

Quality and efficiency are allies, not enemies

There is still plenty of work to do to raise efficiency and quality in various public services. Some in the public sector seem to think efficiency means cuts, and cuts means lower quality. That is not the way to do it. Doing things efficiently should mean doing them better.

If you get something right first time you avoid the costs of changing and remedying, or the even bigger costs of having to apologise and compensate if the good or service has gone out in bad shape. If you harness more machine and computing power to a good programme design you can improve accuracy and quality whilst speeding up the process and cutting its cost. Modern digital technology offers huge scope to both raise quality and cut costs if done well. It also offers new ways to mess things up and to make life more difficult for the consumer.

Let's take the case of NHS supplies. A good system would cut down stockholding of drugs and specialised food products in the system, reducing waste from poor holding and handling, and from items going out of date. More just in time deliveries to hospitals, surgeries and users would reduce the amount of medicine or specialist food that is tipped away as unwanted when a patient recovers. Some hospitals still do not have computer controlled drug dispensing, with suitable controls over what is administered, when and in what quantities. Doing it through a drugs trolley with staff members reading the notes and then fidnign the medicine leaves more scope for error than a system based on a patients computer record and computerised handling of the required drugs. I have talked before about the return and reuse of hardware like wheelchairs, crutches and other aids.

There is the direction and use of manpower. Public service personnel are crucial to successful public services. Their dedication and professional skill are the essence of much of it. Not only do they need proper computer and machine back up to do their jobs, but they also need intelligent direction of effort by management who see where they are needed and can make their best input. Some managers do this well, but there needs to be a constant effort to ensure personnel are well deployed. I have seen cases where two health visitors have turned up to an elderly person facing a problem, only to discover neither of them could resolve the query. Home visits are important but are expensive, so it is crucial the preparation for them directs the right manpower to the right home to sort the issue.

The benefits of Brexit

The Prime Minister tells us the government is committed to Brexit and wishes to deliver the benefits it can bring. That is good news.

I look forward to early news from the government on the following.

First, I want to know how all the money saved is going to be spent, and a sense of urgency in getting us out of financial commitments as soon as possible. I have set out my own suggestions for increased spending on health, social care and other priorities. Spending that money at home gives a 0.6% GDP boost and saves us a lot of money on our balance of payments deficit.

Second, I want to see our new fishing policy as we become an independent coastal state. We need a policy that is kinder to our fish and our fishermen, and which lands more the fish caught in the UK for UK consumption.

Third, I want to see a new migration and borders policy which is fair between EU and non EU migrants, and assists the government in hitting its targets for levels of migration.

Fourth, I want to see the Trade Department roll over the current EU trade agreements with other countries into UK agreements and make good progress on negotiating good agreements with more of the 90% of the non EU world that does not have a trade agreement with the EU. I want the UK to offer reduced tariffs and barriers to developing countries in return for more market access for ourselves.

Fifth I want to see tax cuts in areas where we cannot cut taxes at the moment, including the abolition of VAT on green products and domestic fuel.

Sixth I want to hear what our global agenda will be as we regain our vote and voice on a number of important international bodies.

Postings to this site

I have been extremely busy for the last two days with a lot of activity in the Commons and many votes to attend to.

I am currently unable to handle the volume of postings from some people, and the length of many postings. Where people have posted many and long postings I am deleting some to reduce the backlog. Some people do get away with a lot of short postings, because I moderate the short ones first. I do not delete based on whether they are pro or anti. I do delete posts that make unfair or unproven allegations against anyone, whatever their politics.

In the customs doldrums – again

The House of Commons keeps returning to the issue of customs. Yesterday the Opposition decided to spend virtually the whole day once again rehearsing the same old arguments.

Labour presented its latest version of its policy. Apparently they want to be in a customs union with the EU but not in The Customs Union the EU already has. They want a “strong single market deal based on shared regulations and shared institutions” which sounds much like staying in The single market, but assume “freedom of movement will end”. Gone are all the fine words of the Labour Manifesto setting out how the UK will have a distinctive independent trade policy after Brexit. It is difficult to see how this latest view would ever be negotiable with an Institution which has always said belonging to the customs union and single market comes with the four freedoms attached, including freedom of movement. It also requires payment of budget contributions and acceptance of the European Court’s supremacy. It also led to a massive Labour rebellion on one of the votes.

Why has Labour changed its stance from the General Election, which was to back Brexit and set out on an independent path? We were told yesterday again that they are worried that manufacturers running just in time systems in the UK will not be able to import parts from the continent if we leave. How bizarre! UK manufacturers runs complex supply chains with just in time deliveries at the moment using parts from outside the EU, and that works fine! The continental suppliers would have every incentive to carry on supplying in time, as their jobs and income depend on it. Why do Remain MPs now pretend we did not know we were voting to leave the single market and customs union, when both official campaigns in the referendum told us just that and actually agreed on this point!

Meanwhile the government seeks to negotiate smooth border arrangements and sensible customs arrangements. It would be a good idea for the UK to offer tariff free trade and see if the EU does want that or not. Some wrongly say they have not yet invented the computer systems to handle customs charges without stopping trucks at borders and working it out on a calculator there and then. They need to go and visit a large trucking firm and see that there are already smooth ways of paying customs dues on line with electronic filings which we and the rest of the EU use for the non EU trade which does attract customs dues.

Walk outs from Parliament over the EU

The SNP walk out today over an EU debate reminded some MPs of the previous walk out by Nick Clegg for the Liberal Democrats in February 2008. Then Speaker Martin refused to allow debate on one of their amendments which wanted an In/Out referendum on the EU. As Nick Clegg said "It is time to give the British people a real referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union" . That idea did not go too well for him or his party. I still treasure the yellow leaflet they sent out telling me it was vital the "British people have a say in a real referendum".