

Wokingham gets more money per head than neighbours according to IFS

I have had a few emails from constituents repeating Lib Dem claims that Wokingham gets little or no government funding and is short of money to spend.

The IFS has recently published a study of spending per head on five main service areas, including local government and schools. This combines government grants and local revenues.

The table beneath shows Wokingham in second place after West Berkshire amongst local areas:

Place	Schools per head	Local government per head
West Berkshire	£941 £1822	£881
Wokingham	£892 £1736	£844
Bracknell	£ 879 £1662	£783
Reading	£831 £1634	£803
Hampshire	£797 £1593	£796
Windsor and M	£873 £1555	£682

These figures show that Wokingham is not treated badly or without money in the way the council has been saying. I have made the case for better funding for social services and schools in Wokingham and am pleased to see the government has increased the financial support it offers.

Some questions on carbon accounting

In order to close the gap with net zero ambitions governments and companies pursuing this agenda need to revise the way they account for it. Here are some questions they need to answer.

1. As China, Russia, India produce more than 40% of the world's CO₂ output and their output is still growing, how do we get to the 2030 and 2035 targets? What actions are being taken to get the largest and fastest growing outputs by these countries to be reined in?

2. Why does the system assume electric vehicles are a win for less CO₂? Will the figures include the fact that many EVs are being recharged with electricity that may come from more fossil fuel than renewable generation? What allowance is made for all the CO₂ produced in mining and smelting the raw materials for an EV and its battery? And for total assembly and delivery? How many miles does an EV have to travel before it generates less CO₂ than carrying on with an older ICE vehicle, assuming it can get 100% renewable electricity or putting in accurate figures for the CO₂ content of the electricity likely to be used.

3. Why does the accounting system credit a country with lower CO₂ because it has closed down fossil fuel based activities, only to import the products needed? This will usually raise world CO₂ by the amount of extra transport involved.

4. When attributing success to more renewables shouldn't you need to also factor in the extra costs and extra CO₂ from the standby fossil fuel generation needed to prevent black out when the wind drops?

5. What will be the CO₂ impact of needing to put in so much more grid capacity and cable to allow a major switch from gas to electricity?

6. When calculating the CO₂ impact of rail travel it is important to include connecting travel by road vehicle and do a whole journey calculation. It is also important to use a realistic mix of electric and diesel trains and allow for times in stations with engines running.

Nationalised roads

Our road system is badly run, delivering a poor service to all the people struggling to get to work, to drop children off at school and getting to the shops. It lets down delivery drivers, large trucks bringing essential supplies and business vehicles carrying people to do work in our homes and commercial premises.

It is a typical nationalised monopoly. It believes in keeping us short of roadspace on the bizarre grounds that if they built more roads we would use them more. Any normal business is delighted to expand when it hits on a popular product or service.

The highways authorities take special delight in making life as difficult as possible for their tax paying customers. They regularly restrict access,

narrow lanes, increase junction delays and change rules on road use. They compound this by setting traps to get more fines revenue out of complex and changing regulations.

They fail to maintain the surfaces of many roads, letting potholes grow until more extensive and expensive repairs are needed. The state grossly overcharges for use of the roads, collecting far more in motoring taxes than it defrays in road costs.

They insist on putting cables and pipes under the middle of main road requiring digging up the road every time a repair, replacement or increase of facility is needed.

Why? We depend on the roads for so much of our lifestyle.

Bossiness

The governing elites are usually unpopular. They may have to make unpopular decisions. There will always be some who think they tax too much and others who think they give away too little.

The current governing elites of the EU are particularly unpopular. So are those officials, lawyers and other senior people in UK institutions that have a similar world view to their EU friends and opposite numbers. One of the reasons is the overarching bossiness, the we know best attitudes they strike on so many crucial matters.

There is first the discourse. They wish to talk about the road to net zero, the need to be generous to migrants, the need to follow international Agreements and Treaties, the need to suppress or defeat populist movements. Many in the public want their concerns to be heard. How do I get a better job? How do I pay the energy bills? When can I afford a home of my own? Am I allowed to fly abroad? Can I use my car or van to get around without more charges and barriers?

The refusal of the elites to take many of the popular issues seriously adds to the tensions. The populists cry humbug when they see elite players flying round the world to green conferences, staying at air conditioned hotels and ordering the best meat on the menu whilst telling the rest of us to do none of the above. The elites shout back that the people must understand the priority of cutting carbon dioxide, the need to accept dearer energy and more fossil fuel taxes to get there. They explain their carefully contrived legal framework which turns out to thwart populist ideas of how to improve more voters lives.

As a result of this process most of the major governing and opposition parties in the EU of the late last century have been destroyed or have shrunk

in the face of populist movements of the right and left. The splintering of their votes reveals an inner unhappiness by electors.

Banks, ticket offices, cash and service

Some large companies like banks seem intent on getting as out of touch with many customers as nationalised concerns do. Just as the railway faces a hail of criticism for wanting to close its ticket offices, so the banks are intensifying their closure of branches.

The railways say they will redeploy the staff to be generally helpful around the station. They can be very helpful in a ticket and information office where they have a chair to sit on, computer access to all the details of timetables, travel options and fares and online knowledge of the state of play on the trains at or coming to their station. A staff member on the move around the platform has less easy access to the information, and may be more difficult to find for a worried traveller.

The banks do not promise to redeploy their staff. They want us all to spend our time wrestling with their on line systems which have to balance difficulty of access to make them secure with feasibility of access so we can move our money around. Security is much less of an issue if you go regularly to your local branch to bank, as they get to know you. Your face is your identity. Faced with the narrow systems of the computer you have to choose answers the computer has been taught rather than being able to describe what you want to do and get help from the bank. For commonplace transactions this usually works, but there are often glitches in the software. My bank's computer often fails to recognise people I wish to pay from past payments so you have to go through the new payment process each time.⁷

Government is now requiring banks to ensure we can all have access to cash from nearby machines. This is a minimal response to the retreat of the banks from most personal contact with their customers. Whilst most of us conduct most of our transactions electronically by card and by bank transfer there remain a number of needs for cash. Cash is a reliable resort when machines or the internet goes down. Cash is often quicker and more sensible for smaller transactions. You can always offer cash even if your phone has run out of battery or the internet coverage has gone down or outdoors if the sun is shining so you cannot easily read a phone screen. No-one should be made to use electronic money if they do not want to.

It is a strange modern wish of some large institutions to want to distance themselves from customers, to cut themselves off from the flow of information and social contact which personal service brings. It breeds resentment amongst customers, sometimes causes greater costs and delays and allows some

to claim there is a big plot to make us go cashless so the government will be more in charge of our lives.