

Spending priorities

The government is conducting a spending review, to come up with 3 year spending plans from 2019-2020 until 2021-2. They have already announced substantial increases for the NHS budget and are currently consulting on what other changes should be made.

It is important that priority areas like the NHS, schools and social care receive increases to meet demand and costs. It is also important that action is taken to offset some of these increases through spending changes elsewhere, to avoid tax rate rises and to keep borrowing to low levels.

Leaving the EU without signing the Withdrawal Agreement would be a good start to the spending review, giving the government the best part of £39bn over two years to allocate to other priorities. Cancelling HS2 would also free considerable sums of capital, allowing spending on increasing rail capacity substantially to the Midlands and the North by investing in smart signalling and leaving money over for other purposes. If the government does not wish to revisit HS2, it could at least examine how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Network Rail spending and borrowing which remain at high levels.

The government should also review its spending on Overseas Aid. More of the budget should be allocated to the first year costs of migrants coming to the UK, as the rules allow. More should be used to construct the ships we need to provide humanitarian aid and support in disaster torn areas. This would relieve those budgets. This Parliament would not want to repeal the 0.7% Aid target so it is important to look at how it is spent.

Where budgets are being increased the government needs to ensure that the extra money is being routed into improving the volume and quality of service being provided. The departments need to bid for the extra money with costed plans for improvement. In the case of social care the money needs to go into more provision for social care support for individuals in their own homes, and into providing more good quality care home places. In the NHS there needs to be an expansion of capacity for the GP service and for the hospital service, to cut waiting times and to make the NHS more accessible to users.

What would your priorities be, both for more spending, and for reductions?