

Desultory debate about public services

Public sector service productivity has collapsed 7.5% 2020-23. This is without precedent and means taxpayers need to pay more than £30bn a year extra for their services, with all the extra costs of inflation on top of that. No wonder public spending is so high.

In an extreme case the Post Office, a nationalised industry, admits it wrongly prosecuted hundreds of its own staff and took money from them for losses they had not made. 25 years on from the start of these errors it has still not even repaid the money it wrongly took from them in many cases, let alone paid them the compensation they are due.

In some NHS hospitals there have been bad cases of failure to provide essential care in the form of drinks, food and help to the bathroom. There have been deaths that should not have occurred. In the worst case a nurse murdered babies in the care of her ward.

In some areas schools fail to provide a decent education for young people and see too many youths give up or drop out of school with no qualifications. The NHS waiting lists are very long, but apparently the large numbers of administrators cannot vouch there is no double counting, wrongful recording or people on the lists who no longer need a consultation or treatment

Ask the Opposition parties about this and they usually say it is all down to a lack of money. This is despite record levels of funding and big recruitment drives for extra staff. Where the bad news comes from devolved government in Wales and Scotland, or from Labour and Lib Dem Councils they still usually claim it is a lack of funding and demand bigger increases from government.

Many of the things that are wrong including the fall in productivity come down to bad management. A growing army of CEOs and top management on six figure packages has allowed productivity to fall badly, and in some cases has allowed standards and quality to drop alarmingly. In future blogs I will look at the duties and powers of political leaders and of the senior executives to put this right. What should we expect of public sector CEOs?

EU law repeals and deregulation

The government has sent out its latest update of progress in repealing, amending and incorporating EU law into UK law. It gives us the apparent good news that 2000 laws have now been repealed or reformed in total. This leaves another 4500 to deal with.

The latest list of laws repealed or amended continues with the official

approach of doing many repeals to items that are already time expired or did not apply to us in the first place. The first 3 on the list that I checked out from the latest report were:

Commission decision of 29 June 2005 (2005/477/EC) This was a temporary permission for plants *Vitis L* to be allowed into the Community from Croatia between January and March 2006. This was requested by Italy.

Commission decision of 9 March 2001 (2001/199/EC) This was a temporary permission for New Zealand potatoes to enter the EC from 1 March to 31 August 2001.

Commission decision of 29 January 2004 (2004/110/EC) was measures to handle the risk of BSE at a time when the UK had BSE in the cattle herd. This no longer applies with the end of BSE.

It is difficult to assess progress when lumping in so many items that never applied, applied temporarily or apply only in circumstances no longer applying to the UK.

Many of the other items recorded in the list show how industrious the civil service has been to transfer many EU requirements into new SIs or Acts of Parliament, sometimes reinforcing their regulatory impact. The Aviation(Consumers) Amendment Regulations 2023 may well be important “restatements of EU case law related to compensation and assistance for passengers” but they are not repeals or deregulations. They keep us close to EU ways of doing this.

The Energy Savings Opportunity Scheme Amendment Regulations 2023 “amended the EU 2014 regulations ...to report additional information concerning ESOS assessments/energy performance data and provide an action plan with annual progress updates”. In other words this one strengthens and extends the requirements of the EU regulation.

There is plenty more scope to do some good by repealing the unnecessary and simplifying the important. I have set out many examples in previous blogs of what can be done.

EU wins

I have tweeted today to remind people of the big win from Brexit. The EU has gone on a 800bn euro borrowing binge. If we had still been a member we would have had to stand behind that and paid a big bill to help meet the interest on all that debt.

Facts4EU doing a good job

https://facts4eu.org/news/2024_jan_brexit_is_working

Wokingham funding grants

I have now obtained more of the details of some of the many grants Wokingham Borough gets from the government. The Councillors seem unaware of all this money or want to keep quiet about it.

Funding Segment	Total Spend (£) 2022-23
Council Tax Requirement excluding parish precepts	129,957,000
Settlement Funding Assessment	16,068,000
Help to Buy	10,802,000
New Homes Bonus	4,765,000
Homes for Ukraine	4,478,000
Social Care Grant	3,140,000
Compensation for under- indexing the business rates multiplier	1,578,000
Disabled Facilities Grants	1,076,000
2022/23 Services Grant	1,064,000
Local Authority Housing Fund	932,000
Homelessness and Rough Sleeping	808,000
Improved Better Care Fund	472,000
Adjustment for rolled in grants	387,000
Supporting Families Programme	379,000
Lower Tier Service Grant	338,000
Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund	271,000
Domestic Abuse	248,000
Planning Inspectorate	186,000
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	104,000
Reopening High Streets Safely	102,000
Local Government Digital Transformation	100,000
Changing Places	80,000
European Regional Development Fund	45,000
Local Government Finance Family Annexes	40,000
Grenfell Site	39,000

Constitution, Union and Elections	27,000	
Mandating Data Transparency	14,000	
Resilience Team	12,000	
Affordable Housing	9,000	
Planning Delivery Fund	6,000	
HCA Land Assembly Fund	2,000	
Integration	1,000	
Markets, Partners and Places		—
Local Growth Fund		—
LA Land Release Fund		—
Shielding		—

[More money for Wokingham Borough](#)

One of the many pots of cash for local government that Wokingham Borough is keen to raid is the Active travel fund. This is money for cycling and walking that government gives for plans and priorities of the Council's own choosing. The Lib Dem Council choose badly, favouring schemes which make driving to work, school and the shops increasingly difficult.

In 2022-3 the Council spent £636,000 from these grants, and is negotiating for much more again this year and next. To make better use of these funds they should come up with helpful and popular schemes instead of using the money to attack drivers. It is yet more evidence too that they are in denial about how much the government sends them, always pleading poverty.