

MEPs Adopt Tighter Controls on Assistance Expenses

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The European Parliament's Bureau approved the last part of the implementing measures for the Statute for MEPs. This part concerned "assistance from personal staff". The adoption of the implementing rules clears a vexed issue ahead of next European elections in 2009.

Speaking after the meeting, Diana WALLIS (UK, Lib Dem), European Parliament Bureau member and one of the four Vice Presidents of the European Parliament who took part in the working party which prepared the draft approved last night, said:

"The package adopted today is not perfect, but let's be clear: this is a huge step forward for transparency in the European Parliament.

"The systemic flaws highlighted by our internal auditor have been remedied. The much-criticised service-provider arrangement is severely curtailed and subject to strict controls. There are clear and strict rules on conflicts of interest.

"I now appeal on the Council and the Commission to work with the Parliament to approve, as soon as possible, a proper Assistants' Statute for parliamentary assistants in the three official working places before next year."

The Statute for Members and its implementing measures enter into force in 2009 after the next European elections.

Members will be obliged to spend at least 75% of their assistance allowance on the employment of staff, the remainder (up to 25%) being available for services such as studies, and excluding "the provision of staff".

Furthermore, Members will have the option to use paying agents approved by the European Parliament following an open call for tender, and will also be able to require the net salary to be sent directly by the Parliament to the assistant.

The rules also clarify in great details what constitutes a "conflict of interest", and thus situation for which the assistance allowance cannot be used. These include where the Member or any relative has a financial interest or benefit of any kind in the service provider.