spare*” as Parliament did not sit at weekends, and the statement was therefore consistent with her evidence that she spent weekends at her main home.

150. The evidence of the Cotswold neighbour, whom Ms Dorries employed in Stratford-upon-Avon to help her with family commitments, is broadly in line with Ms Dorries’ own evidence about her overnight stays in her homes there. The evidence of Ms Dorries’ family GP, who is based in the village where Ms Dorries had her first Gloucestershire home, is that he believed that her life was very much based in the area, and that it was very unlikely that Ms Dorries had spent the majority of her time anywhere other than in the area since 2005.

151. The evidence from all but one of the five witnesses from Ms Dorries’ constituency broadly confirms Ms Dorries’ evidence: indeed, they suggest she spent fewer nights in her constituency home than she has suggested in her evidence. None of these four witnesses said that they saw Ms Dorries at weekends.

152. Constituency neighbour 1 gives different evidence, suggesting Ms Dorries spent so much time there that it must be her main home. He believes, from personal observation over a period of some two and a half years, that Ms Dorries spent about 80% of her time there (including weekends) but with the exception of 4 to 6 weeks of the summer recess. He accepts, however, that he cannot quantify the exact number of days or nights spent by Ms Dorries in the property as he has no means of doing so.

153. Ms Dorries strongly disputes this neighbour’s evidence. She does not believe that he is in a position to form a reliable estimate of her use of the property. She says he has seen her

¹⁶⁷ See paragraph 56 above.

only infrequently. She says he cannot from his property see into her property or hear her, and that he is there only infrequently as he spends half the year at his house in France and also spent a long period in Portugal between October and December 2009. Other neighbours¹⁶⁸ have also given evidence that this neighbour spends most of his time abroad.

154. Ms Dorries also believes that the neighbour approached the *Daily Telegraph* and that the newspaper had influenced his evidence, for which it may have paid him. She believes he might not have given evidence without the encouragement of the newspaper.

155. Neighbour 1 maintains that Ms Dorries' recollection of the number of times she had seen him and his wife is inaccurate and that they have seen each other on numerous occasions. He is certain that he was aware whenever Ms Dorries and her family were present. His French property had not been purchased until the end of 2008. He did not spend long periods there, and he had only spent the first week in Portugal, in October 2009, and had been in constant residence since then till just before Christmas. He had approached the *Daily Telegraph* to find out who in Government to write to about expenses, has not been influenced in his evidence, and has not been paid for it.

156. The evidence of the Department of Resources is that all travel claims made by Ms Dorries since February 2007 appear to have been for travel between Westminster and her constituency. She has made no claim in respect of a journey to her main home since then. Ms Dorries' evidence is that she was advised that, once she rented a house in the constituency, as opposed to Westminster, she was no longer entitled to claim for travel from her main home.

157. Some material on Ms Dorries' weblog appears to suggest a pattern of use of her constituency property in some respects at variance with the evidence she has given, in that it implies she has a more permanent presence in the constituency. Ms Dorries' evidence is that she gave prominence on the blog to her use of her constituency property both to comfort her constituency association and to demonstrate to her constituents the degree of her personal commitment to her Mid Bedfordshire constituency. Her evidence as to the reliance to be placed on material on her blog is that it is in fact 70% fiction and 30% fact, and relies heavily on poetic licence. She frequently replaces place-names, events and facts with others. She is conscious of the potential for political opponents to exploit her personal domestic circumstances. According to Ms Dorries, this, and the need to reassure her constituents of her commitment, was the reason behind the blog entries. It was also an attempt by her to retain some degree of a private life.

158. Ms Dorries maintains that the pattern of where she spends her nights has been materially influenced by her family circumstances, which have led her to seek to spend as much time as possible in her family home rather than her constituency home, which she sees solely as a means of maintaining a base in her constituency to assist her in performing her duties as the Member of Parliament. She also wished to maintain a high degree of privacy about the location of her family home. She accepts that the administrative requirements of providing the right details on the right day in respect of the location of her main homes may have got lost in her other priorities. She also accepts that she may on

¹⁶⁸ Neighbours 2 and 3.

occasion have provided anticipatory answers given with the knowledge of what she thought or hoped was about to happen at the time. Her situation in rented family homes had lasted much longer than she had anticipated, and she was also at the time under severe domestic pressures as well as handling a very demanding parliamentary and constituency workload. Ms Dorries likewise accepts that some of the comments she made on her blog exaggerated the extent to which she lived in the constituency, both for political reasons and to protect her privacy. Overall, Ms Dorries' strong historic and continuing family ties to the Cotswolds, the pattern of her overnight stays in her successive properties there, and the fact that everything she does away from her parliamentary duties is based there, leave her in no doubt that this is where her main home is and will continue to be.

Conclusions

159. The question I am to resolve is whether, from February 2007 to June 2009, Ms Dorries was in breach of the rules of the House in identifying a property she rented in her constituency as her second home, and telling the House authorities that her main home was in the Cotswolds, when in fact her constituency property was her main home.

160. There is an ancillary question about whether Ms Dorries was in breach of the rules in not notifying the House authorities of all the various changes to her Cotswold accommodation between 2007 and 2009.

The location of Ms Dorries' main home

161. The rules until 1 April 2009 stated that a Member's main home was normally a matter of fact. Where the Member had more than one home, their main home was normally where they spent more nights than any other.

162. After an extensive inquiry, I consider that the weight of the evidence points to the clear conclusion that Ms Dorries' main home was indeed in the Cotswolds. Her main home was initially her family home, but, following the breakdown in her marriage, her main home then became each of the three properties she rented for a year at a time in Stratford-upon-Avon. I do not, therefore, uphold the complaint that her main home was in fact in her constituency. It was not. It was (and apparently still is) in the Cotswolds.

163. I consider that Ms Dorries has established that she spent more nights in her Cotswold homes than anywhere else, including in her constituency home. This is borne out by the estimates she made of the number of nights she spent in each of the locations from 2005–06 to 2009–10, although she declined to confirm that she accepts these best estimates given by her during the course of this inquiry. These estimates are broadly reinforced by Ms Dorries' evidence on the general pattern of her overnight stays during this period. I am satisfied that, while the numerical estimates cannot be taken as 100% accurate, they provide a reasonable estimate of her overnight stays and they show a sufficiently substantial difference between nights spent in the constituency home and nights in the main home to provide a wide range for estimating error. Ms Dorries' evidence is also corroborated by her neighbour in Stratford-upon-Avon, who in my judgement is likely to have the most accurate understanding of her overnight stays, since he was responsible for supporting her family in the Cotswolds when Ms Dorries was staying in the constituency or elsewhere. Her evidence is also consistent with evidence from her GP in the Cotswolds. And it is

consistent with the evidence given by all but one of the witnesses in Ms Dorries' constituency.

164. The one witness in the constituency who has given markedly different evidence from the other witnesses, suggested that Ms Dorries spent 80% of her time in the constituency. While I do not question the good faith of that witness, or his account of his contacts with a newspaper and its reporter, evidence from witnesses about where someone spends their time, which relies only on personal observation, is bound to give no more than an impression: neighbours can give evidence about when and how often they see the person, but it would be most unusual for a neighbour to know how often a person stayed overnight in their neighbouring property, and none of the constituency witnesses has identified such circumstances. The constituency witness himself has recognised this in his evidence. As well as the weight of the other witnesses being against him, I think it highly improbable that Ms Dorries could have spent as much as 80% of her nights in her constituency home. I therefore accept in preference the evidence of all the other witnesses in her constituency and in the Cotswolds.

165. I have considered whether there are any grounds for setting aside the objective test of where a Member spends their nights because of other exceptional circumstances affecting the Member's choice of their main home. In this case, there is none. The weight of Ms Dorries' evidence to me points to the Cotswold properties as her main homes: the Cotswolds are where she lived before becoming a Member, where her children have grown up, where she had a substantial property and where she has one now. She appears to use her rented constituency home principally to fulfil her parliamentary duties in her constituency. It is true that her daughter started to go to school in her constituency for some of the week, but Ms Dorries' evidence is that, on most of these occasions, she returned with her daughter after school to her Cotswold home. I conclude that the Cotswolds are where Ms Dorries had and has her main home. Her constituency home is her second home, whose costs were therefore eligible for claims against parliamentary resources.

166. It has taken far too long to draw together the evidence which enables me to come to this clear conclusion. I note that, despite requests, Ms Dorries did not provide me with an estimate of the number of nights which she spent in each of her properties until 8 October 2009. This was some fourteen weeks after my initial request of her. Even then, the figures were internally inconsistent, and she did not produce consistent figures until 25 January 2010, some six months after my inquiry had started. It is disappointing that Ms Dorries was not in the end prepared to confirm that she had provided me with her best estimates—as she told me she had on 8 October last year—and that she did not recognise that estimates (not absolute figures) were necessary in order to check the application of her arrangements against the Green Book rules.

167. Ms Dorries' evidence to me was also inconsistent with statements she had previously made on her weblog and in the press, where she seemed to go out of her way to emphasise that she lived in the constituency. I needed to resolve the apparent conflict between what she was telling me and what she had put on her weblog and had told the press. I accept her explanation that the weblog was not accurate but was intended to give her constituents the impression that she was living in the constituency. I therefore consider that Ms Dorries'

evidence to me, reinforced by much of the other evidence I have received, is to be preferred over the impression given in her weblog references. But I note that the result of these references is that the weblog gave information to its readers, including Ms Dorries' constituents and party supporters, which provided a misleading impression of her arrangements as the Member of Parliament for the constituency.

168. I note too that Ms Dorries gave at least a misleading impression in the information she gave to the *Daily Telegraph*, which initiated the complaint against her, where she said that she only spent “*spare weekends and holidays*” away from her constituency home. Her explanation to me that all weekends were spare because Parliament was not sitting was not convincing.

169. I recognise Ms Dorries' wish for privacy, both in respect of her personal and private life, and because of the personal pressures she may come under on account of her views on social policy, in particular on abortion. She is fully entitled to maintain her privacy. She is fully entitled to her views on social policy and to express them as she sees fit. She should not have to fear harassment or intimidation because of these views. I appreciate that she feels under pressure from her critics and the media. But where a Member claims for their accommodation from parliamentary resources, as they are entitled to, then they should expect that the broad details of the arrangements for their accommodation will become public knowledge. It was unrealistic of Ms Dorries to expect to keep secret the general location of her main home. And it was unrealistic for Ms Dorries to expect me to conduct this inquiry with the sparse information she initially provided. I regret that it took some months before Ms Dorries decided to give me sufficient information about her circumstances for me to be able to take forward this inquiry. As provided in paragraph 18 of the Code of Conduct, Members do need to co-operate with me in my inquiries. I look to Members to provide promptly full and accurate information and explanations. Co-operation is necessary if I am to be able to resolve complaints in a timely way on the basis of convincing and consistent evidence. I am always careful about unnecessarily disclosing details of a Member's private life, or that of their family, in the evidence I publish, and am sympathetic to Members' requests that such information should be protected. I know that the Committee, too, would be sympathetic to such matters. But failure to provide the necessary details to the Commissioner when he requests them can only unnecessarily complicate my task and prolong my investigations.

170. My inquiries were also complicated and extended by Ms Dorries' criticism of the one witness who gave evidence against her. There is no doubt that the witness's evidence was first reported in a national newspaper. And it was entirely open to Ms Dorries to question the evidence and whether the witness was acting at the prompting of that newspaper. But I regret the tone and intensity of some of Ms Dorries' comments on the witness (not all of which I have included in the published evidence) and her attempts to persuade me not to consider that evidence. I consider that the evidence was relevant to my inquiry, that I took all proper steps to ensure that Ms Dorries had a full opportunity to comment on it, and that that witness had the same opportunity to comment on her responses. It should then be for me to weigh that evidence and its credibility against all the other evidence I have received. I have sought to do that in this report. I do not believe it would have been just or fair to have taken the action suggested by Ms Dorries and refused to have accepted that

neighbour's evidence on account of the fact that he had discussed it with a newspaper reporter.

Ms Dorries' designation of her main homes

171. During the period covered by this complaint, Members were required to notify the Department whenever they changed their main or second home designation, by completing a form. Ms Dorries did not do so. She failed to notify the Department of Resources of some of the changes in the designation of her main home in the Cotswolds from 2007 to 2009. She did not provide a new designation form to the Department until October 2007, some nine months after she had left the family home, and then only in response to pressure from them. Even then, she made no reference to the property in which she had been living for nine months, and instead designated the rented home she was to move to in January the following year. Despite the Department's pressure in October 2007, she never told them of the move to her third rented property in Stratford-upon-Avon in January 2009. And it took three months before she notified them of her move to her current property. I agree with the Department that it would be unreasonable to expect Members to notify the Department of a change in the designation of their main home in the immediate aftermath of a domestic upheaval which required them to leave that home. Any person would understandably be concentrating on their domestic problems. Their options are likely to be muddled and uncertain. They may be hoping to return to the main home. The completion of a new designation form is understandably not going to be top of their agenda.

172. The length of that initial period depends on personal circumstances. In Ms Dorries' case it seems to me that that initial period should have ended soon after the signing of the rental agreement for her first property in Stratford-upon-Avon in January 2007. The agreement was for her to take that property for a year. She then benefited from two successive rental agreements on different properties, each of them lasting a year, although she moved during the currency of the third period. I consider that it is reasonable to have expected Ms Dorries to have signed a new designation form identifying each new main home at the same time as the yearly rental agreement was made. In the event, she failed to identify the first and third of her annually rented homes in Stratford-upon-Avon. Of course, like any person, her personal circumstances could have changed during any of those years, as they did for the final rental. But the prospect of such a possible change should not absolve a Member from the responsibility of keeping up to date the formal notification to the Department of the location of their main home.

173. I find therefore that Ms Dorries was in breach of the rules of the House in not notifying the Department of Resources of her move to her first rented main home in Stratford-upon-Avon in July 2007 or of her move to her third rented main home there in January 2009. I do not consider that she was in breach of the rules in the timing of the notification she gave the Department of her moves to her other main homes: her second home in Stratford-upon-Avon, which she moved to in January 2008, and her current main home which she moved to in September 2009. But the result of her failure to keep the Department up to date with her moves was that it held inaccurate information about the location of Ms Dorries' main home for two of the three years from 2007 to 2009 inclusive. That was not acceptable.

Overall conclusion

174. My overall conclusion is that Ms Dorries was not in breach of the rules of the House in claiming against parliamentary allowances for her constituency home, on the basis that her main home was in the Cotswolds. I do not, therefore, uphold this complaint.

175. I have found, however, that Ms Dorries was in breach of the rules in not notifying the Department on the requisite designation form (ACA1) of the changes in the location of her main home in the Cotswolds in January 2007 and January 2009. I have no evidence that this had any effect on the claims which Ms Dorries made against parliamentary allowances. Overall, I do not regard this breach as serious.

176. I am disappointed Ms Dorries took as long as she did in providing me with consistent evidence to enable me to resolve this complaint. While I respect her wish for privacy, I do not believe that that wish can extend to the information which a Member is reasonably asked to provide to the Commissioner to enable him to secure the evidence on which to base an authoritative conclusion. As a result, what should have been a relatively straightforward inquiry, stretched over much too long a period. I have submitted this memorandum to the Committee principally so as to reinforce the importance I attach to Members responding promptly, fully and openly to the questions which I necessarily ask of them so that I can judge a Member's conduct on the basis of the best evidence available.

14 October 2010

John Lyon CB

Written evidence received by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

1. Letter to the Commissioner from Mr Michael Barnbrook, 26 June 2009

I wish to register a formal complaint against Nadine Dorries, Member of Parliament for Mid Bedfordshire.

The complaint relates to an article in the *Daily Telegraph* dated 26th June, 2009, a copy of which I enclose, in which it states that Ms Dorries has admitted that she only spent spare weekends and holidays away from her designated “*second home*”. She also stated that her youngest daughter and her pet dogs live at the property.

If this is correct, Ms Dorries is in clear breach of parliamentary rules relating to Additional Costs Allowance, which state that the main residence is the property where a Member spends more nights a week than any other.

It raises the question whether it is her main residence, in which case she should not be able to use the second home allowance for its upkeep.

I have not submitted evidence because I am not aware that Ms Dorries has repudiated the comments attributed to her.

In any case, you have powers under Standing Order 149, which enable you to demand any documentation, such as utility bills, from any Member, in order to assist with your inquiry.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

26 June 2010

2. Extract from article in the *Daily Telegraph*, 26 June 2009

MPs’ expenses: the claims not examined by Tory panel

...

Nadine Dorries, the Conservative MP for mid-Bedfordshire, was one of the most vocal critics of the *Daily Telegraph*’s expenses investigation. She claimed that she was the victim of a witch-hunt after being questioned over her unorthodox arrangements.

Miss Dorries admitted that she only spends spare weekends and holidays away from her designated “*second home*”, a flat in her constituency on which she has claimed £18,000 in rent.

Miss Dorries also said that her youngest daughter and her pet dogs live at the property. This raises questions whether it is, in fact, her main residence, which would mean she could not claim for its upkeep using the second home allowance.

She initially refused to state where her other house was, but later said it was another rented property near her former marital home in the Cotswolds. There is no reference to such an address in any of her expenses files.

However, she is understood to have been cleared by the scrutiny committee and will not have to repay money.

26 June 2009

3. Letter to Mr Michael Barnbrook from the Commissioner, 30 June 2009

Thank you for your letter of 26 June asking to register a formal complaint against Ms Nadine Dorries MP.

Your letter says that you have not submitted evidence in relation to your complaint because you were not aware that Ms Dorries has repudiated the comments attributed to her in the *Daily Telegraph* article from 26 June. As you know, however, I am required to consider whether the complainant has provided me with sufficient evidence to justify at least a preliminary inquiry into whether the Member has breached the rules. To meet that requirement, you do need to submit the evidence which supports your complaint. Therefore, if you would like me to consider instituting an inquiry into your complaint, could you let me have the evidence on which you would like to rely and an explanation of how you believe Ms Dorries has breached the rules of the House?

30 June 2010

4. Letter to the Commissioner from Mr Michael Barnbrook, 2 July 2009

Thank you for your letter dated 30th June, 2009, in which you have asked me to supply the evidence on which I rely in connection with my complaint against Ms Nadine Dorries and an explanation of how I believe that she has breached the rules of the House.

I owe you an apology for suggesting in my letter dated 26th June, 2009 that I was in possession of evidence to substantiate my complaint against Ms Dorries by saying “*I have not submitted evidence*”.

What I should have said was that there was no need for further evidence as Ms Dorries was admitting to breaching the rules in relation to the second homes allowance.

She is quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* as saying that she only spent spare weekends and holidays AWAY from her designated second home.

The rules state that the principal home is where a Member spends more nights a week than any other.

By her own statement she is suggesting that she spends most of her time at her designated second home, which under the Commons rules would make it her principal home.

I would also remind you of your comments in the Fourteenth Report of 2007–08, relating to your investigation of Ed Balls, MP and Yvette Cooper, MP, paragraph 78, where you said, “*If a Member has his or her family living permanently in their constituency home then it would clearly seem to be a matter of fact that the Member’s main home is in the constituency.*”¹⁶⁹

Ms Dorries is quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* as saying that her youngest daughter and pet dogs live at her second home.

By your own submission that would make it her principal home.

Taking into account the above comments, together with the admissions made by Ms Dorries, I would suggest that there is sufficient evidence to instigate at least a preliminary investigation into my complaint.

Once again, forgive me for the ambiguous statement made in my first letter and I thank you for your attention to this matter.

2 July 2009

¹⁶⁹ Committee on Standards and Privileges, Fourteenth Report of Session 2007–08, Conduct of Ed Balls and Yvette Cooper, HC 1044. The full paragraph is reproduced in WE 5.

5. Letter to Mr Michael Barnbrook from the Commissioner, 7 July 2009

Thank you for your letter of 2 July with your complaint against Ms Nadine Dorries MP about the identification of her main home for the purpose of her claims against the Additional Costs Allowance for her designated second home.

In essence, your complaint is that Ms Dorries wrongly identified her main home as her designated second home for the purposes of her claims against the Additional Costs Allowance.

I note your quotation from my Memorandum in the Standards and Privileges Committee's 14th Report of Session 2007–08.¹⁷⁰ The full paragraph is as follows:

“I do not believe that, given the particular circumstances of these two Members, the identification of their main home is a simple matter of fact. It is possible to imagine circumstances when that part of the rule clearly applies. If a Member has his or her family living permanently in their constituency home and has modest accommodation in London big enough only for themselves, and which they use only when Parliament is in session, then it would clearly seem to be a matter of fact that that Member's main home is in the constituency.”

As the paragraph makes clear, that statement is of course based on the particular circumstances of the Members whom I had investigated.

I enclose a note which sets out the procedure I follow. You will know that this letter is subject to parliamentary privilege and should not be disclosed to others.

Having accepted your complaint, I have written to Ms Dorries, inviting her comments. When I receive her response, I shall consider how best to proceed.

7 July 2009

6. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 7 July 2009

I would welcome your help on a complaint I have received from Mr Michael Barnbrook about the identification of your main home for the purpose of your claims against the Additional Costs Allowance.

I attach a copy of the complainant's letters of 26 June and 2 July and a copy of the newspaper article of 26 June which he enclosed. I attach also for background information the *Daily Telegraph* articles of 16 and 18 May on which the article of 26 June appears to draw. In essence, the complaint is that you wrongly identified your main home as your designated second home for the purposes of your claims against the Additional Costs Allowance.

You will note from the complainant's letter his quotation from my Memorandum in the Standards and Privileges Committee's 14th Report of Session 2007–08. The full paragraph is as follows:

“I do not believe that, given the particular circumstances of these two Members, the identification of their main home is a simple matter of fact. It is possible to imagine circumstances when that part of the rule clearly applies. If a Member has his or her family living permanently in their constituency home and has modest accommodation in London big enough only for themselves, and which they use only when Parliament is in session, then it would clearly seem to be a matter of fact that that Member's main home is in the constituency.”

I have told the complainant that, as the paragraph makes clear, that statement is based on the particular circumstances of the Members whom I had investigated.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

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.”

The rules in relation to allowances are set out in the Green Book. I assume that the relevant Green Book is the July 2006 edition, although the provisions of the April 2005 edition may also be relevant.

In Mr Speaker’s introduction to the Green Book in July 2006, he wrote as follows:

“Members themselves are responsible for ensuring that their use of allowances is above reproach. They should seek advice in cases of doubt and read the Green Book with care. In cases of doubt or difficulty about any aspect of the allowances or how they can be used, please contact the Department of Finance and Administration. The Members Estimate Committee, which I chair, has recently restated the Department’s authority to interpret and enforce these rules.”

Section 3 of the 2006 edition of the Green Book sets out in paragraph 3.1.1 the scope of the Additional Costs Allowance as follows:

“The Additional Costs Allowance (ACA) reimburses Members of Parliament for expenses wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred when staying overnight away from their main UK residence (referred to below as their main home) for the purpose of performing Parliamentary duties. This excludes expenses that have been incurred for purely personal or political purposes.”

Paragraph 3.2.1 deals with eligibility as follows:

- “You can claim ACA if:*
- a You have stayed overnight in the UK away from your only or main home, and*
 - b This was for the purpose of performing your Parliamentary duties, and*
 - c You have necessarily incurred additional costs in so doing, and*
 - d You represent a constituency in outer London or outside London.”*

Paragraph 3.3.1 sets out the following principles (which are not included in the April 2005 edition):

“You must ensure that arrangements for your ACA claims are above reproach and that there can be no grounds for a suggestion of misuse of public money. Members should bear in mind the need to obtain value for money from accommodation, goods or services funded from the allowances.”

Paragraph 3.4.1 deals with the location of overnight stays as follows:

“If your main home is in the constituency, you can claim ACA for overnight stays in London—or in another part of the constituency if reasonably necessary in view of the distance from your only or main home. Please contact the Department of Finance and Administration for information on such arrangements.

If your main home is in London you can claim for overnight stays in the constituency.

If your main home is neither in London nor the constituency you can choose in which of these areas to claim ACA.”

Paragraph 3.11.1 gives the definition of a main home as follows:

“Main home

When you enter Parliament we will ask you to give the address of your main UK home on form ACA1 for the purposes of ACA and travel entitlements. Members are expected to locate their main homes in the

UK. It is your responsibility to tell us if your main home changes. This will remain your main home unless you tell us otherwise.

The location of your main home will normally be a matter of fact. If you have more than one home, your main home will normally be the one where you spend more nights than any other. If there is any doubt about which is your main home, please consult the Department of Finance and Administration.

Constituency

For the purpose of the ACA, overnight stays within 20 miles of your constituency boundary are regarded as overnight stays within your constituency.

London

Similarly, for the purposes of the ACA, overnight stays within 20 miles of the Palace of Westminster are deemed to be overnight stays within London.”

I would welcome your comments on this complaint in the light of this summary of the rules. In particular, it would be helpful if you would:

1. identify with dates the location of your main home, and your second home for ACA purposes, including any changes to their locations, since your election to the House in 2005;
2. set out your reasons for identifying those properties as your main and second homes, and the reasons for any changes you made to these identifications;
3. set out what advice, if any, you took from the House authorities before or after you had determined the location of your main and second homes;
4. estimate, drawing on your diaries and other information as necessary, the number of nights you have spent in your main home, in your second home and in other locations in each financial year or part year since your election in 2005. It would be helpful if you would let me know the basis of these statistics, and, recognising the passage of time, how reliable you consider them to be;
5. confirm whether you are accurately quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* of 26 June when you said that you “only spend spare weekends and holidays away from [your] designated second home”;
6. set out the claims you made against the Additional Costs Allowance for your second home in each financial year or part year since you were elected, together with copies of your claim forms and supporting documentation if available.

Any other points you may wish to make to help me with this inquiry would, of course, be very welcome.

I attach a note which sets out the procedure I follow. I have written to the complainant to let him know that I have accepted his complaint and that I am writing to you about it. If it were possible, I would be grateful for a response within the next three weeks. If there is any difficulty about that, or if you would like to have a word about any other aspect of this complaint, please contact me at the House.

I would welcome your help on this matter.

7 July 2009

7. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 27 July 2009

Many thanks for your correspondence and the accompanying helpful notes.

I have forwarded to you my expenses up to the date they are available in order to assist with your enquiry.¹⁷¹

ACA

When I became an MP in 2005 I initially rented a room at the Carlton Club on the sitting nights and then rented a flat in [Westminster].

I then transferred the allowance to a rented property in my constituency [constituency address 1].

I spend approximately 150 nights per year in my constituency home.

By free weekends, I of course mean weekends when I do not have surgeries and official duties.

2005–2007 my main home was:

[Gloucestershire, address 1]

To date:

[Stratford-upon-Avon, address 3]¹⁷²

27 July 2009

8. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 30 July 2009

Thank you for your letter of 27 July with your response to my letter of 7 July about this complaint in respect of the identification of your main home for the purpose of your claims against the Additional Costs Allowance.

Thank you, too, for letting me have a copy of your ACA claim forms. I am most grateful.

I set out in my letter of 7 July five other areas on which I needed your help. I am sorry to have to come back to these areas, but I am afraid that the information you have given me is not sufficient to decide how best to take this matter forward.

In particular:

1. I need to know more precisely the dates (as opposed to the year) between which you had your room in the Carlton Club and your flat in [Westminster], the date when you took over the rented property in your constituency, and the date when you moved from your first home to your current one.
2. I also need help in establishing why you identified your first and second main home as your main homes and the reason why you initially identified your second home as being in London and subsequently changed your designation to your rented constituency home. It would also be helpful to know whether you had rented that home before you started claiming for it.
3. Could you let me know what advice, if any, you took from the House authorities about these arrangements?
4. The number of nights you spent in your main home will, under the rules of the Green Book, be an important factor in helping to resolve this complaint. The estimate you have given me of nights in your constituency home is, I am afraid, too broad and does not account for nights spent in your main home. I would be very grateful, therefore, if you could let me have your estimate of how many nights you spent in your constituency home in each financial year since you were elected in 2005; the number of nights you spent in your main home for the same periods; and the number of nights you spent elsewhere. Could you also let me know the basis on which you have made that estimate, with

¹⁷¹ Schedule not included in the written evidence.

¹⁷² See paragraph 37 of this Report.

any documentary evidence to help substantiate it? I assume you have diaries which show your appointments, which may be helpful in substantiating your estimates, but I readily recognise that any documentary evidence you may have is unlikely to be conclusive and that your response will be your best estimates for each year based on what you know of your normal pattern, diary information and your own recollection.

I take it from what you have said that the *Daily Telegraph* quotation is accurate, subject to the clarification you have given me. The implication of the quotation is that you stay overnight in your constituency home unless you are on holiday or do not have a weekend surgery. Once I have your estimates of your overnight stays, I may need to ask you to explain how that statement is consistent with the normal expectation of the Green Book rules that you spend more nights in your main home than anywhere else.

I appreciate that you may not now be able to provide me with the necessary information before you go on holiday. Could you, however, let me have this information by the end of the first week in September? I would be most grateful. If there is any difficulty about any of this, do please contact me at the House.

30 July 2009

9. E-mail to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 4 August 2009

Thank you for your letter.

If it is OK with you, I would much rather attempt to answer the points you have raised and satisfy any outstanding issues from where I am now, on holiday. I would much rather not have this investigation hanging around.

...

With regard to your individual points, I have sent my ACA claims to you to assist with your enquiries.¹⁷³ I do not have internet access from where I am, other than via my Blackberry, however, the claims will quite clearly show both the dates and the fact that only one property was claimed for using my ACA at any time.

I have only ever rented with the ACA, not bought and therefore the reasons for changing address do not apply in terms of “flipping”.

The address of my main home changed due to my marriage breakdown and the requirement for the family home to be sold.

The Carlton Club, the [Westminster] flat and then the constituency home were all paid for using the ACA, one after the other. I obviously had no accommodation when I first arrived in London as an MP and had no choice but to use an hotel.

I did not rent the constituency home before I rented it using the ACA and had no property whatsoever in the constituency.

I would have no reason to have had any property in my constituency before becoming an MP as I had lived in Gloucestershire for the previous 20 years.

I changed my ACA address from London to my constituency as I had promised my Association during my selection that I would make a home base in the constituency and made the same pledge to my constituents during the general election campaign.

I now reside at the constituency address in tandem with the parliamentary cycle, this is how I broadly estimate my nights.

¹⁷³ Schedule not included in the written evidence.

However, I do not spend every parliamentary sitting night in the constituency.

I spend an occasional Monday and/or Tuesday evening in London, depending upon the votes during the weeks Parliament sits. The arrangement is private and does not involve any claim to the Fees Office.

In 2007 and 2008 I spent many fewer nights in the constituency home and many more nights in my main home than my estimate as my daughter attended [name of school] in Gloucestershire.

I am very happy for you to check this out with the school.

For further information our GP is [name]...

Our dentist is [name], [Gloucestershire] ...

I have sought advice from the Fees Office every step of the way as I'm sure [two named officials], and others will confirm.

This year I will spend approximately 200+ nights per year in my main home.

...

I have been as fulsome as possible in my reply.

I have managed to maintain a balance as an MP and a single parent between long hours, late nights, childcare arrangements, my electorate, my association and [family responsibilities]. It is complicated enough trying to do this without added extras!

I have always sought advice and always remained within the guidance laid out in the Green Book, whilst at the same time exercising my own judgment, ie, I chose to rent and not buy in the constituency as I felt this was easier to explain to my association and electorate.

If there is any further information you require please do not hesitate to contact me ... I will oblige in whatever way I can.

4 August 2009

10. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 4 August 2009

Thank you for your e-mail of 4 August responding to my letter to you of 30 July about this complaint in respect of the identification of your main home for the purpose of your claims against the Additional Costs Allowance.

You will be aware of the information which I sought in my previous letter, drawn from my letter of 7 July. I am sure you will recognise that you have not yet provided me with all this information. I am grateful for what you have provided, but I really do need as full an answer as possible in order to take forward my inquiries.

While I recognise that you would like to make progress with this matter, there is a difficulty in me doing so without the information which I have asked for.

...

4 August 2009

11. Extract from an e-mail to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 8 October 2009

...

We have been through each year, night by night and I have made an as accurate as is possible calculation of the nights spent in each location and have numbered them for you year by year.

It has been a laborious process and I do not claim it to be absolutely 100% accurate.

In addition to the night count, I would like to emphasise that to my family and I, the Cotswolds is our home.

...

2005–06: In the 233 nights remaining in 2005 from the election until March 31st 2006 I spent 31 nights in Westminster, 8 nights abroad, 5 nights in [additional address], 3 nights at party conference, and 186 nights in my main home.

2006–07: From April 1 until March 31st I spent 27 nights abroad, 111 nights in my constituency, 4 nights at party conference, 5 nights in [additional address], 9 nights in [additional address], and 208 nights in my main home.

2007–08: I spent 98 nights in my constituency, 34 nights abroad, 8 nights in [additional address], 3 nights at conference, and 222 nights in my main home.

2008–09: 121 nights in constituency, 29 nights abroad, 16 nights in [additional address], and 199 nights in main home.

The night count has been obtained using my office diary, my personal diary and my daughter's diary and is as accurate as is possible to be.

...

8 October 2009

12. Letter to the Office of the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 11 November 2009

Thank you for being so patient while I have been compiling this report for you. Unfortunately it took longer than anticipated to retrieve some of the information required.

Please find enclosed as much of my diary as Outlook would allow, despite involving PCD.¹⁷⁴ Also a list of the rental homes in Stratford-upon-Avon and Gloucestershire between selling [Gloucestershire, address 1] and moving into [Gloucestershire, address 2].

...

For the first few pages of my diary I have highlighted my journey pattern. Green is my journey from home (main home, [address]) orange/pink is my journey back to home. I have marked in blue the nights I have slept in my constituency home I have also marked with a pink circle some of the appointments my PA had marked in my diary which were based in Gloucestershire, such as my dentist in [address], the washing machine repair man etc.

... [My constituency home] is there as a means of maintaining a base in my constituency in order to assist with my duties as an MP both in Parliament and the constituency ... If I had intended to move my family permanently into Bedfordshire, I would have used the ACA to buy a more comfortable house than the sparsely furnished rented house I use at present, which incidentally has no garden whatsoever. I have used none of the ACA to buy furniture for my rented constituency home other than a very basic cooker and a kettle.

I hope that the Commissioner now has all the information he requires. My ACA usage timeline:

¹⁷⁴ The Parliamentary Communications Directorate.

May 2005–June 2005	Carlton Club*
June 2005–December 2006**	[Westminster flat]
October 2006–January 2007	[Carlton Club] (including 2 nights in [named hotel])
January 2007–Present	[First constituency address] (rental)

* The frequency of nights I spent in the Carlton Club, when using it before renting the constituency home, is, interestingly, consistent with the nights I spend in the constituency house.

** As a result of a security issue with the Westminster flat, with the knowledge and agreement of the Fees Office, I transferred to staying at the Carlton Club from October 2006 until I rented the constituency house from 31 January 2007 until present.

My main home address timeline:

May 2005–January 2007	[Gloucestershire, address 1]
January 2007–January 2008	[Stratford-upon-Avon, address 1]
January 2008–January 2009	[Stratford-upon-Avon, address 2]
January 2009–December 2009	[Stratford-upon-Avon, address 3]
September 2009–Present (Permanent address)	[Gloucestershire, address 2]

I have viewed the record of conversations I have had with the Fees Office on the Fees Office computer. I must have spoken to [a named official] and others at least 20–25 times over the last four years, however, there are only five records of conversations logged.

With regard to the *Telegraph* article, I am constantly between a rock and a hard place. With political opponents baying at my heels telling my constituents I care nothing for Bedfordshire and spend all of my time in Gloucestershire, and the *Daily Telegraph* attempting to portray that I spend none of my time in Gloucestershire and all of my time in Bedfordshire. The truth is that as a mother who has three daughters still living full time with me at home, I spend my time where my children are. To my children, their home, bedrooms, friends, social life, family, church, horses and everything they do is based around [first village in Gloucestershire], and will continue to be the case. Where they are, I am.

11 November 2009

13. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 15 December 2009

As you know, I have been considering the information you have provided about your overnight stays, including the copies of your Outlook diary for 2008–09, and 2009–10 which you sent with your letter of 11 November. The purpose of this letter is to ask for further help in establishing the pattern of those overnight stays.

I have studied the Outlook diary you sent me for 2008–09 and for the eight months from April to November 2009. Unfortunately, the diary entries are not such as to allow me to identify with any reliability where you were likely to have spent your overnights. There are just 11 occasions in 2008–09 and 6 in 2009–10 where you have recorded constituency appointments either in the evening or in the morning or (on 1 occasion in each year) both. The coloured lines you have added to your diary to show your estimate of your constituency nights and journeys to and from your main home give an estimate of 81 nights in your constituency and 62 nights in your main home in 2008–09, and in 2009–10 33 nights in your constituency and no clear number of nights in your main home. Even for 2008–09 the figures only add to 143 nights overall—just over a third of the nights that year—although they do suggest that you were spending more nights in your constituency than in your main home. There is, of course, no diary information for any of the previous years.

I conclude, therefore, that your diaries do not provide a reliable guide to the number of overnight stays in your main home and in your constituency home. Your e-mail to me of 8 October, however, provided the following estimates:

Year	A. Nights in main home	B. Nights in constituency	C. Nights in London	D. Nights elsewhere	Totals
2005–06	186		31	16	233
2006–07	208	111		45	364
2007–08	222	98		45	365
2008–09	199	121		45	365

Since your diaries do not help in corroborating or complementing these estimates, I do need to ask you for the following information:

1. Could you tell me how you came to establish these detailed estimates, given that your diaries do not provide the necessary information?
2. For 2005–06, could you also help me with the following information:
 - a) There are 98 nights missing (taking account of the General Election, there were 331 parliamentary nights that year). Could you complete the estimates for this year so that they total 331 nights?
 - b) In doing so could you confirm your initial estimate that you spent no overnights in your constituency where at the time, as I understand it, you had no established accommodation?
3. For 2006–07:
 - a) Could you tell me whether you spent any nights in your London home, that year? As you know, until January 2007 that was your second home—and the one on which you made claims against your ACA.
 - b) If you did spend nights in that home, you will need to adjust your estimates for nights in your main home and in your constituency, so that the annual number of nights totals 365.
 - c) It is not clear to me how you could have spent 111 nights in the constituency home in 2006–07 when you only began to rent it in January 2007. Could you reconsider this estimate?
4. For 2007–08:
 - a) Could you tell me whether you spent any nights in London in this year? The estimates you have given me suggest you spent no nights in London that year. However, you say in your blog of 16 May that “*Sometimes, on the very late week nights I stay in London...*” and you say in your e-mail to me of 4 August that you spend “*an occasional Monday and/or Tuesday evening in London.*”
 - b) If you did, as stated, spend some nights in London in that year, then you will need to adjust your estimates for nights spent in your main home and in your constituency, so that the overall number of nights totals 366.
5. For 2008–09:
 - a) Could you also tell me whether you spent no nights in London in this year, despite what you say in your blog and e-mail to me as referred to in 4(a) above?
 - b) And, as above, if you did spend some nights in London, you would need to revise your estimates of the number of nights you spent in your main home and constituency.
6. For 2009–10:
 - a) Could you tell me your estimate of the number of nights you have spent in your main home, in your constituency home and elsewhere (including any nights in London)? You have not so far

provided me with such estimates and it is not possible to take this information from the Outlook diary which you sent me.

I would like to make clear ... that I do not propose to publish the detail in your diaries, but I may need to publish your estimates of the total number of nights spent in London, the constituency, your main home and elsewhere in each of the years in question. The reason I am asking for this information is that before I come to a view on the complainant's allegation that you spend "only spare weekends and holidays" away from your second home I need to arrive at a reasonable estimate of the number of nights you have spent in your main and second homes.

If it were possible to provide me with a response to these questions before Christmas, that would be most helpful in enabling me to make progress with this inquiry. If there is any difficulty about this, please let me know.

I am returning your marked-up diaries. I have not kept copies.

15 December 2009

14. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 25 January 2010

Please find enclosed an easier to understand marked print out of my diaries.

It was clear by the points raised in your letter that I had "overcomplicated" the method by which I identified my overnight stays.

I have now made it easier by removing my travel arrangements and simply highlighting the nights I believe I have slept at my main home. The night of April 8th 2008 was marked in green in error. Please ignore that night.

The campaign orchestrated by the *Daily Telegraph* has been very unpleasant. It did not begin with this enquiry. It began with my defending the role of MPs. As someone who had never claimed a mortgage, flipped, claimed for furniture, cleaners, gardeners, food, petty cash or similar and had operated within the letter of the rules and taken frequent advice, at all times, I felt that I was in a strong position to do so.

...

It has come to my attention that a *Daily Telegraph* journalist has been telephoning people who live in proximity to my constituency house asking very loaded questions. They have also had someone knocking on doors in [the constituency, in Gloucestershire, and in Stratford-upon-Avon].

I am aware that they may have persuaded a neighbour who lives in France and only stays in [the constituency] for a short period of time, to make a submission to you. This particular neighbour has referred to me as "it, the Tory MP" since I rented the property in [the constituency]. The last time I saw this neighbour was in June last year and the time before that during the snow last February. They have never on any occasion greeted me pleasantly.

I would like to clarify that this neighbour does not have a front door on the same road as my house, even though they are [a near neighbour]. Their property is at the rear, which is where the front door is positioned and is entirely occluded by large plants and conifers. I can provide a photograph of this if that helps.

They have no view of my front door and cannot see me when I enter or leave the property.

They could not honestly say that they have seen me more than a handful of times over the last two years.

I would also like to question whether or not their submission to you, which is also in the hands of the *Telegraph*, perhaps motivated by the *Telegraph*, can be considered as evidence to your enquiry when it has been published and is in the public domain before the enquiry has been concluded?

Does the fact that the public are aware of the letter place an additional pressure upon you? Can you help but be prejudiced by the *Telegraph* reporting? Is it still possible for you to remain objective?

Can you accept a letter of evidence from someone who has apparently spent the last six months living in France and has only seen me on two occasions in twelve months?

I arrived at the constituency house this morning to find a number of letters and notes on the mat. I apologise for opening the buff envelope which contains a letter addressed to you.¹⁷⁵

It is from [neighbour 3], my next door neighbour. Our front doors are next to each other. He [...] has a full view of everyone who approaches my front door and sees me each and every time I enter and leave the property. My office can obtain his telephone number if you would like to confirm the letter and I can provide a photograph of how close his front door is to mine.

Although I am grateful and touched he has written the letter, I am not totally convinced that his letter should be given any more regard than the one from [neighbour 1]; I would only point out that from the perspective of his letter, he does actually see me and the properties do adjoin each other and he does at least live in this country all of the time.

I have also asked for and given permission to [name of doctor], my GP, who I met on Saturday to write to you in support of my submission. I have not seen his letter which I assume is being sent directly to you.

Even though my diaries quite clearly state that I spend far more time at home than I do in my constituency and given that I do not have a camera above each door to count me in and out and therefore cannot prove how many nights I spend in each location, I would like to make the following points:

You ask me in your letter how I came to establish detailed estimates given that my work diary does not provide the necessary information?

I am now a single parent who works long and complicated hours with personal commitments which are absolutely rigid.

My diary planning on a week by week basis, the organisation of my [family commitments] ... the transporting between three locations, [family requirements], and the needs of my other two, still living at home, elder daughters means that almost every aspect of my life is planned down to the last second.

As a backbench opposition MP, my diaries are not as specific as they would be if I were a Government Minister. I am afraid that I have no option other than to provide you with verifiable evidence which is personal in nature in order to make my case.

...

I am very aware that without the full picture you may not have enough information to make a decision which truthfully reflects my situation, my reputation and integrity are at stake, not to mention the ammunition which could be handed to my political opponents.

...

Having highlighted the diary nights spent at home you will note that when I did not have a rented property in the constituency and used the ACA to pay for hotel accommodation in London, that the number of nights I spent in hotels were also very few with the majority of my nights being spent at home.

When I became an MP in 2005 I had two daughters attending [a school in Gloucestershire].

It was necessary given my domestic situation and [family circumstances] for me to travel home as much as possible to care for my home and daughters. It was not unusual for me to leave Westminster at 10.30 pm and arrive home at 12.15 in order to be at home for the next morning.

¹⁷⁵ WE 25. This was the letter from Neighbour 3.

My youngest now attends [a school] in the constituency two and a half days a week during term time ...

She has a Saturday/Sunday/school holiday job ... in the Cotswolds. I am at home every Friday, Saturday and Sunday night as I have to drop her off at work on a Saturday and sometimes Sunday morning and during the holiday/recess period as she doesn't drive.

...

Maintaining her life in as normal a routine as possible has been the dominating aspect of my life for the past three years.

...

Due to [family circumstances], I was absent with permission from the Whips from late night voting completely throughout October, November and December as my voting record will confirm. I managed to maintain my normal constituency and non-voting Parliamentary duties from my main home. This is one of the reasons I have not been able to focus on this submission to you. My voting record will also show that for all of the last two years [my family circumstances] [have] had an impact upon my voting record.

Historically, following the ... separation from my husband, the family home, [the first Gloucestershire address], was placed on the market. However, things did not happen as quickly as I had thought they may ... our settlement was delayed.

Whilst this process took place, with the initial thought in mind that it would only take a matter of months, my husband rented a house for the girls and I as we had left the family home where he remained until the sale completed.

Due to the process taking much longer than expected, we had to rent for longer than we initially thought. This was necessary as my daughter attended the local school and both of my other daughters who still live with me had commitments in the area—we maintained our normal day to day lives and routine in exactly the same way we had been doing so in the marital home. Our local commitments remained the same and we continued with our usual family routine.

The rented homes were substantial houses. Other family members have relocated their lives in order to live near to us, hence my inability to move everyone and relocate to Bedfordshire. Recently, my personal caring commitments and responsibilities have extended beyond my children.

We rented within a 12 minute drive from my daughter's school.

Throughout this process the Fees Office were fully aware of the situation and I explained what was happening every single step of the way.

It was upon advice from the Fees Office that [the first Gloucestershire address] remained listed as my main home until the legal situation had sorted itself out. Indeed, I informed them of the change of my main home address in 2007 and 2008. The main home address has now been changed from [the first Gloucestershire address] to [the second Gloucestershire address]. It was upon their advice that I left the situation as it was until I knew where our new permanent main home address was going to be.

I have checked with the Fees Office and asked how many of our conversations were recorded—it appears hardly any and that the only recorded conversations were those relating to mislaid invoices etc.

If all conversations had been recorded I would be able to provide the records as supplementary evidence to this letter. I am also acutely aware that details regarding my personal situation would also now have been in the hands of the *Daily Telegraph* and maybe even in the public domain.

Our rental properties in Stratford-upon-Avon were substantial, expensive properties with a garden.

A *Daily Telegraph* journalist informed me that the fact the main house was temporarily rented and not bought deemed it as modest. Who says that houses have to be bought and not rented? Half of the population live in rented accommodation. To tell someone that because their home is rented and not bought makes it “modest”

and not a home is an elitist and offensive assumption. My situation was quite clear. My constituency house was an extremely modest, rented, mostly un-furnished or carpeted mid terraced property as photographed in last Saturday's paper and on a main high street with no garden. Only one room contained any furniture and a requested interview with the *Sunday Telegraph* meant transporting in boxes of books and ornaments and a couple of pictures to make the place look lived in. The *Sunday Telegraph* journalist saw through this and commented on the sparsity and dustiness of the house and the fact that the post hadn't been picked up from the mat for two weeks. I then described it as my "*post divorce bolt hole*" even though I wasn't yet divorced in order to give the impression to my constituents that I did in fact live there and to convince the journalist that I did. I would describe that house as modest. It didn't have any curtains downstairs and I did not claim any expenses to provide any or any furniture as I used the house only as an office and to sleep in.

I often posted comments on my blog relating to [name of town] in my constituency. Since I first rented in the constituency, I made a song and dance about being at the property. I have mentioned it on my blog a number of times. This was done to comfort my Association. The previous MP only visited the constituency occasionally—sometimes only as often as once every six weeks—and they were keen that I reversed that impression. His lack of time in the constituency contributed to his de-selection. The fact that it took me two years to move was becoming an issue which I had to address. I did consider buying using the allowance, but took the decision that it just didn't "*feel*" right—as the Estate has properties available for long term rent this appeared to be an ideal solution and one which was hassle free for me.

I was selected for my constituency the weekend the election was called in 2005 and my opponents make much of the fact that I was "*parachuted in*". There are websites set up to this effect. Communicating the fact that I was around [town in constituency] and had made the effort to move my second home from London to the patch and to take the commute in with my constituents was an important process in letting my constituents know I am totally committed to Mid Bedfordshire.

Whenever I have been at church, the local pub, or interviewed in the patch I have mentioned it on my blog.

In conclusion, the fact remains that I have never at any time assumed my situation of renting whilst in between selling and buying main homes was acceptable until I had checked it with the Fees Office and received assurance that the situation was perfectly acceptable and within the rules. As a new MP who had worked as a main board director of BUPA, as well as having run a successful business for ten years—I found the whole expenses system ambiguous and it smelt from day one like a man trap. I had absolutely no idea how to navigate around such an expense/allowances process and sought advice every step of the way. I remember having a conversation on the phone with a member of the Fees Office who was renting having sold whilst trying to find another property and who was very sympathetic as we discussed the horror of not remembering where everything is. I have never acted upon my own instinct but on the basis of very clear instructions provided to me by the Fees Office on a very regular basis.

To answer your questions, I did not spend any nights in my constituency in 2005–2006.

I did not spend any nights in my constituency in 2006–2007. My PA completed the box and I think she may have misunderstood what I said.

If I have attended a dinner and have had an alcoholic drink and someone is with my youngest daughter at home, I very occasionally stay in London. This never happens on more than 6–8 nights in a whole year and is very ad hoc. I will adjust all years to reflect.

I have provided a diary print out for 2008–2009.¹⁷⁶ I have clearly marked in pink the nights I know I definitely slept at my main home.

For 2005–2006 I entered Parliament for my first day on May 10 2005. According to my expenses, that year I spent 31 nights in London. The remainder of the time I slept at my main home apart from 16 days elsewhere. I spent 0 nights in the constituency.

¹⁷⁶ Not included in the written evidence

On closer examination of my 08–09 diary I have also revised my estimates for this year. I have revised other years to include the nights I stay in London, however, I emphasise these are paid for at my own expense.

06–07	Home	208	London 112	constituency	0	elsewhere	45
07–08	Home	223	London 10	constituency	89	elsewhere	44
08–09	Home	235	London 9	constituency	97	elsewhere	24
09–10	Home	218	London 3	constituency	37	elsewhere	42

2009–2010. I have provided a number of nights. My time at the constituency house was focused in May and June as I had a large number of AGM etc to attend and my daughter had exams.

The truth is that I don't keep a record of where I sleep and when. I have a pattern. My travel arrangements are complicated as I often travel to the house after I have dropped my daughter off, work from the constituency office and then leave for London. Although I sometimes spend the day in the constituency house/office, I don't actually sleep there. As mentioned above, I know I am always at home on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday. If I have anything to attend in the constituency I always drive home afterwards.

...I moved the location of the constituency home a few weeks ago and chose a cheaper isolated property in the middle of a woodcutting yard ...

From October this year onwards I hope my youngest daughter will be able to attend university and I will be spending Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and sometimes Thursday when Parliament sits in the constituency.

If you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

... I do hope that given how close we are to a General Election that this can be resolved quickly.

25 January 2010

15. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 2 February 2010

Thank you for your letter of 25 January responding to mine of 15 December about this complaint in respect of the identification of your main home for the purposes of your claims against the Additional Costs Allowance.

I was most grateful for this response. I will now be working through your revised diary entries and the supporting information you gave me in your letter and will be back in touch with my conclusions.

There was one immediate point, however, about which I need to ask you. In the table which I sent you with my letter of 15 December, I identified from your e-mail of 8 October that you had in 2006–07 spent 111 nights in your constituency. The information given in the table towards the end of your letter of 25 January in effect transposes this to London. You have told me that your PA, who completed the box, may have misunderstood what you said. It would be helpful if you could let me know a bit more about how such an error occurred and how you failed to notice it afterwards.

You ask about the evidence I may receive from your neighbours. Under my procedures, I am able to take evidence from witnesses. That evidence is, like all the other evidence I receive, subject to parliamentary privilege during the course of my inquiries. Once I am clear about the evidence I have received from witnesses, I normally show it to the Member and invite their comments. It is too early to say how pertinent any evidence I receive from your neighbours or other witness may be to the outcome of my inquiries.

You asked also about confidentiality. As you know, information you send me is subject to parliamentary privilege during the course of my inquiries. But it may be published once my inquiry is completed. This may be so if I decide to submit a memorandum to the Committee on Standards and Privileges when I would submit to the Committee all the relevant evidence I have received and the Committee would normally publish that with my memorandum along with their own report. I am, however, able to omit sections of the information I have received if I think it is necessary and if I think the information is not required by the

Committee to assess the evidence on which I have reached my conclusion. It is also open to Members to ask the Committee not to publish with their report parts of evidence I have received.

I will be back in touch as soon as I have concluded my work on your overnight stays. I would hope then to approach the Department of Resources for their help on this inquiry. They will be given copies of all the evidence I have received to help them form their advice to me.

Thank you for your help on these matters.

2 February 2010

16. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 9 February 2010

When I wrote to you on 2 February I said that I would be back in touch when I had analysed the further information you supplied in your letter of 25 January, including the diary evidence. I am most grateful for this further information.

You will appreciate, I am sure, that I need to ensure that I have reliable information on which to base my decision about this complaint. That means that before I seek the advice of the Department of Resources, I do need to ask you some further questions, particularly in relation to the areas where your latest evidence differs from earlier submissions.

I enclose a table¹⁷⁷ which identifies the estimates of your overnight stays which you gave me in your e-mail of 8 October, in your letter of 25 January and in the highlighted days in the diary extracts you sent me with the same letter.

I need to understand the reasons of the variations in your estimates. In particular:

1. 2006–07—I asked you in my letter of 2 February for a little more explanation about how the error occurred in identifying on 8 October that you spent 111 nights in the constituency when your letter of 25 January identified these as in effect, London nights. I look forward to your response.
2. 2007–08—it would be helpful if you could let me know why you omitted the 10 London nights from your e-mail of 8 October, and whether these nights account for the 9 night reduction in the constituency figure provided with your letter of 25 January.
3. 2008–09—it would be helpful to know why the estimates in your letter of 25 January differ so apparently markedly from those in your e-mail of 8 October—namely, 36 more nights in your main home, 24 fewer nights in your constituency home, 9 nights in London where there were none before and 21 fewer nights elsewhere.
4. Diary evidence 2008–09—can you help me to reconcile the overnight stays highlighted in your diary with your own estimates in your letter of 25 January? The pink highlights show 214 nights in your main home, 21 fewer nights than your estimate. I am also unclear about what the 23 orange highlighted entries for August 2008 and February 2009 signify in terms of the location of your overnight stays.
5. Main home stays 2008–09—could you help me on the pattern of your overnight stays in your main home? Your letter of 25 January says you spent Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights in your main home and you have highlighted these in your diary. But there are an additional 76 main home nights on other days of the week highlighted in your diary—on average between one and two further nights each week. Was there any pattern to these additional weekday nights?

Could you explain how, according to your diary highlights, you spent each night in September 2008 in your main home when according to your blog entry of 15 May 2009, your daughter attended a [constituency] school from September that year?

¹⁷⁷ See WE 17 below.

6. 2009–10—you have provided me with diary highlights for April 2009 but not for the remaining months—May 2009 to (I assume) January 2010—to set against the estimates provided in your letter of 25 January. It would be very helpful if you could do so. And it would be helpful to know what single green highlight in the April 2009 diary represents.

Statements in the *Telegraph* article of 18 May

In the light of the evidence you have now given me, I should be grateful for any comments you may wish to make on this article, and particularly on the following excerpts:

“But when questioned by the Daily Telegraph about her second home, she posted a message on the Internet in which she admitted her daughter goes to school in the area, she keeps her pet dogs there and she spends many of her weekends working there.”

“[Ms Dorries] wrote, ‘My children stay with me when I am in the constituency. I keep the dogs at the constituency address as I am often there on my own and it confuses them being moved around.’”

It would be helpful if you could assist me reconciling these statements—if accurately quoted—with what you said in your letter of 25 January:

“... I know I am always at home on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday. If I have anything to attend to in the constituency I always drive home afterwards.”

The *Daily Telegraph* references suggest that you spend many of your weekends in your constituency home; your letter says you spend your weekend nights, at least, in your main home.

It would also be helpful to know whether some or all of your children and your dogs travel with you between homes on each occasion and, if not, who looks after them when they are in your constituency home without you.

I can confirm that some of your neighbours have sent me witness evidence which I am following up with them. When I have completed this work I will let you see it.

Like you, I would like to resolve the inquiry as soon as possible so I would be particularly grateful if you could let me have a response to this letter within the next week. Thank you for your help.

9 February 2010

17. Nadine Dorries MP: Schedule of Overnight Stays, 9 February 2010

Nadine Dorries MP: information about overnight stays from e-mail of 8/10/2009

Year	A. Nights at main home	B. Nights in constituency	C. Nights in London	C. Nights elsewhere	Totals
2005–06	186		31	16	233
2006–07	208	111		45	364
2007–08	222	98		45	365
2008–09	199	121		45	365
2009–10	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Nadine Dorries MP: information about overnight stays from letter of 25/01/2010

Year	A. Nights at main home	B. Nights in constituency	C. Nights in London	C. Nights elsewhere	Totals
2005–06	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2006–07	208	0	112	45	365
2007–08	223	89	10	44	366
2008–09	235	97	9	24	365
2009–10	218	37	3	42	300

Nadine Dorries MP: information about overnight stays from printout of electronic diary provided 25/01/2010

Year	A. Nights at main home	B. Nights in constituency	C. Nights in London	C. Nights elsewhere	Highlighted in orange	Highlighted in green	Totals
2008–09	214				23		237
2009–10	19					1	20

*Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards
9 February 2010*

18. Letter to the Commissioner from Neighbour 1 (constituency), 22 January 2010

Further to a recent meeting with [name of reporter] of the *Daily Telegraph*, we have been asked to write and confirm the following points we discussed:

- Nadine Dorries was our next door neighbour for 2½ years until she recently moved to another property in [town in constituency].
- It is our belief that [address] was very much the “family” home where Nadine lived with her daughter/daughters and her family pets. She spent most of her time here with various members of the family.
- When asked to quantify how much time she and her family resided at [constituency address 1], we believe approximately 80%. This included weekdays, weekends, school and university breaks, with the exception of 4 to 6 weeks during the summer recess when some or all of them went abroad.

We sincerely hope that this information is of assistance in clarifying the situation.

22 January 2010

19. Letter to Neighbour 1 (constituency) from the Commissioner, 2 February 2010

Thank you for your letter of 22 January about Ms Nadine Dorries MP.

I was grateful to you for providing this witness information. I attach a note which sets out the procedure I follow in taking evidence from witnesses. As you will see, since I am undertaking an inquiry, I would ask that the evidence you have sent me and our subsequent correspondence is not disclosed more widely. My inquiries are subject to parliamentary privilege and any evidence provided therefore should be treated as private and confidential to the inquiry. Once my inquiry is completed, your letter may be published along with the other evidence I have received in the course of this inquiry.

In essence, the complaint into which I am inquiring is that Ms Dorries wrongly identified her main home as her designated second home for the purposes of her claims against the Additional Costs Allowance.

The rules of the House of Commons as they were at the time provided that a Member of Parliament's main home was normally one where they spent more nights than any other. You have suggested that Ms Dorries spent 80% of her time at [constituency address 1]. It would be helpful if you could confirm:

1. whether your estimate of 80% of Ms Dorries' time in [this] property is an estimate of the proportion of the nights she spent there each year or whether this estimate covers also her daytime use of the property;
2. if your estimate is of the proportion of nights which Ms Dorries spent in her property, that you believe that, with the exception of her six-week break in the summer recess, Ms Dorries spent every night of the last two and a half years in [this] property;
3. if your estimate is of Ms Dorries' daytime use of the property, your further estimate, if you can reliably provide it, of the proportion of her nights which you believe Ms Dorries spent at the property, if possible in each relevant financial year;
4. the basis on which you have formed these conclusions, including how frequently you have been in [name of road] at the relevant times, together with any supporting evidence you may be able to provide; I should tell you that it has been suggested by other witnesses that you have a home in France and are away from [town in constituency] most of the time;
5. the start and end dates for the 2½ year period to which you refer.

Any other points you may wish to make to help me with this inquiry would be very welcome.

It would be very helpful if you could let me have a response to this letter within the next two weeks. I am likely then to need to show it to Ms Dorries and give her an opportunity to respond.

Thank you for your help with this matter.

2 February 2010

20. Letter to the Commissioner from Neighbour 1 (constituency), 18 February 2010

Further to your letter dated 2 February and my subsequent telephone conversation with [the Commissioner's office], my comments are as follows:

- In paragraph 4 of your letter you make reference to another witness claiming that my wife and I spend most of our time in France. This is untrue. We did not in fact purchase our holiday cottage in France until the end of 2008 by which time Nadine had already been our neighbour for just over 18 months. For your information, our time spent there last year (2009) was:

- three weeks in February/March (our first visit following purchase)

- five weeks in May/June during which I returned home twice each time for five days
- two and a half weeks in August which coincided with the Dorries household summer holiday
- two weeks at Christmas.

Hardly most of the year!

- Your letter infers that I am a “*complainant*”. This is not the case. When approached by the *Daily Telegraph*, I only offered the following observations:

-It was quite obvious that Nadine and her family used [constituency address 1] as the main family home. The dogs lived there permanently and her daughters came home regularly from university and school frequently with their various friends/boyfriends. Her youngest daughter lived there in 2009 as she attended school locally.

- I cannot possibly quantify the exact number of days or nights Nadine spent at the house since this would be impossible to do in the absence of a private investigator or a surveillance camera. Our house and my studio adjoins what was her property on two sides and consequently we were acutely aware of her and her family’s presence whenever they were there. If Nadine is supposed to have her main home elsewhere, she most certainly did not spend much, if any, time there!

Whilst the above is background information for your enquiry, *I do not wish to be a witness*. I have only passed these comments as an adjoining neighbour and a taxpayer deeply concerned about the misuse of parliamentary expenses. I merely wish to be a responsible citizen without being dragged into this government expenses inquiry.

18 February 2010

21. Letter to Neighbour 1 (constituency) from the Commissioner, 22 February 2010

Thank you for your letter of 18 February responding to mine of 2 February about the witness evidence you have given me in respect of the complaint I am inquiring into about the claims from parliamentary resources made by Mrs Nadine Dorries MP for her home in [her constituency].

I was most grateful for this further information.

I note that you have said that you do not wish to be a witness to this inquiry. I can, however, only take account of your information if it is given to me by you as a witness. This is because it would not be fair for me to take into account information which I could not disclose to the Member of Parliament and the Committee on Standards and Privileges, or if necessary subsequently publish after the conclusion of my inquiry.

I consider the information you have given me is relevant to my inquiry. It addresses the question of how many nights Mrs Dorries has spent in her [constituency] property, which is material to the outcome of my inquiry. It is also the case that information which you subsequently sent me in evidence in your letter of 22 January has already been published.

I will, therefore, be showing our correspondence to Mrs Dorries for any comments she may wish to make and, subject to any further representations you may wish to make about confidentiality, I would expect your letters to be published along with the other evidence I have received in the course of this inquiry. I would identify you in published material as a neighbour of Mrs Dorries, but would not publish your name or address, although, of course, it will be known to Mrs Dorries.

One final point. I am sorry if you have inferred from my letter that I believe you are making a complaint against Mrs Dorries. That is not the case. You are a witness in an inquiry into a complaint made against Mrs Dorries by another person.

Thank you for your help on this matter.

22 February 2010

22. Letter to the Commissioner from Neighbour 2 (constituency), 23 January 2010

I was shocked, as a neighbour of our MP, to read the account in this morning's *Telegraph*. I can state that we live across the road and only occasionally see the car parked outside or the MP going in or out of the house. Myself and my husband walk our dog and drive our car past our MP's house every day.

Only one of her neighbours is permanently in residence. The others have a house in France where they spend most of their time. I would like to state that the comment "*she spends 80% of her time*" at the house is *entirely untrue*. If this was the case, I would certainly know.

23 January 2010

23. Letter to Neighbour 2 (constituency) from the Commissioner, 2 February 2010

Thank you for your letter of 23 January about Ms Nadine Dorries MP.

I was grateful to you for providing this witness information. I attach a note which sets out the procedure I follow in taking evidence from witnesses. As you will see, since I am undertaking an inquiry, I would ask that the evidence you have sent me and our subsequent correspondence is not disclosed more widely. My inquiries are subject to parliamentary privilege and any evidence provided therefore should be treated as private and confidential to the inquiry. Once my inquiry is completed, your letter may be published along with the other evidence I have received in the course of this inquiry.

In essence, the complaint into which I am inquiring is that Ms Dorries wrongly identified her main home as her designated second home for the purposes of her claims against the Additional Costs Allowance.

The rules of the House of Commons as they were at the time provided that a Member of Parliament's main home was normally one where they spent more nights than any other. You have told me that you believe that the statement allegedly made by another neighbour that Ms Dorries "*spends eighty per cent of her time*" at the house in [constituency address 1] is "*entirely untrue*". You have not however offered me any alternative estimate of Ms Dorries' use of this property. If you can reliably provide me with an estimate of the number of nights which you believe Ms Dorries has spent at this property, ideally by financial year, I would be grateful to receive it, together with any information about the basis on which you made that estimate.

Any other points you may wish to make to help me with this inquiry would be very welcome.

It would be very helpful if you could let me have a response to this letter within the next two weeks. I am likely then to need to show it to Ms Dorries and give her an opportunity to respond.

Thank you for your help with this matter.

2 February 2010

24. Letter to the Commissioner from Neighbour 2 (constituency), 9 February 2010

We walk our dog every morning between 6 and 8.30 am, and the same times in the evening. Whilst living in [name of road], Nadine Dorries had to park her car ... on the road. We all know her car, and most other residents—it's a small village.

My husband and I constantly comment on her car *not* being there, because we had assumed she lived there all the time. So as a percentage of a year, I would say 10%, and of a week, 15%. We see her car most often on a Friday morning and occasionally the odd day in the week.

My husband, [name], and I are most willing to help in any way we can.

9 February 2010

25. Letter to the Commissioner from Neighbour 3 (constituency), received 25 January 2010

We live in the property directly next door to the house of Nadine Dorries, the MP, and we are the only property which has a front door next to hers. We live in a terraced row of houses.

Her kitchen and our living room are next to each other.

Mrs Dorries has no carpets and so not only do we see her car pull up when she arrives and leaves, we can hear her.

We can hear the sound of the water running, the kettle filling and the switch being switched on and off.

We can hear almost every word if she has her daughter with her as the walls are so thin. We can also hear her walking up and down the stairs.

When she does arrive at the house it is often very late at night but because I watch television until quite late I am usually still up. She often waves as she gets out of the car. When she leaves it is usually very early, well before our children leave for school.

Sometimes I see her arriving early in the morning and then she leaves later in the day but she doesn't return.

It would be absolutely true for me to say that Nadine Dorries is hardly ever here and I hardly ever see her. If I had to put a number on it I would say I have seen her about twenty times over the last year.

When she isn't going to be at the house for long periods of time she lets us know so that we can keep an eye out.

She was away from the house from the beginning of July until October right the way through but we did see her during the day sometimes. She said she was coming to collect post and work in the office which she has in the house.

She often brings her dog with her and sometimes her daughter. When she comes back late at night she always gets out of the car alone.

There are neighbours on the other side but they have a house in France and are away most of the time. They have only been here for about three weeks out of the last six months that I can recall.

If the *Telegraph* is right and they have sent you a statement then I hope they have made that clear.

Received 25 January 2010

26. Letter to Neighbour 3 (constituency) from the Commissioner, 2 February 2010

Thank you for your letter about Ms Nadine Dorries MP, which I received on 25 January.

I was grateful to you for providing this witness information. I attach a note which sets out the procedure I follow in taking evidence from witnesses. As you will see, since I am undertaking an inquiry, I would ask that the evidence you have sent me and our subsequent correspondence is not disclosed more widely. My inquiries are subject to parliamentary privilege and any evidence provided should, therefore, be treated as private and confidential to the inquiry. Once my inquiry is completed, your letter may be published along with the other evidence I have received in the course of this inquiry.

In essence, the complaint into which I am inquiring is that Ms Dorries wrongly identified her main home as her designated second home for the purposes of her claims against the Additional Costs Allowance.

The rules of the House of Commons as they were at the time provided that a Member of Parliament's main home was normally one where they spent more nights than any other. From your letter, I understand that in 2009 you saw Ms Dorries about twenty times in your street, where you are immediate neighbours. I would be grateful if you could provide me with a little more information about Ms Dorries' pattern of stays. If you can reliably provide it, it would be helpful to have your estimate of the number of nights which Ms Dorries has spent at the property, ideally by financial year. Any other points you may wish to make to help me with this inquiry would be very welcome.

It would be very helpful if you could let me have a response to this letter within the next two weeks. I am likely then to need to show it to Ms Dorries and give her an opportunity to respond.

Thank you for your help with this matter.

2 February 2010

27. Letter to the Commissioner from Neighbour 3 (constituency), received 17 February 2010

Thank you for your letter in which you have asked me to identify a pattern regarding the behaviour of Nadine Dorries.

I can only tell you this; the only person who could identify a pattern would be me as I am the only person who could see her going in and out of her front door.

I can also tell you; she is never here at weekends but is often there during the day on a Friday.

She tends to be here mid week, often coming back late at night. She often arrives on a Monday morning with a bag but not always, sometimes it's on a Tuesday.

From July to October she isn't here at all at night but sometimes she is during the day. I haven't really seen her that often but when I do it is usually on a Monday morning, Friday day time or late on a weeknight.

She is always friendly and pleasant. A very nice lady.

Received 17 February 2010

28. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Dorries' GP, 26 January 2010

I have been the family doctor to Nadine Dorries and her family since I took up practice in [name of village] in 1996. The family had been patients of the practice for a few years before I arrived. I saw Ms Dorries in a local supermarket last Saturday following an article which I had read in the *Daily Telegraph*. The gist of the article was that her primary place of residency was somewhere in her constituency. I was somewhat surprised by this as she and her family have remained as patients of my practice in [name of village] despite her winning her parliamentary seat in 2005. I have had a lot of input [material redacted to protect the privacy of third parties]... I am of the opinion that Ms Dorries spends most of her time in this area as she simply does not want to be away ... for longer than is absolutely necessary. [Material redacted to protect the privacy of third parties] I see Ms Dorries, her daughters and other family members either in my practice or out and about on a regular basis. I can say with certainty that their lives are very much based in and around this area and that Ms Dorries has a caring commitment for another family member ... [Material redacted to protect the privacy of third parties.] I cannot truthfully provide you with numbers. What I can say is that knowing what I do, it would seem very unlikely that Ms Dorries has spent the majority of her time anywhere other than in this area since 2005, as much as her job permits. As the family doctor, I would also like to say that the sooner this is concluded the better ...

26 January 2010

29. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 23 February 2010

When I last wrote to you on 9 February I said that some of your neighbours had sent me witness evidence which I was following up with them. The purpose of this letter is to show you the evidence I have so far received from these witnesses and from your GP, and to invite any comments you may wish to make.

I enclose with this letter copies of [neighbour 1's] letter of 22 January, my letter of 2 February and his response of 18 February; [neighbour 3's] letter received here on 25 January, my letter to him of 2 February and his response received here on 17 February; and [neighbour 2's] letter of 23 January, mine of 2 February and her response of 9 February. I also enclose a copy of the letter of 26 January which I received from [name], your GP, and my response of 1 February. If I receive any further evidence from your neighbours I will copy it to you in the same way.

If you wish to comment on any of these statements, you would be welcome to do so. You may wish to incorporate any such comments in your response to my letter to you of 9 February, where, as you know, I have asked you about the arrangements for your family and pets which are referred to in [neighbour 1's] letter of 18 February.

23 February 2010

30. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 1 March 2010

With regard to the latest points you have raised in your letter dated February 5th and the letters you have forwarded on to me from former neighbours, I wish to submit the following:

[Material not relevant to this inquiry.]

The last time I saw [neighbour 1] was at least a year or so ago and before that I have probably seen them both a handful of times over a period of two years.

They fail to mention the most important fact that their house did not have any view of mine and that they could not see whether I was in or not. Neither could they hear, as the house is actually on [name of road].

With regard to the other neighbours, particularly my next door neighbour who has a clear open view of my property and sees my every move in and out, I have no comment to make other than I assume he has not spoken to [name of reporter] and therefore his evidence can be considered as untainted, credible and honest.

I have been informed that the *Daily Telegraph* have approached residents and “aggressively” sought poor opinion of myself.

If you would like to see photographs which give a clear picture of how the properties are laid out I would be happy to provide you with the same.

To the specific points you have raised:

1. I asked my PA to make and complete the table. She simply put the 111 nights in the wrong box.

As you can see from the earlier estimate she has slipped over the box.

She completed the table from a hand-written note I gave her with the figures written in columns.

It was obviously an error as *I did not have or claim for a house in the constituency until some way into 2007 and therefore could not possibly have claimed for 111 nights for 2006–07 as there was no constituency property to claim against.*

2. I have no idea how many nights I spend in London as they are so few and far between. I mentioned 10 as a generous estimate. They may or may not be on nights I would normally stay in the constituency, I have no idea.

With regard to questions 3, 4 and 5a, I have explained before that as a backbench opposition MP it is *absolutely impossible* for me to provide you with accurate assessment of where I stay and when using my diaries and my work commitments; however, I can provide you with a pattern which I did with the recent diary print out I sent you. Any variation in numbers which has arisen has done so via my attempt to be overly specific, which as I have said is impossible and gives rise to unnecessary confusion.

I know I always sleep at home on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday—almost always on a Thursday and often on a Monday. If it is a one line whip I will work from home, or drive to the constituency during the day, especially during term time over the last year or so to drop and collect [my daughter].

5b. The journey to [name of school] from my main home was 1 hr and 30 minutes. The same time it takes my elder daughter to travel across London to work. However, due to [family circumstances], [my daughter] rarely attends school more than two days per week and when she did do she would travel from the constituency house.

[Material redacted to protect the privacy of third parties.]

6. The single green night was because I was about to start highlighting nights I spent at the constituency but realised that this would be confusing and totally wrong as I cannot be 100% sure. It is not good enough to assume knowledge.

The orange marks are the nights I spent on holiday away from both my main and constituency home. I can be certain about this and therefore felt confident in identifying those nights.

My blog is 70% fiction and 30% fact. It is written as a tool to enable my constituents to know me better and to reassure them of my commitment to Mid Bedfordshire. I rely heavily on poetic licence and frequently replace one place name/event/fact with another.

In light of the bullying onslaught of the *Daily Telegraph* I used my blog to its best effect in reassuring my constituents of my commitment to Mid Beds.

My commitment is absolute and is always my first consideration regardless of where I sleep at night. However, I have always been aware that should my personal domestic arrangements become the knowledge of my political opponents, they would be able to exaggerate that to good effect. Hence the reason for my blog and my need to reassure my constituents...

My dogs are looked after by myself and various family members.

On Friday last, [name of reporter] was evicted by neighbours and the decorator from the garden of my home. He was taking photographs through the windows.

For your information, as you will have seen the picture taken of the constituency home in the *Daily Telegraph*, I provide you with a picture taken during one of the many weeks we have been snowed in over the winter.

I have yet to understand why or what he was doing photographing my furniture, but do understand the lengths to which he is prepared to stoop.

1 March 2010

31. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 3 March 2010

Thank you for your letter of 1 March responding to my letters to you of 9 February about the evidence of your overnight stays, and of 23 February with the evidence from witnesses.

[Material relating to other matters.]

I turn now to the summary of your overnight stays. I enclose a table which I believe sets out the best evidence that you can give me about your overnight stays. This gives preference, as you have suggested, to the information which you sent me on 25 January 2010, over the evidence you sent me in your e-mail of 8

October 2009. I have also given precedence to the information you sent me on 25 January over the highlights you put into your diary print out which you sent to me on the same date (where for 2008–09 your main home nights were 21 fewer than the estimates in your letter of the same date). I am assuming therefore that your diary highlights were mistaken in showing you spending every night in September in your main home when you say in your letter of 1 March that you took your daughter to school from your constituency home on two days a week. If I am wrong in this, please let me know.

Finally, I note that you have not answered my question about whether all of your children and your pets travelled with you between your two homes. I note that in your letter of 1 March you identify who looks after the dogs but in view of the allegation made against you, I would be grateful if you could tell me whether your children and the dogs normally stay at one or other home or normally travel with you between the two.

It would be very helpful if you could confirm that you are content with the attached statement of your evidence in respect of your overnight stays and if you could help me on the last point about the arrangements for your children and dogs. In the meantime, to avoid delay, I am consulting the Department of Resources and seeking their help and advice on this matter.

If you could let me have a response within the next week, that would be most helpful. I will anyway come back to you when I have the Department of Resources' response.

Nadine Dorries MP: Analysis of overnight stays

Year	A. Nights at main home	B. Nights in constituency	C. Nights in London	C. Nights elsewhere	Totals
2005–06 (from 10 May)	279	0	31	16	326
2006–07	208	0	112	45	365
2007–08	223	89	10	44	366
2008–09	235	97	9	24	365
2009–10 (to 25 January)	218	37	3	42	300

Note: 2005–06 figures are taken from Ms Dorries' e-mail of 8 October, modified by her letter of 25 January 2010. All other information is taken from her letter of 25 January 2010.

3 March 2010

32. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 15 March 2010

Thank you for your letter of March 3rd.

[Material relating to other matters]

You stated in your response to me that you would consider the evidence from [neighbour 1] as it had already been published. It has been published by the *Daily Telegraph* following the soliciting—by their own admission in their letter to you—of my non-Conservative neighbours, who confirmed that they had been approached, interviewed and told to write to you by [name of reporter].

[Material relating to other matters]

I also again, note the comments from [neighbour 1] regarding their French home. I am afraid that this is very untrue and I have learnt since I wrote my last letter that there has been a period of time when they have sold and re bought in France and that they may be stretching the facts, possibly with encouragement from [name of reporter]. They also, apparently, spent a long period of time in Portugal between October and December last year when I had assumed they must be at the house in France. I suspect the reason they may not want to be considered as a witness or have their own evidence published may be due to the fact that other neighbours may be aware of what they have said. The alarmed tone in their letter may lend some substance to this.

I was not mistaken in showing that I spent every night in my main home in September.

If I am not in Parliament, I drop my daughter at school, work in the constituency house/office or the Shefford office and then collect her and go home. On the odd occasion we sleep at the constituency house in September, if I have a dinner or evening function to attend.

My daughter does not have many of her clothes, shoes, belongings, computer, friends, books, TV or life in general at the constituency house and so staying for her is not a comfortable experience. She would much rather we spent the hour+ driving home School finishes at 3.20 we are usually well home for 5.

I am not sure what you mean by “*all of my children*” and travel arrangements.

My eldest daughter, who is almost twenty five lives in a flat in [London]. Since ... 2007 she often travels home to help but does so via train from Paddington station to [name of station] . When the flat in [London address] was originally obtained the area was chosen for its proximity to Paddington. Even for the period we were renting in Stratford she did the same journey as it was easier for her and a short car journey for me. She also has her life-long friends and personal commitments in the Cotswolds and therefore comes home often.

[Ms Dorries’ second daughter] has lived between home and [name of town] where she attended university since 2006. During most university holidays she has spent travelling. She is now also living in the flat at [in London] and is about to travel again for another twelve months.

Neither of the older girls has a single friend in Bedfordshire and had never set foot in the county until I became the MP in 2005, or have ever “*lived*” in my constituency house.

[Ms Dorries’ youngest daughter], who is my sole responsibility ... and the dogs are usually, but not always, wherever [name of Ms Dorries’ youngest daughter], I, or both of us are.

[Material relating to other matters]

15 March 2010

33. Letter to the Commissioner from Neighbour 4 (constituency), 15 March 2010

I have been made aware of the article in the *Daily Telegraph* regarding Nadine Dorries MP and [constituency address 1], and felt that I should write to you with some facts.

I live at [address], next door but one to Ms Dorries. My house is extended at the rear and I have a direct and clear view from my kitchen window into the kitchen window and rear access of the Member’s house.

{Neighbour 1’s address,} which is in between my house and [Ms Dorries’ house,] has no clear view of the Member’s house, either from the house or the studio, [address], which is on the other side of [the Member’s house].

I have personally seen Nadine Dorries on a maximum of 20 occasions over the last two years. I am aware that she spends the weekends and holidays elsewhere.

I am sorry that others seem for whatever their reasons to be muddying some very clear waters and I felt it necessary to write this given the unfair and what must be inaccurate reporting in the newspaper.

15 March 2010

34. Letter to Neighbour 4 (constituency) from the Commissioner, 16 March 2010

Thank you for your letter of 15 March 2010 about the use of Ms Dorries’s property in [town in the constituency].

You will see that this letter to you is marked personal and confidential. All correspondence on this matter is subject to parliamentary privilege while I am conducting the inquiry, and I would be grateful, therefore, if you would not disclose more widely this letter or your response.

My inquiry is into the identification by Ms Dorries of her main home for the purpose of her claims against parliamentary allowances. I attach a note which sets out the procedure I follow in taking evidence from witnesses. I would expect to show your letter in due course to Ms Dorries and to the House authorities, and you can expect that it may be published, along with the other evidence I have received, once my inquiry is concluded.

I would be grateful if you could confirm that you are content to have given me your evidence on that basis. It would also be helpful if you could give me an indication of: how reliable you consider to be your estimate of having seen Ms Dorries at her [constituency] property on a maximum of 20 occasions over the last two years; whether you consider that all or some of those occasions involved overnight stays by Ms Dorries, and if so the basis of that conclusion; and whether you consider it possible that Ms Dorries would have been able to use the property, and stay overnight in it, without you having observed her presence there.

It would be very helpful if you could let me have a response to this letter within the next two weeks. Thank you for your help.

16 March 2010

35. E-mail to the Commissioner from Neighbour 4 (constituency), 19 March 2010

Thank you for your letter received on the 16th.

I provide this information in good faith.

I am happy to confirm that my estimate of 20 days is reliable, but I am unable to specify in any great detail the length of time spent by Ms Dorries on each occasion.

It could have been possible for Ms Dorries to stay at the property and for me to have not been aware, but unlikely.

I hope that this will satisfy your inquiry.

19 March 2010

36. Letter to the Commissioner from Neighbour 5 (constituency), 18 March 2010

Thank you for your letter of the 11th March¹⁷⁸ concerning Mrs Dorries' property in [town in the constituency]. I believe that Mrs Dorries did stay in the house on some weekday nights.

There was a change in the pattern of her being in [the town], as she was not around for long periods of time including weekends, which I think may be as a result of what I understand to be "*parliamentary recess*".

I am confident of the accuracy of my statement.

18 March 2010

¹⁷⁸ Not included in the written evidence

37. E-mail to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 22 March 2010

I have been advised by my lawyers that I should write to you regarding the pictures in the *Daily Telegraph* on Friday.

The aerial view picture of my rented constituency home included the farm offices on either side plus a number of buildings belonging to the farm. The actual house is the middle section of the picture only.

I rented this house from 31st December because it is £2,000 pa less expensive than the mid terraced house I was renting [at constituency address 1] and because it belongs to Bedford Estate, with all decoration, fixtures and fitting etc included; has space for a good sized office and is available on a long term let. Given the attention to expenses I thought that would be a wise move. The house is also in the middle of a woodcutting yard. I have spent between 15–20 nights at the property since December.

The lease is held with the Fees Office.

I sent you a picture of my Cotswold home taken when we were snowed in during the winter. It is situated in one of the most beautiful, sought after villages in England in one of the most stunning and peaceful locations. The house sleeps six comfortably.

Why anyone would think I would want to spend the majority of my nights in a house located in a woodcutters' yard and not in the Cotswolds defeats me.

I wonder if I could have any indication as to when the enquiry will be completed given that the election may be only two weeks away from being announced?

22 March 2010

38. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 25 March 2010

Thank you for your letter of 15 March responding to mine of 3 March about this complaint, and for your further e-mail of 22 March.

Let me deal first with the evidence I have received from your neighbours. I wrote to you on 23 February to let you have the witness evidence I had received so far, including the letter from [neighbour 1]...

I have received letters from three further potential witnesses. I wrote to them to let them know the process which I follow so that they could decide if they wished to submit formal evidence to me. I attach copies of the evidence I have received from the two witnesses who have responded, and I will let you have copies of the evidence from any further witnesses if I receive it.

[Material not relevant to this inquiry.]

Turning to your letter of 15 March, you comment on [neighbour 1's] evidence including the possibility that his evidence is "*stretching the facts*" with the encouragement from a *Daily Telegraph* journalist. I will, therefore, shortly be writing to him to put this allegation to him and to give him an opportunity to respond.

[Material relating to other matters.] Turning to the pattern of your overnight stays, I will, of course, need to come to a view on the weight I can attach to the estimates you have given me. I need, therefore, to ask you about an apparent conflict in the evidence you have given me your letter of 1 March and in your letter of 15 March. In your letter of 1 March, you said that when your daughter attended school (which she did rarely), "*she would travel from the constituency house.*" In your letter of 15 March, however, you say: "*I was not mistaken in saying that I spent every night in my main home in September. If I am not in Parliament, I drop my daughter at school... On the odd occasion we sleep at the constituency house in September...*"

Your letter of 1 March, therefore, implies that you do stay overnight in your constituency home when your daughter is attending school. Your letter of 15 March says both that you spent every night in your main home

in September (2008) and that on some nights in September you sleep at the constituency house. I cannot reconcile these three statements. Could you please explain how you have made apparently three conflicting statements in your two recent letters, and what the actual position is in respect of the location of your overnight stays in September 2008?

You respond in your e-mail to me of 22 March to the *Daily Telegraph* article of 19 March. That article alleges that your “main home” is a “one-bedroomed lodge-keeper’s cottage in a small Cotswold village”. You say in your e-mail that it “sleeps six comfortably”.

Could you first confirm that the photograph in the *Daily Telegraph* article is of your Cotswold home? I ask because the picture you enclosed with your letter of 1 March appears to show the same cottage, and in the penultimate paragraph of that letter, you describe this as a picture of “the constituency home”. I assume that this was a typographical error and that you meant to refer to your home in the Cotswolds. Perhaps you can just confirm this.

Secondly, in view of the allegations in the *Daily Telegraph* to which you have referred, it would be helpful if you could let me know what accommodation is provided by the Cotswold property in the photograph used by the *Daily Telegraph* (and attached to your letter of 1 March), and which I take to be your home there. It would be helpful to know the number of bedrooms, reception rooms and other facilities it provides.

Thirdly, it would be helpful if you could let me have the names and addresses of neighbours to your Cotswold home whom I could invite to give me evidence about your pattern of use of your Cotswold property.

I am copying an extract from your letter of 15 March and e-mail of 22 March, with this response, to the Department of Resources so that they can take them into account in the advice I have asked of them. I cannot, of course, complete my work on this inquiry until I have resolved discrepancies in the evidence I have been given. If you could let me have a response before Dissolution, that would be most helpful. I will need to resume this inquiry once Parliament has resumed.

25 March 2010

39. Letter to the Director of Operations, Department of Resources from the Commissioner, 3 March 2010

I would welcome your help on a complaint I have received against Ms Nadine Dorries MP in respect of the identification of her main home for the purposes of her claims against the Additional Costs Allowance.

In essence, the complaint is that Ms Dorries wrongly identified her main home as her designated second home for the purposes of her claims against the Additional Costs Allowance. The period in question was from 2005–06 to date.

I attach a copy of the complainant’s letters of 26 June and 2 July, with a copy of the newspaper article of 26 June which he enclosed. I attach also the *Daily Telegraph* articles of 16 and 18 May on which the article of 26 June appears to draw. I enclose also: a copy of my letter of 7 July to Ms Dorries; her response of 27 July; my letter to her of 30 July; her e-mail response of 4 August; my letter to her of the same date; her response by e-mail of 8 October; my letter to her of the same date; her letter to me of 11 November; my response of 25 November; her e-mail to me of 4 December; my letter to her of 7 December; my letter to her of 15 December; her response to me of 25 January; my letter to her of 2 February; my further letter to her of 9 February; and extracts from her response of 1 March. In addition, I enclose evidence from witnesses: namely, letters from [neighbour 1] dated 22 January; [neighbour 2] dated 23 January; [neighbour 3], which I received on 25 January; and [name of Ms Dorries’s GP] dated 26 January. I also enclose: letters of 2 February which I sent to [neighbour 1], [neighbour 2] and [neighbour 3]; the response from [neighbour 2] of 9 February and that from [neighbour 3], which I received on 17 February. I enclose also a copy of the letter of 18 February which I received from [neighbour 1] and my response of 22 February to the witness. I enclose a copy of my letter of 23 February to Ms Dorries, with which I enclosed the witness evidence. Finally, I enclose a copy of a letter of 2 March which includes a schedule showing Ms Dorries’s best evidence of the location of her overnight stays.

I would be grateful for your comments and advice on this matter. In particular, it would be helpful to know whether the Department holds any correspondence or other contacts with Ms Dorries which may be relevant

to identifying the pattern of Ms Dorries's overnight stays in her main home and elsewhere; and the decisions she made about the designation of her main and second homes. It would also be helpful if you could confirm the dates of the various designations she has made over this period, and any supporting documentation. Finally, it would be most helpful to have your view, on the basis of the evidence collected, on the propriety of Ms Dorries's decision to designate her constituency properties as her second home.

Any other points you may wish to make to help me with this inquiry would, of course, be most welcome.

I know that Ms Dorries would like this matter resolved, if at all possible during the current Parliament, so it would be very helpful if you could let me have a response within the next two weeks, or three if that cannot be done.

Thank you for your help.

3 March 2010

40. Letter to the Commissioner from the Director of Strategic Projects, Department of Resources, 11 May 2010

Thank you for your letters of 3rd March¹⁷⁹ to the former Director of Operations, and of 25th March to me.¹⁸⁰

I outline first of all in chronological order the designations of main and additional homes which Ms Dorries made, and the relevant correspondence which we have on file.

We have on file two nomination forms (ACA1) both signed on 30th June 2005. Both nominated [the first address in Gloucestershire] as Ms Dorries' main home and a Westminster flat [address in London] as her second home. On one form, an official has marked "8 May to 8 June" and on the other "June until further notice". In fact, Ms Dorries claimed for overnight stays in hotels in London from her election until 8th June. (There were also two claims thereafter for cancelled hotel charges.) Rent and related costs on the [Westminster] property were then incurred, and were the subject of claims, from June 2005 until December 2006.

It is not entirely clear when Ms Dorries moved out of her Westminster property. The Department paid £9774.66 rent in respect of rental for the flat from 20th June 2006 until 19th December 2006. However, we received a final electricity bill for £326, dated 22nd August 2006, which suggests that Ms Dorries moved out of the property around this time. The Department sought recovery of the cost of rental in letters to Ms Dorries of 30th January and 1st February 2007. The amount sought (£4877.33) was in respect of the last three months of 2006. This amount was subsequently recalculated as £3731.19 to represent the cost of rental up until the day before the first day on which she occupied hotel accommodation (see below). An ACA payment to her in March 2007 was reduced to take account of this recalculated amount.

Ms Dorries referred to security issues in relation to the Westminster flat in a letter to you of 11th November 2009. We have no record of this being raised with the Department at the time, but there was no reason why a Member needed to inform the Department of the reasons for a change of address.

Ms Dorries started claiming for temporary accommodation (in the Carlton Club and, initially, at [a hotel in central London]) on 11th October 2006. (The House returned after the summer adjournment on 9th October). On her claim form of 19th October 2006, Ms Dorries stated that her second home was now "hotels" and the Department acknowledged this arrangement in a letter dated 26th October. A nomination form signed on 7th November 2006 identified as her second home "? hotel until new flat". Her main home remained in [the first Gloucestershire address].

A new nomination form was submitted on 25th January 2007, changing the location of her second home to [constituency address 1]. Her main home again remained [first Gloucestershire address]. Ms Dorries

¹⁷⁹ WE 39

¹⁸⁰ On 25 March I sent the Director a copy of my letter of the same date to Ms Dorries (WE 38) together with extracts from Ms Dorries' letter of 15 March (WE 32) and the evidence of neighbours 4 and 5 (WE 33 to 36).

submitted a claim on 25th January 2007 for the first set of costs in respect of the [constituency address 1]. This claim (as well as the lease) shows that she occupied the property from 1st February 2007.

In her letter to you of 14th November 2009, Ms Dorries records that she occupied three different main homes in Stratford-upon-Avon (from January 2007 until January 2008; from January 2008 to January 2009; and from January 2009 to December 2009 respectively). She also tells you in her letter of 25th January 2007 that the Department was fully aware of these rental properties; that she was advised that [her first address in Gloucestershire] should remain her main home until the legal situation in respect of her separation from her husband had sorted itself out; and that she informed the Department of changes of main home address in 2007 and 2008.

The Department did receive formal notification by a form signed on 22nd October 2007 when Ms Dorries nominated her main home as [Stratford-upon-Avon address 2]. A handwritten note on the form stated that this was a temporary arrangement and in an e-mail to the Department of the same day she said that she was in the process of purchasing a property in [name of second village in Gloucestershire]. In the e-mail she also asked for correspondence to be sent to her constituency (ie second) home: the form again identified [first constituency address] as the second home.

We have no record of having received any formal notification in respect either of [Stratford-upon-Avon address 1] or [Stratford-upon-Avon address 3].

It is entirely possible that Ms Dorries was advised soon after her separation from her husband that she did not need to change the designation of her main home until the situation had sorted itself out. This does mean that there may have been a period up when [her first address in Gloucestershire] was her formally designated main home but she was not, as a matter of fact, living there. The Department always tried to show some flexibility when Members encountered personal difficulties, especially when (as in this case) the issue in question was the designation of a main home, in respect of which no claim could be made under ACA. However, this would have only been regarded as a strictly temporary measure, and, as I explain later, the Department was concerned to regularise matters by October 2007 at the latest.

I should add that it was entirely acceptable for a main home to be rented, as I understand from Ms Dorries's letter to you of January 25th that the Stratford-upon-Avon homes were.

On 29th December 2009, a further nomination form was submitted, confirming that [second Gloucestershire address] had become the main home. This same form also identified a new additional home—[second constituency address]. Ms Dorries asked that all written correspondence should be addressed to her constituency home as her personal office was situated there.

One PAAE claim was submitted in respect of [second constituency address] on 6th April 2010. This was in respect of six months rental from 1st April to 30th September 2010. Rental on the previous additional home [address] had been paid up until 31st March 2010.

The Department also has information about Ms Dorries's travel claims. The information in respect of rail journeys should be treated as less certain than that in respect of motor mileage: we cannot say with absolute certainty what each journey was, but we can deduce this information from the price of the journey, the location of purchase and the rail company used.

Ms Dorries was entitled to claim for journeys between Westminster and her constituency, between Westminster and her main home, and between her main home and her constituency. Between May 2005 and January 2007, Ms Dorries appears frequently to have used her travel allowances for journeys between Westminster and her main home, and between her main home and her constituency. From April 2006 to February 2007, she made no claims for journeys between Westminster and her constituency. No claim in respect of a journey to her main home [either in the first village in Gloucestershire or in Stratford-upon-Avon, or in the second village in Gloucestershire] has been made since 7th February 2007. After this date, all journeys claimed by Ms Dorries (by both rail and car) appear to have been from Westminster to her constituency. Ms Dorries indicated to the Department that she would drive to Parliament and return to [her constituency address] during parliamentary sittings.

I turn now to your specific questions. We have some evidence in respect of Ms Dorries's communication with the Department. We have on file a letter from her, dated 28th February 2007, in which she stated that [her first address in Gloucestershire] would continue to be her main residence and that she would "*continue to commute by train from [name of station] to London, should I return to my main home during mid week*". In addition to this letter, the Department has copies of e-mails and other notes from October 2007. From these it appears that the Department pressed Ms Dorries to submit ACA1 forms on 16th, 22nd and 24th October 2007. Ms Dorries was also told on 22nd October of the Department's concern that mail sent to her main home was being returned marked "*addressee unknown*". This resulted in the submission of a new designation form that day. The file note records surprise that the main home designation on the form was marked as "*temporary*". A conversation from 25th October is recorded in which Ms Dorries confirmed that the temporary main home was her former husband and daughters' family home until a new property was finalised. The activity in October 2007 seems to have been caused by a dispute between Ms Dorries and the Department about the refund of a deposit Ms Dorries had paid in respect of the [first constituency address], as well as the return of a deposit in respect of the [Westminster] property.

I have no reason to doubt that Ms Dorries had a number of other conversations with departmental staff which have not been recorded. There is, however, nothing on file to suggest that any specific correspondence or discussion was entered into regarding Ms Dorries's various designations, or that there was any doubt about where the main and additional homes were located.

I should also record that Ms Dorries e-mailed the Department on 18th October 2007 to express her concern that the Department "*appears continually to misplace my forms*".

As you know, the Department holds no records on, and sought no information about, where Members spent their time. Up until January 2007, Ms Dorries was claiming regularly for travel to [her first Gloucestershire address], and we can therefore say from the evidence which we have that there is corroboration that this was her main home. From February 2007, we do not have travel claims which would provide this corroboration. However she may well have chosen not to claim for travel to her main home after this date. The Department would not therefore have questioned the main home designation because travel claims to it had ceased.

The information which Ms Dorries has given you about her pattern of overnight stays (as set out in the table which your office produced) gives me no reason to query her designations of main and additional homes, except so far as the points made in the next two paragraphs are concerned.

Ms Dorries's estimate that she spent only 31 nights in London during 2005–06—a period when the House sat on 133 days—may seem surprising. Since 11 of these nights were spent in hotels, then, if Ms Dorries' estimate is correct, there could be a question about the value for money of the rental of a flat for around £12,000 for 20 nights' usage. However, Ms Dorries has pointed out in her letter to you of 25th January that she had caring responsibilities which often led to her making late journeys from Westminster to her main home. There are sometimes extenuating circumstances which mean that second home accommodation cannot be occupied for periods when the Member remains obliged to continue rental or mortgage payments. This would apply to circumstances in the Member's personal life (such as the chronic illness of a close relative) which mean that it is not practical or opportune to occupy the accommodation for a period.

I am also not entirely clear about the 112 nights in London in 2006–07 identified in the table which you sent to Ms Dorries and referred to your letter to her of 9th February and her reply of 1st March (in these, referred to as 111 nights). I assume from her letter that these are the nights in respect of which claims were made (ie those spent either at the [Westminster] flat, or at hotels or the Carlton Club, or in the constituency property after it had been acquired). If this is not the case, then Ms Dorries would have been claiming for a constituency property for two months (February and March 2007) without occupying it.

I offer no comment on the evidence which you have received from third parties about Ms Dorries's patterns of residence.

I attach a spreadsheet which gives a summary of designations of main and additional homes as well as a full breakdown of ACA/PAAE costs; and a monthly summary of travel claims. We are not able to break down the figures before March 2006 by month. Please note my caveat about rail journeys above. Copies of the signed ACA1 nomination forms are available if you wish to see them.

Please let me know if I can help further.

11 May 2010

41. Letter to the Director of Strategic Projects, Department of Resources, from the Commissioner, 13 May 2010

Thank you for your letter of 10 May in response to my letter of 3 March to the Director of Operations. I am most grateful for this. I attach a schedule¹⁸¹ showing Ms Dorries' formal designation of her homes from January 2007 onwards. I should be grateful for your confirmation that the summary of the evidence from the ACA1 nomination forms is accurate.

In your letter you mention that the Department holds records of a number of communications with Ms Dorries in 2007, including e-mails, letters, a file note and a note of a telephone conversation. I would be most grateful if you could let me have copies of these records, and of Ms Dorries' ACA1 nomination forms from January 2007 onwards.

Thank you again for your help.

13 May 2010

42. Letter to the Commissioner from the Director of Strategic Projects, Department of Resources, 17 May 2010

I can confirm the accuracy of the table you sent, except that we cannot say whether or not Ms Dorries's use of her flat in 2006 overlapped with her hotel use.¹⁸² What we know is that rental for the flat was claimed for the second six months of 2006; that she used hotels from 11th October that year; and that she repaid the rental from the time she occupied hotels. We do not know whether she still used the flat after she began to stay in hotels.

I am enclosing the documents for which you ask.¹⁸³ Please let me know if I can help further.

17 May 2010

43. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 16 May 2010

In 2008 my daughter returned to school on September and then left for a school politics trip away.

In September, Parliament is in recess, I do not work any late nights and so I travel from home to school and back again.

I can assure you that if there were anything Machiavellian regarding my statements, I would be reading each letter to you very carefully before I write another. The fact is that I cannot be absolutely 100% accurate about any night, only my pattern of nights.

We may have spent the odd night in September [in the constituency] over the last few years, however, I raise that as a possibility because I cannot be specific.

We spend weekends, usually from Thursday night and Parliamentary recess at home and sleep in the constituency house when Parliament sits. Sometimes, [my youngest daughter] isn't with me at all when I am working and staying in the constituency.

¹⁸¹ See WE 46 for the final version of this document.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Not included in the written evidence

I usually arrive back on a Monday and Tuesday after midnight and leave very early the following morning.

You have asked me for the addresses of neighbours in [the second Gloucestershire address] to write to. As you are aware, I moved into [that address] well after the submission of this complaint. However, my main neighbour is a 15th century churchyard. [Reference to the extent of her neighbours' use of their properties.]

...

Whereas I am aware my neighbours in the constituency have written to you, I keep my work very separate from my home life and would not be comfortable with asking neighbours from the Cotswolds to write, even if there were any. The neighbour who moved out of [an empty property] would be happy to write, she is also an employee and is aware of what has been happening and so I can leave that with you.

The accommodation in the constituency is temporary until I take possession of a flat in order to comply with the new IPSA guidelines. When the appointment of IPSA was announced, I asked the landlord for a less expensive property than the mid terrace I rented [at the first constituency address]. The farmhouse is £2,000 less pa than [the first constituency address] for a number of reasons, not least because it is in the middle of a working woodcutting yard. A fire door has been fitted to block of part of the internal accommodation to cut down on the heating cost. My youngest daughter and I use two bedrooms. A flat is available in November and I am discussing the transitional arrangement with IPSA. My home in [Gloucestershire] is built on a hill and is on three levels. The lower ground floor room I use as a sewing room but could be a bedroom. A sitting room, butler's pantry, dining kitchen, utility area, a room which is converted into a dressing room, a large bedroom, main bathroom and a mezzanine floor which is [my youngest daughter's] room/area. We have terraced garden with stunning views over the Cotswold hills ...

[Material redacted to protect the privacy of third parties.]

I have emphasised a number of times the pattern of how I divide my time between home and the constituency. I have tried to be as honest as possible which has sometimes tied me in knots as I have also attempted to answer specific questions, which is almost impossible.

16 May 2010

44. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 18 May 2010

Now that the new Parliament has assembled, I am writing to confirm that I am resuming my inquiries into this complaint.

I am grateful for your e-mail reply of 16 May to my letter of 25 March. I should be grateful if you would confirm two matters for me. First, I shall assume from what you have told me that you spent almost all your nights in September 2008 in your main home (Stratford-upon-Avon address 2), although you may have spent the "odd night" in your constituency home [first constituency address]. It would be helpful if you would confirm that my understanding is correct.

Secondly, I am grateful for your description of your current main home in [second village in Gloucestershire]. I asked if you could let me know whether the property shown in the *Daily Telegraph* photograph of 19 March was of your main home, or of your constituency property (as you suggested in your letter to me of 1 March). I take it that it was of your current main home in [Gloucestershire]. I assume that your estimate that it "sleeps six comfortably" is achieved by using various rooms currently used for other purposes. But, as you say, I understand that you moved into this property in September 2009, after the period covered by this inquiry. I shall not, therefore, be pursuing further your use of this property.

Thirdly I asked if you could let me have the names and addresses of your neighbours in the Cotswolds. While I am grateful for the offer of contact details for the neighbour in [second village in Gloucestershire] who is also an employee, I do not think I need to trouble you for her details. As you surmised, I am looking for neighbours who could provide me with witness evidence of your pattern of overnight stays in your main homes before you moved to [second Gloucestershire address]. Drawing on your letter to me of 11 November 2009, these homes were your homes in Stratford-upon-Avon: [address 1], from January 2007 to January 2008;

[address 2], from January 2008 to January 2009; and [address 3] from January 2009 until you moved to [your second Gloucestershire address]. It would be most helpful if you could provide me with the details of any neighbours or other witnesses who might be in a position to provide me with this evidence.

I should be most grateful for your responses on the points raised in this letter by the end of this month. As you know, I wrote in March to the Department of Resources for their advice and expect to have received their final response before too long. I will write to you again when I receive this letter.¹⁸⁴

Thank you for your help.

18 May 2010

45. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 19 May 2010

When I wrote to you on 18 May I said that I had asked the Department of Resources for their advice on this complaint. I have now received their responses. I enclose copies of my letters of 3 March and 13 May to the Department of Resources and their responses of 10 and 17 May.

The Director of Strategic Projects provides a detailed account of the Department's communications with you about your main and second homes. I have summarised in the attached schedule the information which he has given me about your nominations of your main and second homes, and the earlier information about those nominations provided in your letter of 11 November. It would appear from this information that:

1. In your letter to the Department of 28 February 2007, you designated as your main home [first Gloucestershire address]. In fact your main home from January 2007 was [Stratford-upon-Avon address 1] and was to remain so until January 2008. Your evidence is that the Department advised that you did not need to change your designation from [first Gloucestershire address] until your domestic situation had sorted itself out. The Department's evidence is that they were concerned to regularise the position by October 2007 at the latest. I will need to come to a view on whether you should have re-designated your main home to [Stratford-upon-Avon address 1] from January 2007.
2. You designated as your main home [Stratford-upon-Avon address 2] on the ACA1 form you completed on 22 October 2007 following a series of requests from the Department who had had mail addressed to you returned from [first Gloucestershire address], and a suggestion by you on 18 October 2007 that the Department had mislaid your forms. In fact, [Stratford-upon-Avon address 2] was not to become your main home until January 2008—two months later. On the form, you identified this main home as “*temporary*”, although you were to live there for a year and were not to move into the [second Gloucestershire address], which you identified to the Department on 22 October 2007 as your planned main home, until two years later.
3. You changed your main home to [Stratford-upon-Avon address 3] in January 2009, but did not notify the Department of Resources of this fact. Your main home designation remained [Stratford-upon-Avon address 2]. I will need to come to a view on whether you should have changed your main home designation to [Stratford-upon-Avon address 3] during this period.
4. You changed your main home from [Stratford-upon-Avon address 3] to [second Gloucestershire address] in September 2009, but did not notify the Department of Resources of this until 29 December 2009—three months later.

Could you let me know whether you accept this summary of the evidence and let me know why (despite receiving reminders in October 2007 that you had to lodge forms with the Department) you did not ensure that the Department had fresh and up-to-date ACA1 designation forms each time you moved your main home between January 2007 and December 2009?

The Director also makes the following observations, on which I would welcome your comments:

¹⁸⁴ WE 42, received after this letter was sent.

Use of your constituency property in 2006–07

The Director points out that according to your letter to me of 25 January, you spent 112 nights in London in 2006–07. You also said in that letter that you spent no nights in your constituency during that financial year. The Director suggests that this would mean that during February and March 2007 you did not spend any nights in the constituency property on which you had claimed rent from 1 February 2007. Could you let me know if that was so and, if it was, whether, and if so why, you considered that it was acceptable to claim from February 2007 for a property which you were not to use overnight until two months later?

Travel since 2007

The Director points out that it would appear that you have made no claim for travel to and from your main home since February 2007. After this date you have claimed only for journeys between Westminster and your constituency. It would be helpful if you could explain why you apparently claimed for journeys to your constituency but not to and from your successive main homes, given your evidence that you have spent over 200 nights in your successive main homes in each financial year since April 2007.

I do not propose to ask you specifically about the rental of your Westminster flat in 2005–06, to which the Department refers towards the end of its letter, or about your travel claims between April 2006 and January 2007, since these do not relate to the period covered by the complaint I am inquiring into. But if you wished to comment on these or any other matters in the Department's letter, you would be welcome to do so.

I would be most grateful for a response to this letter by the end of this month. Thank you for your help.

19 May 2010

46. Revised schedule: Summary of evidence about Ms Dorries' main and additional homes, 19 May 2010

Year	Evidence from Mrs Dorries' letter of 11 November 2009	Date of ACA1 nomination form	Evidence from ACA1 nomination forms: main home	Evidence from ACA1 nomination forms: second home	Comments
2005	From May 2005 to January 2007 main home was [first address in Gloucestershire] From May to June, second home was Carlton Club. From June 2005 to December 2006 it was flat in [Westminster]	30.6.05	[first address in Gloucestershire]	Westminster flat	Two ACA 1 forms were signed on the same date, one from 8 May to 8 June, and one for 8 June onwards. In fact for the period from 8 May to 8 June, Member claimed for hotel bills.
2006	Second home in [Westminster] continued to December 2006. As a result of security issue with the flat, Member transferred to staying at the Carlton Club from October 2006	7.11.06	[first address in Gloucestershire]	"?Hotel until new flat"	Rental of flat overlapped with hotel use. Department reimbursed rental for flat only until 10.10.06.
2007	From January 2007 to January 2008, main home was [Stratford-upon-Avon address 1]; from January 2007 second home was [first constituency address]	25.1.07	[first address in Gloucestershire]	[first constituency address]	Member started claiming for hotels from 11.10.06 Letter of 28.2.07 to Department states that [first address in Gloucestershire] will continue to be main residence.
		22.10.07	Temporary: [Stratford-upon-Avon address 2]	[first constituency address]	Rental of [first constituency address] began 1.2.07 Note on ACA1 form identified main home as temporary arrangement. In conversation of 25.2.10, Member says her main home was temporary, until now property finalised.
2008	From January 2008 to January 2009, main home was [Stratford-upon-Avon address 2]				
2009	From January to December 2009, main home was [Stratford-upon-Avon address 3] and from September 2009, [second address in Gloucestershire]				Rent on [first constituency address] claimed until 30.3.10
		29.12.09	[second address in Gloucestershire]	[second constituency address]	Rent claimed for [second constituency address] from 1.4.10 to 30.9.10

Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

19 May 2010

47. E-mail to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 25 May 2010

Thank you for your last two letters.

In response to your question regarding neighbours in proximity to the Stratford-upon-Avon properties; because I only expected to be in each property for a short period of time, I didn't particularly get to know the neighbours and besides, most of our family infrastructure remained in [first Gloucestershire village]. However, when in Westminster, I did use the services of a neighbour who I got to know through church to help transport the girls backwards and forwards to [first Gloucestershire village] if they were stuck when I was away.

His name was [...].

I haven't seen him for some time; however, as a matter of courtesy I will drop him a line today and let him know I have passed on his details...

With regard to the other points raised in your letter of 19th May, the same answer applies to 1,2,3 and 4.

When I left my marital home I did believe it would be a very temporary arrangement. It was understood that my ex-husband would leave the home and that the girls and I would move back in. This did not happen. I had a conversation with [name of official] in the Fees Office who I explained this too. Each week we thought we would be moving back to our own home. When it became apparent that this was not going to happen, we planned to move into [second Gloucestershire address]. Unfortunately, the legal and financial settlement was ... stalled and our situation in rented homes lasted much, much, longer than we had anticipated.

At the time I was dealing with the effect of stress upon us all ... brought about by the ... massive upheaval to our lives.

This included organising the girls, their transport and trying in extremely difficult circumstances to keep everything as steady as possible. I was also having to cope with the demands of becoming a new MP and working 90 hrs per week in Westminster and Bedfordshire whilst my children had been up-rooted from their home in [first village in Gloucestershire] and were in temporary accommodation in Stratford. In addition to this I had to cope with the demands and needs of 80,000 constituents—700 local party members—54 local councillors and local party executive and officers who all wanted time with their new MP.

I launched a two and a half year campaign to lower the upper limit at which abortion takes place which took over almost every single day of my life. I was one of the four MPs mentioned in the No 10 Smeargate e-mails. As the most junior, I was the only one who could defend the other three (David Cameron, George Osborne and an un-named) which resulted in an extraordinary amount of invasive media attention, adding more stress to what was already a very tense and difficult situation. [Material redacted to protect the privacy of third parties.]

I am afraid that the administrative requirement of providing the right details on the right day pre expenses fiasco may have become a bit lost in all of this and in terms of priorities, was very definitely not on the top of the list. This is hardly surprising and I am afraid that the only thing which is surprising is that I remained sane and managed to hold onto my job at all.

The fact remains however, that although I may have provided anticipatory answers given with the knowledge of what I thought/hoped was about to happen at the time, I did maintain a main home for my daughters at the addresses given until the point whereby my marital financial situation and settlement allowed us to move to a permanent address in [second Gloucestershire village].

4a) I did not think it was "acceptable" to rent a constituency house for two months and not use it. I also did not think it was acceptable to sleep on the floor.

The constituency house was completely unfurnished and without carpets or curtains. It had no cooker or fire.

I am afraid that with less than £300 disposable income per month, finding the money to provide a bed, curtains, bedding, kettle, cooker etc took some time. I arranged for some things to arrive from home, chest of drawers, desk, dishes etc but that took organising and time. I was working flat out. Unlike most MPs, I do not have a wife to organise things for me, I have to do it myself. I had also paid for the deposit on the house with my own money which had left my financial situation very strained.

I did not furnish the house from the “*John Lewis list*” for the same reason I did not buy a house using the ACA. The same principle applied. How could I give a bed back to the taxpayer?

Once I had a bed, desk, curtains etc I was able to sleep over. Given all that was happening at the time, I think I did amazingly well to have got it organised in the time I did. I think two months is a reasonable amount of time, given my workload and financial circumstances to have furnished a house to a standard comfortable enough to sleep in.

The travel arrangements from home to constituency and Westminster provided me with a problem. I was presented with a difficult tax bill which I could not pay as a result of having claimed travel from home to the constituency. However, I was advised that once I rented a house in the constituency, as opposed to Westminster, that I was no longer entitled to claim for travel from my main home.¹

This suited me at the time because I did not want political opponents to be able to use my travel pattern against me. Establishing a house in the constituency and regularising my travel from Mid Beds to London seemed an acceptable measure to put in place.

You informed me that you were going to write to [neighbour 1] to enquire as to the exact nature of their relationship with the *Daily Telegraph*. May I ask if this has happened?

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

25 May 2010

48. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 27 May 2010

Thank you for your letter of 25 May responding to my letters to you of 18 and 19 May. I am most grateful to you for responding so promptly.

I am now writing to [your Cotswold neighbour] seeking his help on your homes in Stratford-upon-Avon— [addresses 1, 2 and 3]. I will let you know when I receive his response.

I was grateful for the responses you gave me to the matters raised in my letter of 19 May. I hope I am right in taking from the fact that you have not commented on the two matters I raised in my letter of 18 May that the assumptions I made in paragraphs 2 and 3 of that letter, first in relation to where you spent overnight in September 2008 and second the accommodation in your current home in [Gloucestershire], is accurate. I hope I am right, too, in my assumption that you had annual rental agreements for each of the three properties you lived in Stratford-upon Avon. If not, please let me know.

You asked me about [neighbour 1]. I wrote to [neighbour 1] on 18 May and look forward to receiving his response. I will of course, show it to you when I have received it.

I will, therefore, be back in touch when I have received evidence from the two outstanding witnesses. At that stage, I hope that I will be able to conclude my inquiry and come to a view on how best it should be resolved, including whether I need to put a memorandum to the Committee on Standards and Privileges. If I were to do so, you should draw no inferences about my likely conclusion.

¹ In fact, as the Director of Strategic Projects said in his letter of 11 May, Ms Dorries was entitled to claim for journeys between Westminster and her constituency, between Westminster and her main home, and between her main home and her constituency.

Thank you again for your help.

27 May 2010

49. Letter to Cotswold neighbour from the Commissioner, 27 May 2010

I am writing to ask for your help on an inquiry I am making into the location of the main home of Ms Nadine Dorries MP between 2005 and 2009.

I asked Ms Dorries to identify anybody in Stratford-upon-Avon who might be able to help me in establishing the amount of time, including her overnight stays, which Ms Dorries spent in her main home over that period. She has kindly suggested that you may be able to help for the period she had homes in Stratford-upon-Avon in 2007, 2008 and 2009

I have marked this letter "*Private and Confidential*". I would very grateful if you did not disclose this letter, or your response, to anyone else, while my inquiry is continuing. In order to maintain the confidentiality of my inquiry, the evidence I receive is subject to parliamentary privilege and so must not be disclosed during the course of my inquiry.

I enclose a note which sets out more fully the process I follow in taking evidence from witnesses who may be able to help with my inquiry.

The matter I need to establish is whether the three properties where Ms Dorries lived in Stratford-upon-Avon were her main homes as defined by the House of Commons rules. Those rules require that a Member of Parliament's main home is normally the one where they spend more nights than anywhere else. The nature of the home, and other factors, including where other members of their immediate family live, can also be relevant.

Ms Dorries has told me that, from January 2007 to January 2008, she lived at [Stratford-upon-Avon address 1]. She lived at [Stratford-upon-Avon address 2] from January 2008 to January 2009, when she moved to [Stratford-upon-Avon address 3] until September 2009. Ms Dorries has told me that she spent around 230 nights a year in these homes, broadly four to five nights a week. Her normal pattern was to spend weekends there (Friday to Sunday), and usually Monday nights, and the parliamentary recess. Her younger daughter, [name], lived with her in Stratford-upon-Avon except when she was attending school in Bedfordshire. Her daughter's main possessions, as well as her friends, were in Stratford. Ms Dorries' eldest daughter often travelled home to Stratford-upon-Avon to help her mother and to see her friends there. The family's pet dogs travelled with Ms Dorries between her main home in Stratford and her constituency property.

Ms Dorries told me that she got to know you through church, and as a neighbour in Stratford. You helped transport her children backwards and forwards to [first village in Gloucestershire] (where she had had her marital home) if that was necessary while she was away.

I would be grateful if you could confirm as far as you are able the description Ms Dorries has given me of her homes in Stratford-upon-Avon. In particular, it would be helpful if you could confirm her general pattern of overnight stays there; the use of the property by her daughters and the help you were able to give her in terms of transport for her children where necessary. Any other points you may be able to give me about the use of the properties as Ms Dorries' main home would, also, be very welcome.

I should emphasise that I am asking only for your personal recollection. I do appreciate that you may not have had sufficient contact with Ms Dorries' arrangements to provide me with a complete response, but any help you can give me would be much appreciated.

I very much hope that you could let me have a response to this letter within the next two weeks. If there is any difficulty about that or you would like to ask anything about this, please contact me at the House of Commons. Thank you again for your help.

27 May 2010

50. Letter to the Commissioner from Cotswold neighbour, 11 June 2010

I apologise for the delay in replying as I have been away the Whit holiday.

I did used to help Mrs Dorries when she was away. I ran the girls about and if she left the dogs behind I would walk them during the day. I would put the bins back on Tuesday and I helped her move each time until she got into the house in [second village in Gloucestershire].

Mrs Dorries used to ring me when she was moving, usually on a Monday morning but sometimes on a Tuesday. She would ring me when she got back, usually on a Thursday night but sometimes on a Wednesday.

I never did anything over the weekend or during school holidays. In the summer she did not need me until October. Mrs Dorries went through a very difficult time and I was only too glad to help her and the girls. All the girls had things in the house but I know that the two older girls have lived in a flat in London for a few years now.

[The youngest daughter] never liked going to Bedfordshire and would stay behind as often as possible.

...

11 June 2010

51. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 14 June 2010

When I wrote to you on 27 May, I said that I was writing to the person you had identified in Stratford-upon-Avon who had helped you in transporting your children there.

I have now heard back from him. I enclose a copy of my letter to him of 27 May, and a typescript of his manuscript response of 11 June. I understand he may have himself sent you a copy of the manuscript letter.

As you will see, your friend broadly confirms that he used to help you when you were away from your various Stratford-upon-Avon homes between 2007 and 2009. You will see that his recollection is that you left your Stratford-upon-Avon home usually on a Monday, but sometimes on a Tuesday, and that you usually got back on a Thursday night, but sometimes on a Wednesday. You did not call on him during the weekends or in school holidays.

Your evidence was that you usually spent from Friday to the following Monday night in your Stratford-upon-Avon homes plus the recesses. It would be helpful if you could help me to reconcile these two recollections. In the light of your friend's evidence, I would be grateful if you could confirm the normal pattern of your overnight stays in your Stratford-upon-Avon homes during that period, in particular whether, as your friend's evidence suggests, you usually left earlier than you suggested after the weekend, but returned earlier in the week.

If you could let me have a response to this within the next two weeks, that would be most helpful. Meanwhile, I hope to receive a response from one of the witnesses in [the constituency] [neighbour 1] to whom I wrote, as you know, on 18 May.

14 June 2010

52. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 15 June 2010

Thank you for your letter and the copy of the letter you have received from [my Cotswold neighbour].

[My Cotswold neighbour] worked for me for three days per week. Sometimes Monday to Wednesday and at other times Tuesday to Thursday.

He charged me very little so I couldn't ask him to do more than that.

My work in Parliament is from Monday until the last vote on a Thursday night at 6.30pm.

If I do come home on a Thursday night, I am still back in the constituency on a Friday morning for my surgeries etc. I also use the constituency house as an office.

My pattern has been and still is the same. I spend my weekends and recess at home and I spend the nights Parliament sits in my constituency, although not every night Parliament sits, as I have previously explained.

There has been the odd occasion on a one line whip Monday when I have worked from home and travelled down on a Tuesday morning, however, I usually travel down on a Monday.

With regard to [constituency neighbour 1], they have hardly been at the house since January. As I have previously stated, they live in France for half of the year.

15 June 2010

53. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 16 June 2010

Thank you for your letter of 15 June responding to mine of 14 June about the evidence which I had received from your friend in Stratford-upon-Avon.

I am grateful for the explanation. I have noted that you believe you spent slightly fewer nights in your Stratford-upon-Avon home when Parliament was sitting than your friend has suggested. I will be back in touch when I have completed my consultations with the remaining witness.

16 June 2010

54. Letter to neighbour 1 (constituency) from the Commissioner, 18 May 2010

I last wrote to you on 22 February following your letter to me on 18 February about the witness evidence you gave me in respect of the complaint I am inquiring into about the claims from parliamentary resources made by Ms Nadine Dorries MP for her home in [her constituency].

I said in that letter that I would be showing our correspondence to Mrs Dorries for any comments she might wish to make. As you will see below, she does not accept what you say. In a letter to me of 1 March, she wrote:

"The last time I saw [neighbour 1] was at least a year or so ago and before that I have probably seen them both a handful of times over a period of two years.

"They fail to mention the most important fact that their house did not have any view of mine and that they could not see whether I was in or not. Neither could they hear, as the house is actually on [name of road]."

Ms Dorries wrote to me again on 15 March and included the following in respect of your evidence:

"I also again, note the comments from [neighbour 1] regarding their French home. I am afraid that this is very untrue and I have learnt since I wrote my last letter that there has been a period of time when they have sold and re-bought in France and that they may be stretching the facts, possibly with encouragement from [name of reporter]. They also, apparently, spent a long period of time in Portugal between October and December last year when I had assumed they must be at the house in France. I suspect the reason they may not want to be considered as a witness or have their own evidence published may be due to the fact that other neighbours may be aware of what they have said. The alarmed tone in their letter may lend some substance to this."

I would welcome any comments you may wish to make in response to Ms Dorries' observations on your circumstances and the factual accuracy of your evidence.

I was not able to continue my inquiries into this matter during the Dissolution of Parliament, but now the new Parliament has assembled, I would like to take matters forward. It would be very helpful, therefore, if you could let me have a response to this letter with any comments you would wish to make on Ms Dorries's views on your evidence by 3 June. I would be most grateful for your continued help.

18 May 2010

55. Letter to the Commissioner from Neighbour 1 (Constituency), 9 June 2010

I acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 18 April (which, for some unknown reason, I did not in fact receive until the middle of May) and apologise for the delay in replying.

Having read the content of your letter, I am amazed and astonished by the alarming inaccuracies of the comments made by Nadine Dorries and therefore respond as follows:

- The reference to not seeing us more than a handful of times during the course of a two year period is totally incorrect. She may not have actually engaged in conversation more than a handful of times but she most certainly saw us and we saw her on numerous occasions either outside her front door, by her car or in her courtyard which adjoined ours.
- The ridiculous comment she makes about our house not having any view of hers is unbelievable. As you will see from the enclosed plan and photos,² the properties are terraced Georgian houses. Her front door was immediately next to our kitchen window and therefore we could not only see her coming and going but, because of the nature in which she and her family noisily closed the front door at all times of the day and night we could also hear them in both our kitchen and our bedroom which is above the kitchen.

Nadine's bedroom at the rear of her property directly overlooked our front door and courtyard and therefore we were always aware when she was in residence. (Rather strangely our front door is in fact at the rear of the property with access from [name of road]). From our courtyard we could also see into her dining room.

[Address] is in fact our studio with a guest bedroom and bathroom above. Nadine's master bedroom and bathroom adjoined this and in fact her *en suite* bathroom was above the studio and due to very poor sound proofing, we could hear whenever she or her family used the bathroom.

- The comments regarding our French home are totally incorrect. We have only ever owned the one small property which, as stated in our previous letter, we purchased at the end of 2008.
- As to Nadine's reference to us spending a long period of time in Portugal between October and December last year, this is farcical and totally incorrect. We did in fact go to Portugal for one week from 1st to 8th October for our honeymoon! From 8 October to just before Christmas (11 weeks to be precise) we were in constant residence in [name of town in constituency].

I apologise for the length of this letter however both my wife and I feel absolutely infuriated by the lack of truth and the extraordinary inaccuracies in her response. We sincerely hope that her parliamentary research is a great deal more accurate!

I trust the above will help you with your continuing inquiries.

9 June 2010

² Not included in the written evidence

56. Letter to Neighbour 1 (constituency) from the Commissioner, 15 June 2010

Thank you for your letter of 9 June responding to my letter of 18 May regarding Ms Dorries' comments on your evidence and for the plan and photographs you sent to me. I am sorry that, due to a typographical error, the letter was dated 18 April—I sent it to you on 18 May. Please accept my apologies.

It was most helpful to have this response. There was, however, one point which Ms Dorries made and on which I would welcome any comments you may wish to make. You say that the comments by Ms Dorries regarding your French home are totally inaccurate. You will see that, among those comments, Ms Dorries suggests that you were “*stretching the facts*”, possibly with the encouragement of [a reporter]. It would be helpful if you could let me know whether the terms of your evidence in relation to your French home, or in relation to the main evidence you sent me on 22 January, were influenced or otherwise affected by anyone else.

If you could let me have a response to this within the next two weeks, I would be most grateful. I would then show your letters to Ms Dorries for any comments she may wish to make. As you know, your evidence will be included along with the other evidence I have received in the course of this inquiry, and you can expect it to be published. I may identify you by name, but I will not disclose your address.

Thank you again for your help with all this. I look forward to hearing from you.

15 June 2010

57. Letter to the Commissioner from Neighbour 1 (constituency), 24 June 2010

I acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 15 June and respond as follows:

I can assure you quite categorically that none of my comments have been influenced by [name], the reporter from the *Daily Telegraph*, or by any other persons. The information I have given you is most certainly not “*stretching the facts*” as suggested by Ms Dorries! The information I have given you with regard to our French property and the time spent there is totally accurate.

24 June 2010

58. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 28 June 2010

I have now reviewed all the evidence which you and other witnesses have so far given me during my inquiries into this complaint. The purpose of this letter is to ensure that I have consistent evidence in relation to the identification of your main home, and in particular to your overnight stays, and to ask for your help in reconciling the evidence I have received from you and others.

To help achieve this, I enclose a paper with a schedule of your overnight stays.³ This schedule compares the numerical estimates you have made for your overnight stays—in particular in October last year and in January this year—with the pattern of overnight stays which you first identified for me in January and added to in March and June this year. The paper then compares the evidence you have given about the pattern of your overnight stays with that of other witnesses and with the numerical outcome that pattern implies. Finally, it identifies some points which I need your help in resolving. I would be very grateful if you could let me have an individual response to each of the four specific matters I have identified at the end of the paper.

I hope that it might be possible for you to let me have a response to this letter, answering each of the points I have raised, within the next two weeks. By then, I would expect to have completed receiving evidence from the final witness, and so, subject to any comments you make on that evidence, I should be on the point of

³ Not included in the written evidence. For a revised version, see WE 61 below.

concluding my inquiry and preparing the draft factual sections of my memorandum to the Committee. I would, of course, show these to you once they have been prepared, so that you can comment on their factual accuracy.

I look forward to hearing from you.

28 June 2010

59. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 1 July 2010

I have now heard back from the final witness, [neighbour 1], from whom I had asked for further evidence in the light of your response to his initial evidence to me.

I sent you on 23 February this witness's letter of 22 January, my letter to him of 2 February and his response of 18 February. You commented on his letter in your letter to me of 1 March and again in your letter of 15 March. I said in my letter to you of 25 March that, in the light of your comments, I would shortly be writing to him to put to him the suggestion in your letter of 15 March that he was stretching the facts with the encouragement from [a reporter]. I wrote to this witness on 18 May, once I had recommenced my inquiries following the start of the new Parliament. I attach a copy of that letter. The witness responded to my letter on 9 June. I attach a copy of that letter, together with its attachments. I decided I needed to ask him about one further point to deal with one of the suggestions you had made about his evidence, and I wrote to him about that on 15 June. I attach a copy of that letter. The witness responded with his letter of 24 June, which I received on 1 July. I enclose a copy of that letter.

As you can see, the witness takes issue with a number of points you have made about him and his evidence. He suggests that he saw and heard you on numerous occasions over a two year period; that the properties are contiguous; he has only ever owned one property in France which he purchased at the end of 2008; he spent just one week in Portugal in 2009; and finally, that none of his comments have been influenced by a reporter from the *Daily Telegraph* or by any other persons.

I would welcome any comments you may wish to make on this witness's response. Subject to your response, I will then need to decide, in fairness, whether I need to show those comments to the witness. Otherwise, I believe I have taken all the evidence I need from witnesses. The remaining matters are set out in my letter to you of 28 June and its attachments. Once I receive your response to these two letters, and again subject to what you say, I would hope that that would conclude my inquiry and I can then complete the drafting of the factual sections of my memorandum for the Committee. I would show you these sections so that you can comment on their factual accuracy.

1 July 2010

60. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 7 July 2010

I am writing to confirm that, when I wrote to you on 28 June, I omitted in the schedule attached to that letter a reference to one of the witnesses from whom I had received evidence in relation to your use of your Constituency home.

I am most grateful that you raised this with my office and I would ask that you accept my sincere apologies for this oversight. I am very sorry that this has happened.

I now attach a revised schedule which includes a reference to the evidence from the additional neighbour in [the constituency] [neighbour 4]. I have also taken the opportunity to bring the summary up to date and add to the summaries for [neighbour 1] and [neighbour 2]. The evidence from your Cotswold neighbour [name] was already in the summary at the start of the section on evidence from third parties.

I have now received your e-mail and letter of 7 July responding to my letter of 28 June. I will consider that letter and respond to you on it as soon as I can.

I apologise again for my oversight and I am grateful to you for picking this up.

7 July 2010

61. Nadine Dorries MP: Schedule of overnight stays from 1 February 2007 (Revised version)

Nights spent at Cotswold home and at her [constituency] home

On 26 June 2009, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that Ms Dorries had “admitted” that she only spends spare weekends and holidays away from her designated second home in her constituency and that her youngest daughter and pet dogs live at the property.

On 27 July 2009, Ms Dorries told me that she spent approximately 150 nights per year in her constituency home and gave no figure for the number of nights spent in her Cotswold home.

On 8 October 2009, Ms Dorries provided more detailed statistics on her pattern of overnight stays. The information relating to the period in question was:

Financial Year	Cotswold home*	[Constituency] home	London	Elsewhere	Total
2006–07	208	111	+	45	364
2007–08	222	98	+	45	365
2008–09	199	121	+	45	365

*Addresses in Stratford-upon-Avon from January 2007. Until January 2007, Ms Dorries’ Cotswold home had been in [a village in Gloucestershire].

+ No separate figure given for nights in London.

When she provided the figures, Ms Dorries said that the night count was based on her office and personal diaries, and her daughter’s diary, and she said it was “as accurate as it is possible to be”. It identified considerably fewer nights in her constituency home than the 150 given in her evidence of 27 July 2009.

On 25 January 2010, Ms Dorries provided revised and extended information on her pattern of overnight stays, as follows:

Financial year	Cotswold home*	[Constituency] home	London	Elsewhere	Total
2006–07	208	0	112	45	365
2007–08	223	89	10	44	366
2008–09	235	97	9	24	365
2009–10 (to 25 January 2010)	218	37	3	42	300

*Address in [second Gloucestershire village] from September 2009.

Ms Dorries said that the revised information for 2008–09 had been based on “closer examination of my 08–09 diary” and that the figures for other years had been revised to include nights she had spent in London. She had also provided figures for 2009–10.

Ms Dorries’ January 2010 figures suggested all the nights she had said in October 2009 that she had spent in her constituency in 2006–07 had in fact been spent in London. She spent 9 fewer nights in her [constituency] home in 2007–08 than she suggested in her October 2009 evidence, and 24 fewer nights in 2008–09. The number of nights in her constituency home had therefore reduced still further from her original estimate of 150.

Ms Dorries also said in her letter of 25 January 2010 that the figure of 111 nights given in the 8 October 2009 figures for her constituency home in 2006–07 had been a clerical error and should have been zero. She confirmed this in her letter of 1 March 2010, and also said in that letter that in 2006–07 “there was no constituency property to claim against”.

Basis of estimate: Pattern of overnight stays

On 25 January 2010, Ms Dorries said that she did not keep a record of where she slept and when, but knew she was always at her Cotswold home on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday. In contrast to what she had said on 8 October 2009, on 1 March 2010, Ms Dorries said it was “*absolutely impossible for me to provide you with accurate assessments of where I stay and when using my diaries and my work commitments*” but she could provide a pattern.

The following table gives the patterns given by Ms Dorries for her overnight stays, when the House was sitting, in her Cotswold home and her [constituency] home in her letters of 25 January 2010, 1 March 2010 and 15 June 2010 respectively:

Day	Letter of 25 January 2010	Letter of 1 March 2010	Letter of 15 June 2010
Monday	#	Constituency or Cotswold*	Constituency or Cotswold +
Tuesday	#	Constituency	Constituency
Wednesday	#	Constituency	Constituency
Thursday	#	Constituency or Cotswold **	Constituency or Cotswold
Friday	Cotswold	Cotswold	Cotswold
Saturday	Cotswold	Cotswold	Cotswold
Sunday	Cotswold	Cotswold	Cotswold

No information given.

* “Often” spent in Cotswold home.

** “Almost always” spent in Cotswold home.

+ Spent in Cotswold home on “the odd occasion”.

The table shows that Ms Dorries spent at least 3 nights a week in her Cotswold home and at least two nights a week in her [constituency] home, with the remaining two nights being shared between both homes. Her evidence about the location of her Monday nights changed between her evidence in March 2010 and June 2010 (from “often” in the Cotswolds to “the odd occasion”).

Ms Dorries said on 4 August 2009 that she now resided at the constituency property “*in tandem with the Parliamentary cycle*” and that “*this is how I broadly estimate my nights*”. On 15 June 2010, Ms Dorries said that her work in Parliament is “*from Monday until the last vote on a Thursday night at 6.30pm.*” She also said that she spent “*the nights Parliament sits*” in her constituency “*although not every night Parliament sits, as I have previously explained*”.

The typical pattern of nights which Ms Dorries has given for the nights spent by her in her constituency home when Parliament is sitting has been compared with the pattern of sittings of the House over the period from 1 February 2007 to 25 January 2010. On the basis of the pattern described by Ms Dorries, this would suggest the following approximate number of nights could have been expected:

Financial year	Nights in constituency home
2006–07	20
2007–08	99
2008–09	97
2009–10 (to 25 January 2010)	82*

* If allowance is made for sitting nights in October to December 2009, when Ms Dorries said in her letter of 25 January 2010 that she was excused from late-night voting and returned to her main home, this figure reduces to 56.

This pattern is broadly consistent with Ms Dorries’ revised evidence of 25 January 2010 for 2007–08 and 2008–09. The domestic difficulties which Ms Dorries faced in 2006–07 (her evidence is that she did not have the time to furnish her new constituency property immediately) could explain why the normal pattern was not followed in 2006–07. For 2009–10, it suggests that, before any allowance is made for the period when she was excused late-night voting, she would have been expected to have spent twice as many nights in her constituency home in 2009–10 than her January estimate. It is still considerably more than her estimate when allowance is made for this (56 nights as against 37).

As to where she spends her weekends and recesses, Ms Dorries has consistently said that her weekends and recesses (apart from holidays) were spent in her Cotswold home.

Evidence from third parties

Cotswold neighbour [Stratford-upon-Avon]—11 June 2010

The pattern of nights given by Ms Dorries' Cotswold neighbour in his evidence of 11 June is summarised in the table below:

Day	Cotswold neighbour's evidence of 11 June
Monday	Constituency or Cotswolds+
Tuesday	Constituency
Wednesday	Constituency or Cotswolds +
Thursday	Cotswolds
Friday	Cotswolds
Saturday	Cotswolds
Sunday	Cotswolds

+ Usually [constituency] home but sometimes Cotswold home.

The Cotswold neighbour said that he “never” did anything over the weekend or during school holidays, and in the summer was not needed until October.

Neighbour 1 [constituency house]—22 January, 18 February, 9 June and 24 June 2010

Immediate neighbour. [Constituency property] was Ms Dorries' family home where she lived with her daughters and the family pets. He believed that she spent 80% of her time there, including weekdays, weekends and school and university breaks, with the exception of 4 to 6 weeks during the summer recess when some or all of them went abroad, but he “cannot possibly quantify” the exact number of days or nights. This evidence would suggest that Ms Dorries spent at least 5 nights a week in her [constituency] house, including weekends and relevant recesses.

Neighbour 2 [constituency house]—23 January and 9 February 2010

Near neighbour. Only occasionally saw Ms Dorries going in and out of house, or car parked there. Car seen there most often on a Friday morning and occasionally during the week. Estimated Ms Dorries' presence in [constituency home] at 15% of the week and 10% of a year. This evidence would suggest Ms Dorries spent up to about 1 night a week in her constituency home.

Neighbour 3 [constituency house]—25 January and 17 February 2010

Immediate neighbour. Ms Dorries was never there at weekends, but often during the day on a Friday. Ms Dorries tended to be there midweek, often arriving late at night. Often arrived at house on a Monday morning, with a bag, but sometimes Tuesday. Not there at all July to October. Does not see her often, but when he does it was usually on a Monday morning, Friday day, or late on a weeknight. Often brought the dog and sometimes her daughter.

Neighbour 4 [constituency house]—15 March and 19 March 2010

Near neighbour. Had “personally seen” Ms Dorries “on a maximum of 20 occasions over the last two years”. Was “aware that she spends the weekends and holidays elsewhere”. Believed his 20 day estimate was “reliable”, but was “unable to specify in any great detail the length of time spent by Ms Dorries on each occasion”.

Neighbour 5 [constituency house]—18 March 2010

Near neighbour. Believed Ms Dorries stayed at constituency house on some weekday nights. She was not around for long periods of time including weekends, which [he] believed included recesses.

Family doctor (Cotswolds)—26 January 2010

Family have remained patients of his [Cotswold] practice. Sees Ms Dorries and family either in his practice or out and about on a regular basis. Can say “with certainty” that their lives are very much based in and around the area. Cannot provide numbers, but believes on the basis of personal knowledge that it seems “very unlikely” that Ms Dorries has spent the majority of her time in any other area since 2005.

The evidence from all but one of the witnesses from Ms Dorries' constituency is broadly consistent with her own evidence about her pattern of overnight stays, although most witnesses understate Ms Dorries' overnight stays in the constituency home compared to her own evidence. One neighbour in [the constituency] gives different evidence suggesting she spends many more nights in the constituency.

The evidence of the two witnesses in the Cotswolds is broadly in line with Ms Dorries' own evidence about her overnight stays in her home there, although her Cotswold neighbour has in some respects a different pattern of nights in her Cotswold home from the pattern offered by Ms Dorries.

Points to be resolved

Whether the *Daily Telegraph* report of 26 June 2009 is an accurate report of statements you made and, if so, why you spoke as you did?

Why your estimates of your overnight stays changed from July 2009 to January 2010?

Whether you consider that the pattern of your overnight stays which you gave me on 25 January 2010, 1 March 2010 and 15 June 2010 is sufficiently consistent with the statistics you gave me in your letter of 25 January 2010 that, subject to your answer to point 4 below, and to confirming that your constituency home was not available to you in 2006–07 because you could not find the time to furnish it immediately, those figures should be accepted as the best assessments you can make of your overnight stays in each of the relevant years?

Why the number of nights you said on 25 January 2010 that you had spent in your constituency home in 2009–10 is much smaller than the number predicted from your pattern of use of that home and the sittings pattern of the House?

7 July 2010

62. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 6 July 2010

In answer to your letter of 28th of June, could you please explain why the witness statements from [constituency neighbour] and [Cotswold neighbour] were not included in the same document along with other documents?

1. I did admit that I spent spare weekends and holidays away from my second home. All of my weekends are “*spare*” as Parliament does not sit at weekends. Therefore the statement concurs with the evidence I have given you which states that I spend week nights when Parliament is sitting at my constituency home and weekends and recess at my main home.
2. My estimates changed because you were asking me to be specific and I could not be so. I realised it was more accurate to provide you with my pattern than attempt to identify individual nights and then discover that I had got one wrong. I was an opposition backbencher, not a minister. I depended on and was hostage to the diaries of other family members to provide you with the specifics you required which I realised was not absolute, or appropriate.⁴
3. I did not have a constituency home in 2006. From recollection, I believe I rented the house in April 2007 and then moved in a few months later once I had furniture, cooker etc as I am sure my expenses show.⁵
4. You have my statement and my pattern of nights. You have evidence from I believe a fair number of neighbours in addition to my own. I have nothing else to add other than on occasion, I randomly needed to go back home for domestic reasons, however, I cannot accurately say when or how often that was.

[Neighbour 1]

[Neighbour 1] clearly states in his letter of 22nd of January 2010 “*Further to a recent meeting with [name of reporter] of the Daily Telegraph*” and again in his letter of 18th February “*when approached by the Daily Telegraph*”. None of the other letters I have seen from a witness states this.

⁴ Ms Dorries annotated this paragraph in manuscript as follows: “I have said this so many times already!”

⁵ Ms Dorries annotated this paragraph in manuscript as follows: “and this!”

If [neighbour 1] had not been approached by the *Telegraph*, would he have written to you? He clearly states that he was approached by the *Telegraph*, not the other way around. So how do we know he wasn't paid by the *Telegraph*?

Therefore, I believe the evidence of [neighbour 1] to have been interfered with and influenced. Frankly, given the *Daily Telegraph* reporting of the expenses issue, it is impossible for him not to have been, payment, direct influence, or not.

[Neighbour 1] also states in bold letters that he does not want to be a witness. No other witness states this. I believe that is because [neighbour 1] is comfortable with telling [untruths] to you in a letter, but is afraid that he may formally have to give such evidence and be challenged.

I am not going to respond in detail to his points raised not least because [neighbour 1] had a row of trees in front of the window to my house in order to deliberately obstruct the view from his property into mine. The picture showing the window behind a six foot thick hedge indicating that he could see through is laughable. He has actually sent you a photograph of his lie. Or is he admitting that he is some kind of perverse peeping Tom who regularly literally, parted the hedges to look into my window. His hedge is about three foot thick as his wife was did not want anyone from my property being able to see into theirs and one would assume, likewise.

In addition to this, I never used the dining room other than very early in the morning, long before my neighbours were up, or late at night when most are in bed.

The window he points to on the main road and describes as [neighbour 1's] kitchen window has a large table in front of it, they can only see who walks past their window as they can't stand up to it.

How on earth could he possibly know where in the house I slept?⁶

He did buy a house in France in 2008. To replace the house he sold in 2007.

I am strongly opposed to the evidence of someone who states that they do not want to be a witness and admits to having been visited and approached by the *Daily Telegraph* being considered.

I am aware that it is impossible for you to reasonably believe [neighbour 1] and disregard the consistent information provided by others and you may think I am over reacting to the evidence sent by [neighbour 1], however, that is not the point. I strongly object to lies being given any consideration whatsoever.

[Material redacted to protect the privacy of third parties]

As an MP, all I have to offer my constituents on whose behalf I work tirelessly when they come to see me about serious issues is my reputation. It is everything. Nothing else is as important.

If the evidence of [neighbour 1] is to be considered and have any influence whatsoever on the outcome of this enquiry, then I wish to explore my rights further with regard to the provision laid down in the standing orders and the requirement for legal presence during the committee hearing, the ability for me to make my own presentation and for an MP who is not a committee member to attend.

6 July 2010

63. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 8 July 2010

Thank you for your letter of 6 July responding to my letter to you of 28 June, and for your e-mail of 7 July.⁷ I have noted, too, your manuscript side comments in the letter.

⁶ Ms Dorries annotated this paragraph in manuscript as follows: "The curtains were almost always drawn as I usually left before it was light."

As you know, I have written to you separately to apologise for having omitted from the schedule I sent you on 28 June the evidence from one witness and to give you a revision of that schedule. Evidence from the other witness [Cotswold neighbour] was already included in the schedule I sent you on 28 June identified as your Cotswold neighbour in the summary. It appears as the first entry in the section “*Evidence from third parties*”. I do not believe the revised summary makes a material difference to the response you have sent me, but if you think otherwise, please let me have any additional comments you may wish to make.

In your letter you asked in what way your Cotswold neighbour’s ... evidence is different from your own. The summary (page 5) says that your Cotswold neighbour “*has in some respects a different pattern of nights in her Cotswold home from the pattern offered by Ms Dorries.*” Both patterns are included in the summary, on pages 2 and 3–4 respectively. The difference is apparent from those. For example, you say that you spent Monday nights either “*often*” in your Cotswold home (your letter of 1 March 2010) or on “*the odd occasion*” (your letter of 15 June 2010). Your neighbour says you spent your Monday nights “*usually*” in [the constituency], but “*sometimes*” in the Cotswolds. For Wednesday nights, you have said in both letters that you spent these nights in [the constituency]. Your neighbour says that you spend Wednesday nights “*usually*” in [the constituency] but sometimes in the Cotswolds. These are the differences to which I was referring.

In response to your first point on where you spent your weekends, I know that there have been a number of statements on your blog. The blog itself seems now to have been taken down. I enclose however some references from your blog and your maiden speech in May 2005 where you refer to your constituency as your home. I believe that these references make clear your position, but if you wished to add or clarify anything in relation to these or any other statements on your blog, please do so.

I have noted the comment in paragraph 4 of your e-mail of 7 July.

I was grateful for the responses you gave me to the four points of resolution which I set out at the end of the schedule. I believe you have answered the first and second of my points, for which I was most grateful. You have partially answered the third point, but have not confirmed for me whether the figures you gave me in your letter of 25 January should be accepted as the best numerical assessments you can make of your overnight stays in each of the relevant years. I would be most grateful if you could confirm this.

In relation to your statement that you rented the house in your constituency in April 2007, I should point out that, according to the Department’s letter of 11 May 2010, you submitted a claim for the first set of costs for [first constituency address] on 25 January 2007 and that the claim and the lease shows you “*occupied*” the property from 1 February 2007. It seems from your evidence in your letter of 25 May that, because of the need to furnish it, you did not immediately occupy the property, and that it took two months for you to do so. This suggests that you rented the property from 1 February 2007 but did not occupy it until April 2007 for the reason you have given. It is important that I do get these dates right and so I would be grateful if, having refreshed your memory, you could confirm these timings or provide evidence to suggest they need revising.

You have not offered me an answer to my final question, which was why the estimate you gave me on 25 January 2010 of the number of nights spent in your constituency home 2009–10 is much smaller than the number one might predict from your pattern of use of that home and the sitting patterns of the House. If you could let me have a response to this question, I would be most grateful.

I turn now to your response to the evidence from the final witness. I consider that I will need to put your response to that witness. I believe I can do so in a way which enables him to see and if necessary respond to your comments without repeating some of the personal comments which you make about him. I attach a copy of the extract from your letter which I am putting to him.⁸ I should say that his evidence is one among a number of witnesses and I will need to weigh all the evidence, including that which you have given me.

You ask about giving evidence to the Committee. That is a matter, of course, for the Committee itself and you may wish to seek advice on this from the Committee Clerk, perhaps when you have seen the full

⁷ Not included in the written evidence. In this e-mail Ms Dorries asked in what way her Cotswold neighbour’s evidence differed from her own.

⁸ Extract from Ms Dorries’ letter of 6 July 2010 (WE 62), not included in the written evidence.

memorandum which the Clerk will send to you before the Committee considers this matter. My understanding, however, is that it is open to a Member to ask to give written or oral evidence to the Committee if they so wish.

Finally if you could let me have a response to this letter within two weeks, that should just leave any reply from the final witness about the allegations you have made about him, before I will be able to bring this inquiry to a conclusion and start to prepare my draft memorandum. Thank you for your help.

8 July 2010

64. Extract from Ms Dorries' blog, 15 May 2009

"I rent a house/office/surgery in my constituency. This house is used in connection with my duties as an MP. For example—this weekend I have had meetings all day Friday. I am presenting to a patients group in Barton Le Clay surgery on changes in the NHS tonight. I am canvassing Saturday and attending a church service on Sunday and then after the church service writing a speech for the Police and Crime Bill to be delivered next week.

"On the weekends I have free, and during the recess, I go somewhere else. I am not publishing the address. I gave it to my whip and e-mailed it to the fees office in 2008. I spend most of the holidays abroad, all of which can be confirmed. My children stay with me when I am in the constituency, where I go my girls go, however, one also lives in London and one is at uni. This has not always been the case. I now spend my late nights in London. At my own expense.

"I keep the dogs at the constituency address as I am often there on my own and it confuses them being moved around. When I am not in the constituency, especially during the long summer break, we have a house sitter, at my expense. Again, this can be confirmed.

"During term time I spend the majority of weekends in the constituency as my job tends to be seven days a week, as detailed above. My youngest daughter has attended a school in Bedford since last September. Up until September she attended a school 'somewhere else'. My eldest daughter had a term time job during the last year in the constituency before commencing work in London in a PR firm."

[Extract from a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, posted on her blog,⁹ 15 May 2009]

"I never wanted my constituents to think that I had another prime responsibility other than Bedfordshire and Parliament; maybe I should have been more open. My daughter was due to start boarding school in September but instead she started at a school in [the constituency]. At the weekends we go back to the Cotswolds together, or, if I have to work such as this weekend, we stay in Bedfordshire. During the parliamentary term time, it is unusual for me not to have a constituency engagement. I spend more nights away from my constituency home than I spend in it and I use it for the purpose of my work. I do, however, retain the right to have my daughter, or daughter's with me depending on who is with me at the time. It may only be a second home, however, it is a home. So, to my constituents and no one else, I am sorry. My crime is that I haven't owned up to you that I don't always live here—that I have a private life, which has not always run smoothly."

[Extract from Ms Dorries' blog¹⁰ of 16 May 2009]

8 July 2010

65. Extract from Ms Dorries' maiden speech, 25 May 2005

"[Many of the residents of mid-Bedfordshire] chose to live there, as I have, because they wanted to wake up to the sound of birdsong rather than the incessant hum of traffic or, unfortunately, the sound of the bulldozer..."

"I will always do my best for the people of mid-Bedfordshire, the place that I now call home."

⁹ <http://blog.dorries.org>

¹⁰ <http://blog.dorries.org/>

Official Report 25 May 2005, cols 739 and 740

25 May 2005

66. Letter to Neighbour 1 (Constituency) from the Commissioner, 8 July 2010

When I wrote to you on 1 July I said that I was copying your letters of 9 and 22 June to Ms Dorries for any comments she may wish to make. Ms Dorries has made a number of comments having seen your evidence.

I attach extracts from what she has said. In the light of her comments, I thought in fairness I should show this to you in case you wished to comment further. You are not, of course, obliged to do so.

Could you within the next two weeks either let me have any comments you may wish to make that you consider may be helpful to my inquiry, or let me know that you have decided not to do so? I would be most grateful for your continued help.

8 July 2010

67. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 12 July 2010

With regard to your comments re my maiden speech and the comments on my blog;

My maiden speech was made in June 2005. I took a constituency house in 2007. However, as I stated on another occasion, my second home may only be a second home, however, it is a home. It would be pretty odd to describe somewhere as “*a place I now call my second home*” even if I had been living there at the time I made the speech. Mid Bedfordshire is, metaphorically speaking, one of my homes. I have to say that I find this a rather spurious point to raise?

I often made comments on my blog in order to deliberately give the impression that I lived in the constituency. Because I didn't in fact live in the constituency, I probably went over the top. I was always very worried about people finding out that I lived in the Cotswolds and deliberately put up smoke and mirrors to prevent this happening. My daughters had already told me that there was absolutely no way they were going to move and my youngest daughter was particularly upset at the prospect, it was very difficult. I also mention in the blog that I was not going to disclose where I lived. This was also part of my intention to conceal my main home.

In the blog, I state I am in the constituency at weekends. I often am. *That does not mean I sleep there.* I am there on Friday and Saturday this weekend. I will finish on Friday at 6pm and be in my main home by 7.20 and Saturday at 3pm and be home by 4.20.

My predecessor visited Mid Bedfordshire about once every two months, it was an issue of much consternation with many members of my Association. My comments were to re assure them of my personal commitment to Mid Beds. It was my attempt to retain some degree of a private life.

[My Cotswold neighbour] worked for me for three days a week. I doubt he kept a diary. I think that both his and my estimates are more or less accurate, I was away most week nights when Parliament sat. Neither of us can be specific.

[material relating to other matters]

... [The quote from the blog] was the most accurate and substantiates my position.

I do not believe you should be writing to [neighbour 1] and disagree with your letter.

I maintain that having been approached by the *Telegraph* and having been asked by a *Telegraph* journalist to write to you, [neighbour 1's] evidence must have been influenced, it could not [but] have been.

To my knowledge, no other evidence from any neighbour concurs with that of [neighbour 1].

[Neighbour 1] has stated that he does not want to be a witness.

[Neighbour 1] lives in France for most of the year.

The contents of [neighbour 1's] submission have already been printed in the *Daily Telegraph* thereby influencing both yourself and the committee.

There is absolutely no way in any court of law evidence would be accepted which had been encouraged, influenced and then printed by the media.

I feel very strongly about this. The question, with regard to whether he was paid is also relevant, a point [neighbour 1] is unlikely to confirm. The *Daily Telegraph* would not have had a story if they hadn't persuaded him to write you.

I understand the principle in law that if a journalist is in pursuit of the truth then exceptions apply; however, I do not believe that this applies if the story is printed in advance of a case being heard.

I have checked my dates and claims and it was April 2007 when I began to use the constituency house, or thereabouts. I can't remember exactly to the day how long it took me to get a bed, cooker etc in, however, it was around 8 weeks.

With regard to the 2009–2010 estimate sent to you on the 25th of January, the total number of nights was 300. I assume this is because I could only say how many I had spent so far at the time I wrote? If so, then the normal approximate pattern would apply. However, later in 2009, I had an additional problem with regard to [family circumstances] and had to travel back home ... The autumn of 2009 was unusual.

[material redacted to protect the privacy of third parties]

I sincerely hope that this issue will be concluded before the House rises. It would be entirely unacceptable if this were to drag on over the summer recess due to [neighbour 1], whose evidence, in my opinion should not even be considered.

12 July 2010

68. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 13 July 2010

Thank you for your e-mail of 13 July with your response to my letter of 8 July. I was most grateful for this timely response.

I have noted your points on your maiden speech and on your blog...

Thank you, too, for responding to almost all the points I raised in my letter. You have not, however, given me the confirmation of whether I should accept as the best numerical assessment you can make the figures for your overnight stays which you gave me in your letter of 25 January. It would be very helpful if you could now respond to this point.

I have noted your wish that I do not take any account of the evidence of one of the witnesses [neighbour 1]. I do not think it reasonable for me to suppress evidence which I consider is relevant to my inquiry. I will need to form my own view on the weight to be attached to that evidence, taking into account the witness's statements and your comments on them, and any other relevant evidence.

You asked about the timetable for concluding this inquiry. In fairness, since you have made further comments which appear to cast aspersions on the evidence of one of the witnesses, I must show those to that witness so that he can have an opportunity to respond. I will therefore, need to send them to him so that he can take them into account in the response which I have already invited from him. While I will need to show you that response, I would only need to involve him further if you then raised additional matters which I had to put to

him, as of course you are fully entitled to do. Otherwise, I would hope that his response would bring this particular aspect of the inquiry to an end. I attach the extract from your letter which I will send to him.

There is now a little over two weeks to the recess. While I am hopeful that, subject to your response to the witness's final evidence, I would have concluded the inquiry by the end of this month, it would not be practicable for me to produce the memorandum before the House rises. That is because it does take a little time to draft the memorandum and it cannot be completed until I have received all the evidence. I will then need to show you the factual sections of the memorandum and to provide you with an opportunity to comment on its factual accuracy. With your help, however, I hope it might be possible for my memorandum to be available for the Committee shortly after the House returns in September from its summer recess. The Committee, of course, has yet to be appointed.

I look forward to receiving a copy of the blog I quoted in my letter of 8 July, and your response to the point at paragraph 3 of this letter. An answer in the next week would be particularly helpful.

13 July 2010

69. Letter to Neighbour 1 (Constituency) from the Commissioner, 13 July 2010

I wrote to you on 8 July to show you some comments which Ms Nadine Dorries MP had made on the evidence you had given me to help me with this inquiry and to give you an opportunity to comment on them.

This letter is just to let you know that Ms Dorries has made some further comments on your evidence. I enclose an extract of what she has said.¹¹ You may wish to take these further comments into account when preparing your response to my earlier letter. It would be helpful in your comments if you could deal with Ms Dorries' allegation that a national newspaper persuaded you to write to me with your evidence.

I understand you expect to let me have your response in the next few days, and if you could possibly do so by 21 July, that would be much appreciated. Thank you for your help.

13 July 2010

70. Letter to the Commissioner from Neighbour 1 (Constituency), 20 July 2010

Further to your letter dated 8 July I respond as follows:

- Following the articles in The Daily Telegraph concerning Nadine Dorries claims regarding her “*second home*”, we telephoned the newspaper and spoke to the Political Editorial Department. This initial contact was purely to ascertain who we should write to within the government to express our deep concerns. This telephone call prompted a request from the *Daily Telegraph* to meet with [name of reporter], as a result of which he recommended that we write to yourself.

I can categorically claim that at no point were we “influenced” by the *Daily Telegraph* nor has any of our evidence been “interfered” with as suggested by Nadine Dorries. Furthermore, there was and never has been any suggestion of payment of any kind.

I take great exception to the latest comments and accusations by Ms Dorries relating to the *Daily Telegraph* and also her reference to “*lies*”.

- In response to Ms Dorries' comments regarding whether or not my wife and I could either hear or see her when in residence, I feel I have already made it quite clear in previous correspondence that we could very clearly see and most of all hear her, her family and her dogs. In light of this, I would be more than happy

¹¹ Not included in the written evidence.

for a visit to be made to our properties which would very quickly confirm what we have stated in previous correspondence.

- The reference to our house in France and the replacement of a house sold in 2007 is incorrect and in my view totally irrelevant. The further reference to living in France is also irrelevant. Ms Dorries moved into [first constituency address] in February 2007—18 months before we purchased our house in France.

In response to your letter dated 13 July (enclosing extracts from Ms Dorries' letter of 12 July) I comment as follows:

- I resent very strongly the continued accusations by Ms Dorries that I was encouraged or persuaded by the *Daily Telegraph* to write to you. To the best of my knowledge my comments to you have not been printed in the *Daily Telegraph*. The only reference to which I am aware was on 23 January which stated "*expenses for the second home that she was living in almost all the time according to evidence some of her neighbours are preparing to submit to a parliamentary investigation*".

Contrary to the statement in my letter dated 18 February 2009, in which I wrote that I did not wish to be a witness, and, as a direct result of the latest comments and reference to "*lies*" by Nadine Dorries, should you feel it necessary **I AM NOW PREPARED TO BE A WITNESS IN YOUR INQUIRY.**

20 July 2010

71. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 22 July 2010

When I wrote to you on 8 and 13 July, I said that I would be putting to him the comments which you had made on the evidence from one of the witnesses in your constituency [neighbour 1] for any comments he might wish to make.

I have now heard back from this witness. I enclose a copy of my letters to him of 8 and 13 July, and his response of 20 July.

I think I have taken this as far as I need, although if there are any additional factual points which you wish to draw to my attention, please do so. I would then consider whether I need again to engage the witness, although I would now like to bring this matter to a conclusion. I will obviously need to weigh his evidence against your evidence and that of other witnesses when I come to prepare my conclusions to this inquiry.

Subject to this last point and a response to my letter to you of 13 July, I consider I should now have completed my inquiries. I will now, therefore, prepare the factual sections of my memorandum to the Committee, which, as you know, I will show you so that you can comment if necessary on their factual accuracy. I will then prepare my conclusions and complete my work on the memorandum, so that it can be submitted to the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Thank you again for your help on these matters.

22 July 2010

72. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 27 July 2010

The only response I can give you with regard to your question regarding my overnight stays is as I have maintained throughout. When Parliament is sitting I spend the weeknights in my constituency home. I spend weekends and recess at home. I am a mother and have a dependent relative. Last year I had [reference to family circumstances]. My pattern is not absolute or always the same. I am not prepared to give you any absolute figure in terms of numbers regarding where I sleep as I cannot be 100% certain that it would be truthful to do so.

I am aware that this may not be tidy enough for your report; however, my pattern of nights is truthful. Confirming any specific number would not be and therefore I am afraid that it makes little difference how often you ask me the same question, I can only answer what I know to be correct and that is how I divide my time and my general pattern of nights.

I think I have almost jumped through hoops in order to provide you with absolutes and I am afraid that I have to say given that you know and are aware of my pattern it is wrong of you to try and persuade me confirm a definite number. I do realise that it would make life much easier for me to do this, however, it is not right to do so unless I am completely sure.

Frankly, you could put together a dozen tables of nights with small variations either side and any one could be the right one.

With regard to [neighbour 1]; he states in his first letter that he could see me through the dining room window. When the large hedge is pointed out changes this to the fact that he could hear me.

I take your point that his evidence will be balanced out against others, however, his evidence is a lie and I feel very, very strongly that a malicious person who has lied should be given any consideration whatsoever.

My blog is back online and therefore you can access anything you wish.

I look forward to your report.

27 July 2010

73. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 29 July 2010

Thank you for your letter of 27 July responding to mine of 13 and 22 July about this complaint.

I was grateful to receive this response. I have noted what you say about the pattern of your overnight stays, and that you are not prepared to give me any absolute figure in terms of where you spent your nights as you cannot be 100% certain that it would be truthful to do so. I should perhaps make clear that I did not ask you for an absolute figure. Since I first wrote to you on 7 July 2009 I have asked you on a number of occasions for an estimate—and no more than an estimate—of the number of nights you spent in your main home. I have asked you for such an estimate because the number of nights spent in the property was at the time the principal qualifying test for the definition of a main home. That definition says that the Member's main home is normally where they spend more nights than any other. I will record the estimates for your overnight stays which you gave me in your letter of 27 July 2009, in your e-mails of 4 August and 8 October 2009 and in your letter of 25 January 2010. I will also note, however, that you cannot give me an absolute figure and would prefer me to rely on how you divide your time and on the pattern of overnight stays, which you have given me. I assume that was the pattern which you gave me in your letter of 15 June 2010. Unless you tell me otherwise I will reflect that most recent pattern in my report, but note also that you gave me an earlier version in your letter of 1 March 2010. I will need to assume also that that pattern has remained largely unchanged throughout the period in question.

I have noted your comments about the evidence of one of the witnesses in your constituency and that your blog is now back on line.

Subject to any further comments you might wish to make about your overnight stays, I am now at the end of this inquiry. As I said in my letter of 22 July, I will now therefore prepare the factual sections of my memorandum to the Committee on Standards and Privileges. I will show you these so that you can comment if necessary on their factual accuracy. I will then prepare my conclusions and complete my work on the memorandum before submitting it to the Committee. I will let you and the complainant know when the full memorandum is submitted.

I will be back in touch, therefore, when I have completed the factual sections of my memorandum.

29 July 2010

Appendix 2: Letter to the Second Clerk from Nadine Dorries, 18 October 2010

Re Letter to the Standards and Privileges Committee

Having read the conclusions of the report produced by the Standards Commissioner, Mr John Lyon, I would like to make the following comments.

1. Although the substantive complaint was not upheld, during the course of his inquiry the Commissioner identified in para 175 an administrative breach. He has described this breach as not serious; however, it is a breach. At the time I was in the midst of dealing with a number of very serious personal issues. My prime concern at this time was the management of my case load and maintaining my constituency and Parliamentary duties. I regret that certain elements of paperwork did not receive due attention and I would like to wholeheartedly and most sincerely apologise for this breach of House rules.
2. With regard to the Commissioner's overall conclusion I would like to raise the following points;
 - a) In Para 162 the Commissioner concludes with the words 'It was (and apparently still is) I would like to request that these words are removed. Where I live now has no relevance to the inquiry and the word 'apparently' suggests doubt. Of which there is none.
 - b) I would also like to take issue with para 166 and 176 in which the Commissioner states that it has taken far too long to draw together the evidence and suggest that procrastination on my part may be the reason. I would like to request that both be removed. The Standard's Commissioner did not ask for information regarding a neighbour at my main home location until a considerable time into the inquiry. I was incredibly frustrated at the length the inquiry took and can only emphasise that as a member undergoing an inquiry, fifteen months is much too long a time period to sustain without personal ill effect. I did inform the Standards Commissioner some three months ago that I was going to raise with the Committee my concern that this inquiry had taken so long, however, it appears many inquiries take this length of time.
 - c) I would also like to take issue with the comment made in para 167 which is strongly worded and incorrect.

Many thanks

Formal minutes

Tuesday 19 October 2010

Members present:

Mr Kevin Barron, in the Chair

Sir Paul Beresford

Mr Oliver Heald

Annette Brooke

Eric Ollerenshaw

Mr Tom Clarke

Heather Wheeler

Mr Jim Cunningham

Draft Report (Nadine Dorries), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

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

Paragraph 1 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 4 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 5 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 6 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 7 to 26 read and agreed to.

Two Papers were appended to the Report.

Resolved, That the Report, as amended, be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 2 November at 9.30 am