

The Chancellor's wish to see greater productivity in public services

The Chancellor gave an important lecture recently on the need to raise public sector productivity. He drew attention to the decline in public service productivity by 5.7% compared to pre pandemic, whilst private services had shown a productivity improvement of 1.7% over the same time period.

He raised the issue of the "10,000 public workers in equality, diversity and inclusion" wondering if this was too many. I would add why did the NHS recruit more than 3,500 additional managers over the last three years? How did their appointment coincide with a major decline in productivity and what are they doing about it? How many new forms and requirements have these additional managers imposed on the front line staff? Why do we have duplicate or triplicate management, with management at NHS England levels, management at regional NHS quango level and management at hospital or GP Trust level? Why is there a cadre of senior NHS managers in the Department of Health and another corps of senior managers in NHS England? How many requirements on NHS trusts do these bodies send out each year?

When staff morale is low as it has been in the NHS with strikes and disputes over working conditions as well as about pay it implies the senior management have not listened and led in the way they should. It took senior management a very long time to come up with a manpower plan. Given the dominance of the NHS in the UK health area it is important the NHS does enough to stimulate sufficient education and training of our future health practitioners. That will take time and is not enough by way of response to current troubles. The senior management need to rework rotas, shifts, working practices and conditions with their medical teams to win back the loyalty and support of the staff. There is the danger of losing too many experienced and good people over conditions and job gradings.

The by elections

Knowing some of you will want to talk about the by elections, here is your opportunity. Each of the three parties won one. They showed continuing poor support for Conservatives, no love for a Labour replacement, and anger at Mayor Kahn's anti motorist policies. They show Lib Dem's with very low national poll figures can pull off the odd by election win. A highly subsidised investment in the West country did not impress voters there.

The UK's public sector productivity problem

In an age of digital investment, artificial intelligence, smart phone activity and other leaps forward in productivity from technology, you would expect the UK public services to have had a good 25 years achieving more from its workforce thanks to investment and modernisation. Instead the Office of National Statistics reports that public sector productivity by the end of last year was lower than 25 years ago, at a time when the private sector had continued to show reasonable annual growth. In the whole period 1997-2019 the one fifth of the UK economy that is public services managed growth of just 3.7% in productivity. In 2020 productivity fell 13.3% thanks to lockdowns. In the following two years when the private sector made a full recovery from covid the public sector showed a rise of 7.3% in productivity in 2021 and of 1.9% in 2022, leaving it 5.2% below 2019 levels, and 1.7% below 1997.

UK public services are very labour intensive. We all want plenty of great teachers, good doctors and nurses and well trained uniformed police and defence personnel to take care of us and protect us. Behind them lie large back offices with people giving the front line professionals support. In these areas more can be done by computer and by organising workloads and shifts well. Back up staff can keep more of the records and handle more of the administration to get the best out of the public facing staff. In too many areas management imposes a wide range of duties, checks and forms on staff which can get in the way of undertaking the day job instead of supporting its better performance.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has been put in charge of trying to cut through the complexities and overhead costs to deliver just that amount of administrative support and good planning that a successful service needs. He needs to do a lot to improve management performance especially in the NHS where huge sums of additional spending have been released without a proportionate increase in output. Your thoughts on how this can be achieved would be of interest.

Cutting CO2 , raising more tax revenue and cutting imports – why we should

get out more of our own oil and gas

Yesterday I met some experts on energy and supply chains. They told me that the official figures implying there would be twice as much CO₂ if we import LNG in place of domestic North Sea gas down a pipe was a big underestimate by the government. If you take into account the different levels of emissions in extracting the gas, in compressing it, in transporting it as a cold liquid and then converting it back it could as much as seven times as much CO₂ is produced by all these processes. Those who argue we must keep our own gas in the ground to speed net zero are wrong – it would delay our road as we would have to import the gas we did not produce for the rest of this decade at least. There is no way we will have enough people with electric heating or electric cars by 2030 or nearly enough grid capacity to power them to do without much of the oil and gas we currently need to stay warm and to get about.

The investment task to replace all the current oil and gas based activities and put in enough reliable electrical power is colossal. People wanting to put in new windfarms are being told there is a queue into the next decade to get access to grid to carry extra renewable power to users at the times when renewable would be available. The Grid is only just considering how to expand, which it would need to do by a factor of 5 or more by 2050 to take out our current dependence on gas heating, gas industrial processes, and petrol, diesel and aviation spirit for transport. It would also need much enhanced electrical cable capacity under every street to provide enough power to each electrically heated home with an electric car to recharge.

The UK needs to improve our energy security and self sufficiency. Being reliant on imports by pipe and wire from a continent short of energy and recovering from the need to end its dependence on Russian fossil fuels, we could run out of energy at crucial times. We always used to be self sufficient. We have a good mixture of natural resources to provide more oil and gas, wind power, nuclear and the rest we will need. To have a successful economy with well paid jobs we need more reliable and affordable power. Letting the market work with less interruption would help bring this about mainly with private sector investment capital.

Bohunt School 6 th form

Conservative Councillors write about the failure to provide the 6th form at Bohunt on time

Bohunt Sixth form expansion delayed again...

In March 2022 following a long public campaign by residents of Finchampstead

Wokingham Borough Council reached a deal with the Bohunt Trust to expand the educational provision at Bohunt School. Two petitions were raised by local residents with well over 1400 signatures and the campaign was supported by local conservative cllrs as well as the local MP James Sunderland. This agreement was that WBC and Bohunt would fund the provision of a brand new 6th form facility, additional year 7 places and send provision. This new facility was scheduled to open in September 2023 giving much needed provision for an additional 200 – 300 pupils

In May 2022 following the local elections the Liberal Democrats took control of Wokingham Council. In public they were keen to reassure residents they still planned to proceed with expansion at Bohunt however the lack of any meaningful progress on the ground made it clear that all was not well. Costs had risen on the building programme and the crucial stumbling block was Wokingham Borough Council insisting on a new scope and refusing to part fund its share. 14 months after the Liberals took control of the council there is still no agreement on funding and without movement from Wokingham Borough Council no chance of this moving forwards

We have been advised that even if funding was agreed today there is little chance of a new building being ready by September 2024 due to logistical issues of construction and hiring the relevant staff. The council have now formally admitted the sixth form will not open (as they promised at the may 2023 local elections) in September 2023. It is now time for them to be honest and commit publicly to fund this expansion rather than the endless misleading statements about commitment with no funding

We are very dissapointed that WBC continues to fail to honour the promises it gave to the Finchampstead and Aborfield community in March 2022. It is wrong that children from across the south of the borough face long journeys out of borough at Farnborough or to the north of wokingham for 6th form provision because there is no facility nearby. It is wrong that WBC is building 2 new send schools on green fields at Rooks Nest when alternative provision could have been provided earlier and at less cost to the taxpayer at Bohunt. It is wrong that WBC is walking away from additional year 7 provision at Bohunt meaning children from Finchampstead face long journeys across wokingham every day because the capacity at bohunt is full. The catchment area at bohunt gets smaller year by year. Bohunt is a successful and well loved school. WBC should be supporting and developing successful schools in the borough. Children in the south of the borough are being treated like second class citizens and this is not acceptable. The south is forced to take all the housing but gets no infrastructure – this is wrong

We remain fully committed to seeing the 6th form, extra year 7 and send provision at Bohunt and will continue to campaign for this important facility to be provided

Cllr Charles Margetts, Cllr Rebecca Margetts, Cllr Peter Harper and George Evans former Conservative candidate for Barkham |)