

Spending money with reform

Some write in to tell me increased spending needs to be accompanied by reform to ensure better quality and efficiency in delivery of the services provided. I agree.

Let's take the case of schools spending. The government is promoting Free Schools. They have greater freedoms over the curriculum, teacher recruitment and rewards, and management. They can vary the school day and the length of terms. They receive their money direct from central government, removing the Council's involvement and costs. 30% of these schools are rated outstanding, compared to a 20% level for all schools.

The government plans to drive forward its schools reforms, encouraging more free schools and ensuring more of the money available in the education budget gets to the schools where a Local Education Authority is still involved.

I wonder what is the point of Local Enterprise partnerships. They involve themselves in parts of the transport and training budgets in particular, but there is overlap with Councils who make local transport decisions and central government responsible for the national networks. There is an argument for having just two levels of decision making on budgets, under elected supervision, at central and local government levels.

The costs of government can be reduced. The preparations for Brexit can be achieved more cheaply. We need no more wasteful preparations for Brexits that Parliament blocks nor over the top preparations for eventualities that are not going to take place. Whitehall was gripped with unrealistic pessimism which cost us needless spending.

Government should stop borrowings by Councils that want to acquire portfolios of commercial properties that they buy off the private sector outside their areas. We do not need Councils to become portfolio investors, often buying shops the private sector thinks will fall in value. There may be a case for Councils being involved in new property development investments in their own area, but again there need to be controls over the extent and the wisdom of the investment.