

Civil service working

The government is asking the question again, should more of the civil service work outside London? It is a good time to review this, given the larger changes being discussed about the balance to be struck between working in an office and working from home.

The case for more civil servants in future working away from the capital is based on the proposition that it would be fairer to spend more of the pay bill around the country, and better for taxpayers to employ fewer people in very expensive central London accommodation. Change of course should be carried out at a pace and in a manner which respects the needs of existing staff who have based their lives around the current pattern of office provision. The large size of the service and the turnover of staff means there is considerable scope for change.

There is also a case for recognising the wish of many to have more time working from home to save the travel cost and time it takes to get into big cities, especially London. The modern computer allows people to be set up with good means of carrying out many tasks. Some worry that some might abuse the privilege and not work as much as they do when supervised in an office. Modern computers can be tougher managers than a person in the office, as they know exactly how many emails a person has done, how many page views they have managed, how long they have been active on their machine. The civil service could move more towards an output oriented approach to working. Sitting for 40 hours in an office is not a particularly useful skill unless you are there to provide cover for client and customer enquiries. Getting specified work done is.

The number of civil servants who need to be in central London is quite limited. Minister's private offices can best support the Minister in person. Senior officials who mainly advise Ministers might well find it more convenient to be in the heritage buildings at the core of the central London public estate. Any Central London based public service of course needs to be there. Otherwise many officials can be based around the country, with good computer, email and video conference links to the centre.

There is considerable scope for a better balance around the country, with economies on office costs. The government can also now consider how much work can be done without an office at all.

Housing costs

Many people who rent would prefer to own their own home but cannot afford to. Anyone who owns a home is free to rent if they wish, but most do not want to

do so.

Over the long term owning is cheaper than renting. Paying the interest and making the repayments of a 20 or 25 year mortgage may be a bit dearer than renting a similar property. After the mortgage is repaid there are no rent or mortgage payments for the rest of your life. It becomes a much cheaper option, even allowing for the high Council taxes and the repair bills which will still catch you. Best still, the time of least cost is your retirement after you have paid off the mortgage. If you rent the period of highest rents will be in your old age, as house rents trend remorselessly upwards.

Encouraging and helping people to own their own home makes sense for the government too. If more people own their own home the government does not have to spend so much on building and owning extra homes for rent. Part of the large state debt is a massive collective mortgage on a big estate of Council houses and debts to finance grants and loans to Housing Associations to own property. During the heydays of Council house sales some of the receipts went to reduce Council and therefore wider state debt, and some went to build new homes.

Home owners have greater freedoms to improve and decorate their homes as they please. As the value of the property rises, as it often has in the past, so the family have an appreciating asset. They can borrow against it to set up a business or meet other one off costs or investments.

The government wishes to expand home ownership. It is worth doing so . It chimes with the wishes of many people, builds prosperity and can lead on to reduced state debts. State subsidised housing is a dear way of providing homes when many of the tenants would prefer help to buy anyway. Clearing more of the costs and obstacles to home ownership should be a priority. Recent Stamp duty reductions are a good start.

Free trade and national security

As a free trader I think it is usually a good idea to specialise and then to buy in the goods and services you do not produce yourself. All individuals practise this, relying on the supermarket for our food and the power company for our electricity. They are better at those, with economies of scale, whilst we earn a living as best we can.

It can be true for many things for a nation . There are, however, some obvious limits. It would not be a good idea to rely for your defence on importing war supplies when you need them from countries that may be on a different side in a conflict. It is probably a good idea to produce enough food at home so we do not starve should there be some major disruption of global trade.

The UK needs to reassess its national resilience and ask if it has become too dependent on the goodwill of foreigners to supply many of the things we need. Some things ought to be easier to supply from local sources. Water, quarried stone, many other building materials, timber and energy are heavy and expensive to move around, so going more local could make economic sense.

How would you arrange our affairs so we have more of the essential capabilities and technologies an advanced nation needs?

I have written to the government proposing an energy policy that puts self sufficiency at its core. I will take up the issue of more home grown trees leading to more home grown timber, as the government is already committed to the costs of more trees. We need to turn this into a sustainable resource cutting the need to import substantially.

Importing bottled water looks like a bad idea environmentally as well as Economically, so where are the U.K. entrepreneurs who can win the battle of the bottled waters?

The U.K. government controls a lot of economic activity which gives it power as a buyer to organise competitive procurement that can stimulate U.K. activity in the chosen areas. It needs to learn from the NHS experience with procuring protective clothing, drugs, and medical equipment in the pandemic. It can doubtless improve on its experience then. It relied too much on possible foreign supplies which let it down, and ended up paying expensively for more domestic output in a hurry. Longer term planning and working with suppliers who can match world prices for sustained orders is required.

[New primary school for Wokingham](#)

I have received this letter from the Department for Education:

Dear Sir John Redwood

Statement of Intent for a new primary free school in Wokingham Town (Matthews Green area), Wokingham

I am writing to inform you that The Keys Academy Trust has been given Secretary of State approval to sponsor the new free school, which is proposed to open from September 2022.

Wokingham invited proposals from potential sponsors under section 6A (the 'free school presumption') of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (referred to as 'the Act'). Following the local authority's assessment of the proposals received, the Secretary of State has agreed, in principle, that sponsorship of the new free school be awarded to The Keys Academy Trust.

With effect from May 2015, all new schools established under s6a of the Act have been classified as free schools. The school is not required to use the term 'free school' in its name, in line with practice within the department's centrally managed free schools programme.

Letters have also been sent to the DCS of Wokingham and The Keys Academy Trust informing them of the decision.

Yours sincerely

Dame Kate Dethridge

Regional Schools Commissioner, North West London and South Central

[The pound rises to \\$1.30](#)

We hear a no deal exit is still likely, with the UK rightly declining to make the unreasonable concessions the EU wants. All those Remain commentators need to explain the current strength of the pound against the world's main reserve currency, as they are ever ready to blame Brexit when the dollar is strong.