

## How productive are MPs?

Several correspondents of this blog, and others in the public debate, have rushed to raise the issue of how productive are MPs in response to any of us who highlight the general issue of public sector productivity. It is a fair question. MPs who want a more productive- and better paid – public sector do need to consider their own contribution. The total cost of MPs is tiny in relation to public sector output, but those who would lead must expect more scrutiny and should be expected to lead by example.

It was this issue which led David Cameron to make the cost of politics an issue in government. It led to the decision to back a reduction in the number of MPs. The current plan is to remove 50 out of 650, offering a 7.7% increase in labour productivity. The question for this Parliament is will the other parties now agree to this, as Conservatives still want to put through this reform.

Those of us who want England to be better represented can also do this in a way which does not add to the bills for political government. The twin hatted MP who is both a UK and an English MPs would be a lower cost more productive model than the one adopted in Scotland.

It is true that in recent years the number of peers has continued to expand. Peers are only paid if they turn up, so it is not quite as bad as it looks, but few can deny the Upper House is now overmanned. There are various proposals for dealing with this. A few are now in effect. Peers can now retire and are encouraged to do so. We need to consider more steps to limit numbers. It is mainly up to the Lords to decide what they think is best. Options include a use it or lose it rule, a fixed single term of appointment, or a high overall retirement age. It is easiest to bring in these changes by giving newly appointed peers different contracts with retirement built in at an appropriate future date in the light of each individual's circumstances. More retirements could be encouraged by letting people keep their courtesy titles without rights to sit in the Lords and vote.

The other main way political government can raise its productivity is by controlling numbers and costs in MPs offices. I choose to do all my own research, article and blog writing and speech making myself without researchers and writers working for me. Other MPs have other ways of limiting their demands on additional staff and costs. All MPs interested in raising public sector productivity should of course review what they can do within their own very small part of the public sector by way of example.

---

# Berkshire's superfast broadband coverage

I have received this news release from West Berkshire Council regarding Berkshire superfast broadband coverage:

Superfast Berkshire, a multi-million pound programme to deliver access to high speed broadband throughout Berkshire has entered its final phase.

The programme initiative was started in 2011, under the umbrella of the Government's (Broadband Delivery UK) national programme, set out to deliver superfast broadband to areas not serviced by the commercial plans of the private sector. Over the past five years the programme has driven superfast broadband coverage across the county from 87% to 95% under Phases 1 & 2. Contracts have just been awarded to BT and Gigaclear under a third phase which is now under way and will see superfast coverage extended to more than 99.5% over the next 2 years. This will make Berkshire one of the best served counties for superfast broadband across the UK, benefiting residents and businesses alike.

Contracts for the third phase have been signed with BT to extend coverage to 7,400 urban premises and Gigaclear to extend coverage to 6,100 rural premises. Not only is this good news at a county level, each of the 6 Berkshire districts will also achieve coverage of over 99%, providing much more equitable access for all areas of the county, a key objective of the phase 3 procurement. However, the work doesn't stop there as Superfast Berkshire working with BT, Gigaclear and other suppliers under their commercial plans strive to hit the magic 100% target of total coverage for Berkshire.

In total more than £40m will have been invested in the Superfast Berkshire programme by both the private and public sector to deliver superfast broadband. This includes around £29.3m from partners BT, Gigaclear and Call Flow Solutions, £5.5m from Berkshire local authorities & Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership and £5.2m from national government (BDUK).

Superfast Berkshire has also actively engaged with broadband market providers since the start of the programme to encourage expansion of their commercial plans, allowing public sector funds to be used where they are most needed. This has also given consumers more choice where superfast provision already existed or overlaps.

Berkshire has seen the demand for faster and faster broadband speeds with more and more businesses, people working from home and normal family activity all with increasing numbers of applications relying on fast internet access. Take-up of superfast broadband products delivered under phase one has risen to over 47% so far (the third highest across the UK) and take-up under phase two is also starting to climb.

---

## What the German car industry wants

I read that some in the German car industry think a long transition for the UK leaving is a good idea. This is presumably because they don't fancy 10% tariffs on their large exports to the UK.

I gave good news for them. The UK is happy to offer them continued tariff free as part of a clean Brexit in March 2019. Were we to leave under WTO rules the German industry would of course still have its excellent factories in the UK. It would need them even more as it could make product for the UK market tariff free here in the UK, and would be most welcome to do so.

---

## Energy use by the public sector

Many people in the public sector are much exercised by climate change ideas. I myself am all in favour of energy efficiency and cutting fuel bills without cutting standards of heating and lighting. The public sector could do much more to offer a lead in these matters.

Highways authorities squander a lot of power on traffic light sets that could be replaced with roundabouts, and on all night street lights in places where they could be safely switched off at midnight owing to a lack of pedestrians after that time. Railway companies keep train engines running for long periods when parked at terminus stations awaiting turnround and scheduled departure. Most trains keep their engines running when stopped at red lights or in intermediate stations. Buses too often keep engines running in stationary traffic, at traffic lights and at bus stops. Most lack the switch off switch on technology enjoyed by many modern cars. Trains and buses are often far too large and heavy for the passenger numbers and route they are travelling, worsening the fuel per passenger figures.

Public sector building managers often keep lights on when outdoors light is sufficient to light the rooms. I remember attending a big conference on overuse of energy in a large room with huge candelabras with many bulbs on, all blazing when the sun was pouring in through all the windows. I was the only one to suggest we find a light switch. There are not enough movement sensors and other controls on the public estate to cut the bills.

Ministers could initiate more studies of energy use by building and function, and see what divergencies there are. Some of the investments needed to cut consumption are low cost with high pay off. Lagging of tanks and pipes, stopping drafts, putting in better controls and installing more efficient

boilers may all have good payoffs.

---

## The EU tries to strengthen a weak hand

The EU wants more of our money. It wants to send us more of its unemployed. It wants to continue its huge trade surplus. All this puts it in a weak position as we leave.

So it invents silly ideas. It says the ECJ will continue ruling us after we have gone. This does not apply to any other independent country and should not apply to us. No need to pay to remove it!

It says it will stop UK citizens legally settled in one EU country moving to another after we have left. Fine. We cant stop them doing that if they want to. I doubt UK pensioners who have bought villas in Spain or Portugal will want to move to Poland or Germany anyway. Again, no need to pay for that.

They would be foolish to demand we pay to export to them, as that would be illegal under WTO rules. The only legal way to pay to trade is recognised tariffs, where their exports would then gift us a £12 bn tariff revenue to give back as tax cuts.