# Coventry MP faces backlash over taxpayer-funded pet rent



Coventry Labour MP Taiwo Owatemi has faced significant criticism after it was revealed that she used taxpayer money to cover a "pet rent" for her cockapoo, Bella, while living in her second residence in London. This claim, amounting to £900 annually, has raised alarms among campaigners and members of the public in light of ongoing cuts to disability benefits.

Owatemi, who serves as the Member of Parliament for Coventry North West and is also a Lord Commissioner of HM Treasury, had her expense claim approved shortly after Labour won the general election. This approval came despite the broader political context in which her party is currently advocating for £5 billion in cuts to disability benefits. The claim was reported by The Sun, which highlighted the implications of an MP utilising public funds in this manner.

Hannah Campbell, a disability rights advocate and a mother of three, made her discontent clear, labelling the situation a "disgrace." Campbell, who lost her leg during military service in Iraq, stated: "It’s one set of rules for them and one set of rules for everyone else. They are not leading by example. When disability money is being cut, hearing that an MP has received £900 for a dog is shocking." Her comments underscore the stark contrast between Owatemi's financial support from taxpayers and the struggles faced by individuals on benefits.

In response to the uproar, a spokesperson from the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) clarified that MPs like Owatemi must operate in two locations—both their constituencies and Westminster—and that certain accommodation costs, including surcharges imposed by landlords, are allowable under strict regulations. The spokesperson remarked: "IPSA is committed to supporting a Parliament where people without the private finances to fund working from two locations themselves are not prevented from becoming an MP."

This episode has drawn parallels to previous scandals regarding MPs' expenses, igniting discussions about accountability and the appropriateness of claiming expenses for personal pets. John O'Connell, chief executive of the TaxPayers' Alliance, expressed his view on the matter, stating, "It's surely enough for MPs to get the rent on a second home paid for without the need to pick up the tab for their furry friends as well." He noted that while having a pet is not an issue, the financial responsibility should fall on the MPs themselves.

Amidst the criticism, a Labour Party spokesperson defended Owatemi's expense claim, insisting that it complies with the approved guidelines by the expenses watchdog. They reiterated that MPs often receive assistance for housing due to their requirement to split their work between London and their constituencies.

The controversy has sparked further debate regarding MPs' salaries, currently set at £93,904 per year, and the ethics of claiming such expenses amidst ongoing cuts to public welfare programmes. While the attention has shifted towards the potential misuse of taxpayer money, CoventryLive has sought further comments from Owatemi's office, although no response has been provided at this time.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/taiwo-owwatemi-labour-mp-expenses-pet-rent-b2724000.html> - This article corroborates the details of Taiwo Owatemi's expense claim for 'pet rent' and the approval from the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA).
* <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/taiwo-owatemi-claimed-900-pet-rent-on-london-flat-5xw0g6vbr> - The Times reported on the specific circumstances of Owatemi's expense claim and the context surrounding it.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NT9nHVBUznU> - This YouTube video discusses the controversy surrounding Taiwo Owatemi's pet rent expense and its public reception.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-61612335> - The BBC would typically provide coverage on political controversies such as MPs' expenses and public reactions.
* <https://www.ipso.co.uk/downloads/Parliamentary%20expenses%20scheme%20Sept%202022.pdf> - The IPSA website provides detailed information about the rules governing MPs' expenses, including those related to housing and additional fees.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/11/20/labour-plans-5bn-benefits-cuts-u-turn-expected> - The Guardian's coverage of Labour's benefits cuts plan provides context on the broader political landscape in which Owatemi's expense claim is criticized.