

Improving the public sector

Today I have highlighted two disastrous management errors in public services which Parliament has criticised many times in the past. Yesterday Ministers presented their approach to both problems to try to put things right.

In both cases MPs asked about what would happen to the managers who made the mistakes, especially the top management of the Post Office who went on to spend large sums on lawyers to hound the people they had wrongly accused. One contributor has been muddling the state owned Postal Office up with the privatised mail services, which have nothing to do with this issue.

My prior concern over the years has been to speak with others for the postmasters who were so badly treated to get the accusations against them reversed and to give them compensation for their large financial losses forced upon them. I agree the government as owner of the business does need to tell us what will be done about those who pursued this policy at the Post Office. The bill for compensation will be substantial and falls to taxpayers as we own the Post Office.

The Defence Minister has accepted that the MOD needs to improve the way it handles contracts. He has also promised to seek to rescue this large contract by closer working with the defence supplier. He seemed confident that remedial costs fall to the supplier to pay.

Post Office compensation

I am glad the government has now signed off on a compensation scheme for Post Office managers wrongly accused and badly treated by the Post Office over the introduction of the Horizon computer system. Some were made to pay large sums to the Post Office they did not owe and some were falsely accused of fraud. Many lost their businesses and some faced criminal convictions for things they had not done.

This was a shameful incident and it has taken time for the Post Office and its government owner to do the right thing.

Buying defence equipment

Yesterday in the House the government made a statement on what had gone wrong

in trying to buy 589 fighting vehicles for the army. So far very few have been delivered and those that have been have not met noise and vibration standards. This has raised hearing issues for some who have worked in them.

The Minister and the review are both critical of procedures. The Minister is leading the work to get the matter rectified by the contractor. He assured the House that the contract was at a fixed price of £5.5bn and the government's intent is to secure the delivery of 589 working vehicles that meet the required standards.

It is most important for the army and taxpayers that he succeeds. There have been too many cases of procurement overruns on time and budget and on the need to remedy or change specifications during the roll out of a programme. Let us hope the MOD can now find new ways to offer value for money and to secure the high quality vehicles, vessels and other equipment they need.

[My support for the Government's new policy to ensure that the Post Office properly apologises and compensates every post master wrongfully convicted](#)

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I am grateful to the [Minister](#) for changing the policy. I have been a long-standing critic of past Governments and Ministers for not telling the [Post Office](#) to apologise and pay up, and I encourage him today to ensure that the Post Office apologises properly, and pays up quickly and generously.

Parliamentary Under Secretary for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully):

My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We will ensure that we lean into the [Post Office](#) to ensure that they deliver all compensation schemes quickly and equitably so that we can get this issue sorted out. [The Post Office](#) has acknowledged that it has done wrong, but the inquiry will detail the questions that it needs to answer over the next few months.

My intervention in the Armed Forces Bill supporting the Government's effort to improve home ownership for armed forces service personnel

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I will be supporting the Government, as they have made welcome progress on creating better conditions and support for our armed forces, but I would like to press the [Minister](#) on housing. When we wish to recruit and retain the best people in the future as we have in the past, it is important that we provide something better on housing than we traditionally have. It is a disgrace if armed services personnel, after providing substantial service to our country, cannot afford to buy a house of their own, and instead have to scramble to get rented accommodation, which they often find difficult.

I hope the [MOD](#) can do more through its potential and current schemes to promote home ownership, and to promote buying property nearer home base, for example, so that people leaving the armed forces have a property of their own. If service personnel are not able to do that, a surrogate scheme is needed so that when they leave the armed forces after holding important jobs and earning reasonable money, they are not debarred from the private housing market and they do not come to see their service career as a gap in making those contributions and building up savings in a house of their own. They should have as much opportunity to own their own property as the rest of the community.

Yes of course we need an expeditionary service and service personnel may need to serve in a variety of places abroad, but that should not get in the way of either having a home of their own with their family or having the wherewithal to have a home of their own when they leave the armed services. I hope my hon. and gallant Friend the Minister will sympathise and do more to make sure it can be true. I do not think we need a legal requirement, but we need a firm pledge of intent from the Government.