

Speech: Dormant Assets Commission report launch

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, and let me begin by thanking Nick and the Dormant Assets Commission for inviting me to speak today.

I'm extremely grateful to you and your superb team for all the work you have done over the past year. You have written a very impressive and detailed report – but I'm afraid you will all have to wait a little longer for my formal response. I will need to study its detail very carefully.

As you may be aware, this Government is committed to building a shared society, where everyone has the opportunity to get on in life, no matter who they are or where they come from.

We want the benefits of economic success to be felt by everyone, not just the privileged few. As Minister for Civil Society, the Prime Minister's vision is central to everything I do. It is my mission to ensure we make a difference and improve peoples' daily lives.

I believe that our approach to dormant assets in this country is an outstanding example of the Prime Minister's vision for a shared society. Government, business and the voluntary sector working together to make society work that little bit better for everyone. And the results of this collaborative approach have been impressive.

The existing dormant assets scheme was launched in 2011 to encourage banks and building societies to identify dormant accounts. After identification, they have to make all reasonable efforts to reunite assets with their owners.

Only after this and where there was a surplus, should any money be distributed for the benefit of good causes throughout the UK.

Now, it has been a great success so far. More customers have been reunited with their money, and 360 million pounds has been distributed for the benefit of good causes, with more to come.

In England, this money has been used through social investment to establish Big Society Capital, the world's leading social investment bank, and I'm pleased to see Cliff Prior in the audience today. BSC has matched 300 million pounds of reclaimed funds with 500 million pounds of additional investment into activities with a social purpose.

I have seen for myself the impact this has had on communities. Two projects I have visited, Think Forward in North East London and Reconnections in Worcestershire, are both social impact bonds that were funded by Big Society Capital. One was specifically for young people in London and the other the elderly in Worcestershire – yet without this source of money, they might have struggled to find the funding to start these projects.

Encouraged by this success, last year I established an independent Commission on Dormant Assets. It was asked to consider how we might improve the current scheme to include a wider range of dormant assets, beyond banks and building societies, and I asked Nick to be its Chairman.

The Commission has since identified a potential two billion pounds in assets that at the moment are simply gathering dust in dormant accounts, when they could either be reunited with their rightful owner or used to change millions of lives across the country.

Now as you'll all appreciate, a broader scheme cannot be set up overnight. Getting a new dormant assets scheme in place is a big task and it's going to take time. And as I said earlier, I will need to consider this report carefully before broadening the current scope of activities.

I also want to carry out a wider public consultation to allow everyone with an interest to feed in their views. So there's a lot of work ahead of us. But thanks to the Commission, we have a report and its clear advice on the next steps we might take to take this forward.

I will also continue to think creatively about how the existing scheme can be improved, so even more money is released and even more organisations can benefit from the funding.

But Government really can't do this on its own. If we're going to make a success of an expanded dormant assets scheme, then the partnership of those represented here today will continue to be absolutely essential.

So, I look forward to working with you – financial services companies, consumer groups, charities, communities and individuals across the country.

Together we must ensure we put in place a scheme that really delivers for good causes; that continues to protect consumers and reunites owners with their assets wherever it's possible to do so.

More than anything, I want to see us transform the provision of social investment and support of good causes here in the United Kingdom. This could then make a real and lasting difference to the lives of the people in our country who need our help the most.

Reuniting dormant assets with their owners, while using any surplus to benefit good causes, is exactly what a decent and caring Government should be doing.

Positive action from the State is bringing together Government, business and the third sector, working together for the benefit of taxpayers, consumers and beneficiaries.

So I am very grateful to the Commission for all its hard work over the past twelve months to unearth these new resources, helping our charities and voluntary groups to become more sustainable and independent. This report will shape and inform how we make best use of dormant assets in the years ahead.

I will now hand over to Nick, who can talk more about the work of the Commission and its main findings and recommendations.

Thank you.

ENDS