

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024039504368 Former Labour minister Elliot Morley has become the highest-profile parliamentarian to be jailed over the expenses scandal after he was sentenced to 16 months' imprisonment for claiming more than £30,000 in false mortgage payments. The 58-year-old former MP for Scunthorpe, who had admitted two charges of false accounting, was told he was guilty of "blatant dishonesty" and had "thrown away his good name and good character" in a fraud which ended "a distinguished political career" that spanned more than 20 years. Sentencing him at Southwark crown court, Mr Justice Saunders described Morley's public downfall as "tragic". Morley, who is diabetic and suffers from depression, had earlier wiped away tears as the court heard he had made a "grotesque error of judgment". He could be released on licence in four months. "He had given honourable service to the public, not just to constituents but to the country as whole," said Jim Sturman, QC, defending. He had "discharged onerous ministerial duties for almost a decade". But now he faced "a bleak and very uncertain future, especially at his age". He had also been stripped of a £64,000 resettlement grant he would normally receive on leaving parliament. Peter Wright, for the prosecution, said Morley had "engaged in the wholesale abuse of the expenses system". The court was told that, between May 2004 and November 2007, Morley had "on no fewer than 40 occasions" falsely claimed £800 a month. Parliamentary rules entitled him to claim only mortgage payment interest on his second home. But while his interest varied from £52 per month in 2004 to £5.85 in February 2006, he continued to claim £800 a month. He sought £15,200 in mortgage claims, when he was only entitled to £1,572. Between March 2006 and November 2007, after his mortgage had been repaid, he continued to submit the £800 monthly, claiming £16,800 towards a mortgage that did not exist. He failed to respond to requests for further information from the Fees Office and "evaded giving answers in the knowledge that to give truthful answers would reveal the fraud", said Saunders. When he was eventually challenged, he described it as an "embarrassing and inadvertent oversight" and immediately repaid the money. Morley, who lost his post as environment minister in 2006, stood in the dock as the judge told him that in common with other MPs convicted over expenses, he was guilty of a "serious breach of trust". It was "arguably worse" in his case because he was a minister. The judge was satisfied the "excessive claims were made deliberately and are not explicable even in part by oversight". He allowed a 25% discount of the sentence because of the "courage" it had taken for Morley to enter a guilty plea. He avoided a longer sentence, despite claiming more money than other MPs convicted, because "the degree of sophistication" involved in the fraud was less. The judge also made "some small further reduction" in sentence in light of Morley's public service. He had read "a truly remarkable series of testimonials" from many distinguished people describing him as a "positive force for good"