

Desultory debate about public services

Public sector service productivity has collapsed 7.5% 2020-23. This is without precedent and means taxpayers need to pay more than £30bn a year extra for their services, with all the extra costs of inflation on top of that. No wonder public spending is so high.

In an extreme case the Post Office, a nationalised industry, admits it wrongly prosecuted hundreds of its own staff and took money from them for losses they had not made. 25 years on from the start of these errors it has still not even repaid the money it wrongly took from them in many cases, let alone paid them the compensation they are due.

In some NHS hospitals there have been bad cases of failure to provide essential care in the form of drinks, food and help to the bathroom. There have been deaths that should not have occurred. In the worst case a nurse murdered babies in the care of her ward.

In some areas schools fail to provide a decent education for young people and see too many youths give up or drop out of school with no qualifications. The NHS waiting lists are very long, but apparently the large numbers of administrators cannot vouch there is no double counting, wrongful recording or people on the lists who no longer need a consultation or treatment

Ask the Opposition parties about this and they usually say it is all down to a lack of money. This is despite record levels of funding and big recruitment drives for extra staff. Where the bad news comes from devolved government in Wales and Scotland, or from Labour and Lib Dem Councils they still usually claim it is a lack of funding and demand bigger increases from government.

Many of the things that are wrong including the fall in productivity come down to bad management. A growing army of CEOs and top management on six figure packages has allowed productivity to fall badly, and in some cases has allowed standards and quality to drop alarmingly. In future blogs I will look at the duties and powers of political leaders and of the senior executives to put this right. What should we expect of public sector CEOs?