

Productivity

The government was able to report a reasonable increase in productivity in the third quarter of 2017 with a 0.9% gain in the three months, with similar advances in both services and industry. The Treasury is keen to advance productivity as a means of promoting higher real incomes and improving UK competitiveness in world markets.

One of the areas of the economy that has struggled to make productivity improvements is the public sector. Whilst there is a good reason to want good staffing ratios for front line services like healthcare and teaching, there are many back office functions and other services where the government can improve quality and lower cost by adopting more productive ways of working. Offering more computing power to perform clerical functions, speeding and cheapening communication with users by going digital, adopting the internet for a wide variety of productivity enhancing improvements are the way forward.

Some of it requires policy change. The introduction of Universal Credit is partially designed to reduce the number of benefits that require separate application and calculation, whilst ensuring decent support for those who need it. The Treasury could reduce the costs of tax collection by streamlining and simplifying taxes.

Some of it requires careful negotiation with staff. The aim should be to help people work smarter and to be better paid as a result. Given the need for more staff in many areas of the public sector, productivity raising improvements do not require reducing the number of jobs overall, but ensuring the jobs are better and achieving more. Some technology will not be popular with workforces, as we have seen with more automation on trains.

Today I am inviting you to write in with your suggestions for ways public service could be improved through the adoption of new technology. Well done it can raise service standards for users, reduce costs for taxpayers, and provide better paid and more worthwhile jobs for those in the public sector adopting the new ways of delivering.

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Unlike this Government, Labour is committed to supporting renewable energy projects – Alan Whitehead

Alan Whitehead MP, Labour's Shadow Energy and Climate Change Minister, commenting on the Governments response to the unabated coal closure consultation, said:

“While Labour supports the phased removal of coal from the system by 2025, unfortunately, this consultation leaves open a number of loopholes that could hinder the process.

“The Government's lacklustre support for renewables and scrapping of a number of green schemes has left it on course to miss its own climate targets. Similarly, their decision to massively reduce the levels of funding for carbon capture and storage, which would help a genuinely inclusive transition, is disappointing.

“Unlike this Government, Labour is committed to supporting future renewable energy projects to build the clean economy of the future.”

News story: Royal Navy work with Australians on massive drug bust

Under the command of Combined Task Force (CTF)150, Royal Fleet Auxiliary

(RFA) Fort Rosalie's Royal Navy Sea King Mark 7 helicopter spotted a suspicious boat while flying over the Arabian Sea, off the coast of Oman, this week.

Australian ship HMAS Warramunga – working with Fort Rosalie as part of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) – then intercepted it and found more than 3.5 tonnes of illicit substances, valued at £105million.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Thanks to the skill and professionalism of Britain's Armed Forces, working with key allies like the Australians, we are keeping our citizens safe by tackling the evil international drugs trade that funds terrorism.

I am incredibly grateful that we have the best service men and women in the world who always go the extra mile, whether they are protecting us from harm or saving precious wildlife like this family of turtles.

The Flight Commander, Lieutenant Commander Dan Breward Royal Navy said:

We're delighted to have been able to contribute to CTF 150's missions within the joint operations area. There was a massive effort from all parties involved from both Fort Rosalie and, ultimately, Warramunga.

As long as drugs and weapons continue to be trafficked to aid terrorism, we will be here with the coalition members to stop them; we have a track record that we aim to build upon.

In addition to the huge haul, RFA Fort Rosalie was also able to rescue three young Loggerhead Turtles that were caught in a huge mass of fishing nets drifting through the water. The baby turtles were freed by some delicate cutting from the team.

The Navigator, Second Officer Thorsten Brabetz, said:

It was not what we expected to find when we investigated the floats. It was great to be able to save the turtles and release them back into the sea. It was a real feel good moment for the boats crew and the entire ship.

In 2017, CMF ships have seized a total of 22.67 tonnes of narcotics. Boarding, search and seizure operations at sea require a persistent and methodical approach by CMF sailors and marines.

[Influential committee backs Coffee Cup Charge](#)

MPs on the Environmental Audit Committee have published a report backing Liberal Democrat calls for a charge on disposable coffee cups.

The Committee has called on the Government to introduce a 25p levy on disposable coffee cups and a target to ensure they are all recycled by 2023.

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