

Response to Cabinet public engagement event

Nottingham 2009

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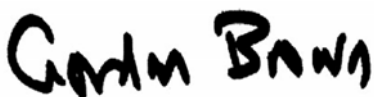
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INTRODUCTION

When the Cabinet met in Nottingham on 20 November I said that I would ensure that we wrote to participants to record the day and answer their questions. This note looks to fulfil that promise.

Cabinet Ministers met in Nottingham having already undertaken a series of visits to schools, health care centres, local businesses and other organisations across the East Midlands. The subsequent public meeting involved over 200 people engaged in round-table discussions with the Cabinet.

This is an important process. The Cabinet meeting in Nottingham was our seventh such meeting outside London this year, and on each occasion we have an opportunity to hear what people really think. Nottingham was no exception, with discussions covering a wide range of issues that are of interest to people across the region. This document summarises the points made by participants, and gives the Government's response.



Gordon Brown
Prime Minister

ECONOMY

available at: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/prebud_pbr09_repindex.htm

What the public said:

What will the Government do to evaluate the long-term problems the economy faces, and what steps will it take to ensure that economy can move forward safely?

The Government response:

The Government will keep on acting internationally to get the world economy growing again. The Government will help equip high potential British firms, improve the skills of our people to adapt them to the specialist demands of a modern economy, strengthen our capabilities in research and development, innovate further in science and technology, and help businesses to harness this innovation in commercially successful ways. The Government published New Industry, New Jobs in April this year to explain this strategy.

What the public said:

What is the true position of the public finances?

The Government response:

The Government has recently set out the position of the public finances, and announced its plans to support the economy in the coming year, in the Pre-Budget Report

What the public said:

There is a risk that short-term pressures will lead to cuts in valuable programmes and public services. What will the Government do to ensure sustainability of activity in public investment?

The Government response:

The Government has allowed public spending to rise to support the economy through the global downturn in the short term. Rather than simply cutting funding the Government is committed to providing targeted support to families and businesses most affected by the recession

What the public said:

Aren't public sector pensions unaffordable and a drain on national income? New public sector employees should have to move to money purchase pensions to reduce the cost to the public purse.

The Government response:

The Long-Term Public Finance Report 2009 shows that in the long term the cost of public service pensions is projected to remain stable as a share of GDP, at around or below 2% up to 2059-60.

Switching public servants to Defined Contribution pensions raises significant financing problems. However, the Government has taken steps to reform

schemes. Amendments have included increasing pension ages, reducing ill health benefits for all members and, in the case of the Civil Service scheme, moving to a Career Average scheme for new entrants.

What the public said:

The Government should be willing to make difficult decisions, such as introducing a pay freeze across the public sector in order to protect jobs and reduce the budget deficit.

The Government response:

The Government agrees that, following substantial investment in public sector pay since 1997, continued pay restraint will be important to support front-line service delivery while ensuring sustainable public finances. The 2009 Pre-Budget Report announced that Government will seek a 1% cap on basic pay uplifts across the public sector for 2011/12 and 2012/13, generating savings of £3.4 billion a year by 2012/13.

BUSINESS

What the public said:

Businesses in the UK have to comply with a range of pay, health and safety and other regulations, and can't compete directly with competitors in other countries.

The Government response:

The UK has one of the most open economies in the world. The Government has committed to cutting the cost of regulation, offering businesses the flexibility to react swiftly to changes in the global business environment. In the World Bank's 'Doing Business' rankings, the UK holds 1st place in Europe, and 5th globally, for ease of doing business. The Economist Intelligence Unit has noted that the UK will continue to have the strongest business environment of all major European economies up to 2012.

What the public said:

How will the Government encourage companies to stay in the UK rather than relocate to countries that offer lower tax rates and less regulation?

The Government response:

The UK has a well established, flexible and attractive business environment, and has historically been the No. 1 destination for Foreign Direct Investment in Europe. Our

corporation tax rate of 28% is at its lowest ever level and is the lowest corporation tax rate of the major G7 economies. However, tax is only one among many considerations when companies make investment decisions. Other considerations such as skills and light touch regulations are key business drivers. These, too, are areas where the UK also shows great strength.

What the public said:

What is the Government doing to attract foreign investment into the UK?

The Government response:

UK Trade & Investment is the Government organisation that helps businesses locate in the UK and grow internationally. It promotes the UK as the place in which and from which to do business. In 2008-2009 the UK attracted 1,744 investment projects, creating and safeguarding more than 78,000 jobs. To ensure that the UK is able to maintain its leading position in Europe with the most open and best business environment for investors, UK Trade and Investment will continue to focus on securing investment in sectors where the UK has the strongest international offer.

What the public said:

Government accounts for a large proportion of business for many companies, but late payments can hamper growth and prevent companies from employing more staff. What will the Government do to ensure that invoices are paid promptly?

The Government response:

The Government agrees that prompt payment is important. Government departments have been asked to pay invoices within 10 days and statistics are being gathered to check compliance. As part of the *Access for All* programme, public procurers are asking main contractors to pass prompt payment terms to sub-contractors.

What the public said:

Will the Government consider introducing more tax incentives to encourage companies to invest in research, training and capital projects to help lift the UK out of the recession?

The Government response:

The UK has one of the most effective systems of R&D tax credits. Since their introduction, over 36,000 claims have been made for over £3 billion of relief. This has supported over £32 billion of research and development. In addition, the Government announced in the Pre-Budget Report that the UK would introduce a Patent Box. This will reduce the rate of corporation tax applied to income from patents and strengthen the incentives to invest in innovative industries.

What the public said:

UK companies have led the world in developing new technologies but we always seem to lose out to foreign manufacturers when it comes to making money out of them. What will the Government do to help

companies make the most of their inventions?

The Government response:

The Government has sought to address this through a number of measures. These include a Growth Capital Fund to help small businesses find finance; a UK Innovation Investment Fund to invest in high growth technology companies; the Technology Strategy Board, which stimulates business innovation, and use of public procurement to provide opportunities for innovative companies through the Small Business Research Initiative. In the Midlands, Government is supporting the new Manufacturing Technology Centre to help business and universities commercialise new and innovative products.

What the public said:

Figures from the banks about new credit being extended to businesses are misleading. Banks are refinancing existing loans without making new credit available to firms.

The Government response:

There are always some definitional issues with lending statistics. However, in monitoring the lending commitments entered into by RBS and Lloyds Banking Group, the Government considers that only new loans made to businesses count against the lending targets. This ensures that the banks which received significant taxpayer support

are strongly focused on making new funding available to their business customers.

What the public said:

Can HM Revenue & Customs show some flexibility in their collection of arrears from businesses to avoid the risk of viable businesses being driven into insolvency?

The Government response:

HMRC is acutely aware of the pressures businesses face when they are in financial difficulty. Through the Business Payment Support Service it provides support for viable businesses in temporary financial crisis. This service has already helped over 160,000 businesses spread more than £4 billion in tax. This includes over 900 agreements with businesses in Nottingham to spread tax payments worth £18 million.

What the public said:

The Car Scrappage Scheme has been a significant boost to car manufacturers, but why has the Government singled out this sector instead of providing similar support to all areas of industry?

The Government response:

The automotive sector has been hit particularly hard by the recession, and supports hundreds of thousands of jobs in the UK. It also invests heavily in research and development. The Government believes it is important to help the automotive sector in these difficult times so that it is in a good position to take advantage of new

opportunities emerging from the development of low carbon technology and vehicles when the economic situation improves. However, the Government will explore opportunities to develop similar support schemes. For instance, at PBR the Government announced funding that will allow up to 125,000 households to trade in their old boilers to the latest efficient models.

What the public said:

Can the Government force more companies to introduce Corporate Social Responsibility plans and get involved in charity work?

The Government response:

The Government believes that the best way of encouraging organisations to be more involved in their communities is by providing ways in which they can do so. In the past the Government has funded organisations such as Business in the Community and Business Community Connections to increase companies' involvement in volunteering and charitable giving. The Government has recently established the 'Building Stronger Communities' Taskforce, headed by Dame Julia Cleverdon, to examine ways in which companies can support communities to emerge stronger through the recession.

The Government recently responded to the recommendations of the taskforce here: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/news/news_stories/091201_buildingstrongercommunitiesresponse.aspx

EMPLOYMENT

What the public said:

What can the Government do to address the perception that people from abroad are ‘taking our jobs’?

The Government response:

Migrant workers make up less than 8% of those in employment in the UK. They bring benefits by filling skills shortages and helping companies grow and employ more people. As all the available evidence shows, this has not been at the expense of native workers. The Government wants to ensure that migration continues to benefit the UK, so we are ensuring that migration is targeted at skill shortage areas and that our people have the right skills to compete in the modern labour market.

What the public said:

There are too many disincentives for companies to employ young people, including tax and NIC costs. More Government support is required, especially for small companies.

The Government response:

The Government has launched the ‘Backing Young Britain’ campaign to call on businesses to create more opportunities for young people. This is supported by the £1

billion Future Jobs Fund, set up to create around 100,000 jobs for young people. The ‘Six Month Offer’ provides further support for those job seekers experiencing at least six months unemployment and includes access to a recruitment subsidy of up to £1000.

What the public said:

Will the Government extend the Future Jobs Fund, or develop other initiatives for unemployed 18-24 year olds?

The Government response:

The Government has already set out funding for over 300,000 additional youth training and job opportunities, including the £1 billion Future Jobs Fund, and more further and higher education places and apprenticeships. The Government has also committed to a new Young Person’s Guarantee for 18–24-year-olds that will ensure that they are offered a job, training or internship if they are unemployed after six months,. In addition, the Backing Young Britain campaign brings government, business and the third sector together to create more opportunities for young people to access training and work during, and leading out, of the economic downturn.

What the public said:

What support is available for lone parents who want to work but consider the policy of ‘forcing them back to work’ whilst their children are young to be unhelpful?

The Government response:

The Government is not forcing lone parents into work but it is committed to ensuring that they are given the opportunity to improve themselves and their families. Employment support for lone parents includes pre-work support such as the New Deal for Lone Parents and in-work support such as childcare advice and assistance, “better off” calculations, in-work credit, job grants and benefit run-ons.

What the public said:

What is the Government going to do to encourage businesses to support working parents, especially if they work part-time in a senior position?

The Government response:

The Government has a strong record on supporting parents and businesses to help them reconcile work and family responsibilities. Free guidance and tools to help employers manage a range of flexible working options are available on the Business Link website (<http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/employingpeople>). The Government has also recently established a taskforce on family friendly working hours. This focuses on the quality and accessibility of part-time work and brings together employers and organisations which act on behalf of employers.

What the public said:

There is a real benefits trap in the UK that makes it more expensive for people to work

than to live on benefit payments. What can the Government do to help people make the transition off benefits and into paid employment?

The Government response:

The Government is committed to ensuring there are employment opportunities for all and that the system of working age benefits provides effective support for people to return to work. The design of the current tax and benefit system means that there are very few circumstances in which an individual working 16 hours or more receives less money in work than they would receive in out-of-work benefits.

SKILLS AND APPRENTICESHIPS

What the public said:

The Government should introduce a graduate tax to help fund Higher Education and to make sure that people who benefit from qualifications make a fair contribution in return.

The Government response:

In November the Government launched the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance. The Review Panel will consider various options for the future of Higher Education funding in England and will look at the balance of contributions to higher education funding by taxpayers, students, graduates and employers. The Review Panel will make recommendations to the Government by Autumn 2010.

What the public said:

What is the Government going to do to address the impact of the equivalent or lower qualification (ELQ) policy, which has resulted in reduced funding for students studying for a second degree or wishing to retrain?

The Government response:

To be in the premier league for skills, the UK will need 40% of working-age adults to have a Level 4 qualification by 2020. Both economic success and economic justice argue that public money should go first to those who have never had the chance of higher education. Government has said, however, that the impact of the ELQ policy should be reviewed annually by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

What the public said:

Will the Government intervene to clear the backlog of student loan applications?

The Government response:

When this issue arose the Government asked the Student Loans Company to take urgent steps to improve the customer service being delivered to students. The Government provided them with additional resources to help students, including additional telephone lines and operators, and improved information on the internet. A review was commissioned to ensure that lessons were learnt. This has recently reported, and the recommendations have been accepted in full.

What the public said:

Too many graduates are now unemployed. Should the Government reduce the graduate intake until the job market rebounds?

The Government response:

While times may be hard, graduates are still likely to fare better than non-graduates in a recession. There are still jobs out there but graduates will need to research these thoroughly and take opportunities to gain experience and build their CVs. Higher Education Institute Careers Services can offer advice, as can the direct.gov.uk graduate pages.

What the public said:

Is the Government going to do anything to address the impact of Higher Education funding rules on part-time students?

The Government response:

This Government was the first to introduce funding for part time students, and pays £46 million in grants, with an additional £40 million of institutional funding given to universities, to encourage participation in part-time study from the most under-represented groups.

What the public said:

How can government departments work together to help organisations to make sense of the range of support that is available for people to train and develop new skills?

The Government response:

The Government has recently published the *Skills for Growth* national skills strategy, outlining its approach to getting the skills the UK needs to drive our future growth. This includes helping learners to make informed

decisions about training available to them, simplifying the skills system by removing organisational clutter and ensuring our best colleges and training institutions benefit from simpler funding and monitoring arrangements.

What the public said:

Jobs are rarely for life. How can we encourage people to develop the flexibility to develop new skills and careers?

The Government response:

Programmes such as Apprenticeships and Train to Gain are already successfully helping people to re-skill and up-skill, enabling them to maximise the opportunities a growing and changing economy offers. From next year, skills accounts will further empower people, giving them the tools to choose the learning they need to help them move forward in work and life.

What the public said:

A lot of support is focussed on teenagers. What support is available for adults who want to develop new skills and change jobs?

The Government response:

The Government believes that learning should serve the needs of the whole community and has reformed the wider adult learning to offer everyone the opportunity to improve their skills, prospects and quality of life, irrespective of their age or background,. An example is the Skills for Life programme, which has helped over 2.8 million people

over the age of 16 to gain a national qualification.

What the public said:

The Government should invest to create apprenticeship colleges where young people or the long-term unemployed can be trained in a hands-on trade.

The Government response:

Further education colleges and training organisations already provide a range of opportunities for individuals to develop their skills in order to increase their employability. These include practical vocational training and work based learning, including apprenticeships, which the Government has reinvigorated since 1997. Spending in this area is now at its highest level, having reached over £1 billion this year.

YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION

What the public said:

How can we get young people to engage positively in volunteer activities?

The Government response:

The Government is committed to inspiring a million more young people to volunteer. This commitment includes an investment of up to £117million in the youth volunteering charity v between 2008-2011. In order for young people to positively engage with volunteer activities, suitable opportunities need to be created and young people need to know where they can find out about them. v enables young people to find out about volunteering opportunities available in their area, through a web-accessible database at www.vinspired.com

What the public said:

The narrowing of the curriculum, and the emphasis on targets in education, means that pupils are missing out on wider activities such as arts, music and drama.

The Government response:

The Government believes it is important that all young people are offered quality cultural

activities in and out of school. For example, *Find Your Talent* is a programme offering young people five hours a week of high quality cultural experiences. The Government is also funding Sing Up, which aims to provide every primary school with a quality singing experience, and Tune In - Year of Music. The Government is also re-emphasising the message to schools that excessive time spent on test preparation is unacceptable.

What the public said:

Can the Government introduce more practical, vocational subjects into the National Curriculum?

The Government response:

The Government is already ensuring that every learner has the choice of a motivating qualification route that suits their learning style and preferences. Its qualifications strategy sets out four learning routes for 14-19 learners – diplomas; general qualifications (GCSEs and A levels); apprenticeships; and foundation learning.

What the public said:

How can Government make science and mathematics more enjoyable and appealing to students?

The Government response:

The Government is already doing a great deal to make science and mathematics more appealing, through “Science, Technology,

Engineering and Mathematics Network” (STEMNET) ambassadors, CREST (Creativity in Science and Technology) awards and activities such as the Bloodhound project which aims to develop a car to attempt a new world land speed record.

What the public said:

Job seekers within the sciences field can often find more money in the City in comparison to teaching their skills in schools. What is the Government doing to attract more scientists to teach science?

The Government response:

Most teachers choose teaching because they want to improve the lives of their pupils. The Government attracts scientists to teaching by providing students with opportunities to try out teaching and advertising the factors which attract people to the role. It also offers the highest level of training bursaries - £9,000- to physicists or chemists who take postgraduate teaching qualifications.

What the public said:

What is the Government doing to share best practice between schools, and to tackle those that are underperforming?

The Government response:

Educational standards have never been higher, but schools should be encouraged to continually improve. The Government is moving to a system of self-improvement in all schools and, where appropriate, challenge

and support for under-performing schools. The Government will also continue to harness the expertise and experience of the strongest schools so that they are able to support the rest of the system. The National and City Challenge programmes empower secondary headteachers to buy in help; support their improvement efforts backed up by a dedicated adviser; implement new trusts/federations based on successful schools; and where needed, create new Academies.

What the public said:

There is not enough for young people to do, and boredom can lead to anti-social behaviour and poor school performance.

The Government response:

The Government wants all young people to have somewhere to go where they can get involved in lots of different and exciting activities and get advice and support when they need it. A lot has been achieved in the last 10 years including giving young people a say in what is available in their area, increasing activities on Friday and Saturday nights, getting schools to offer more clubs and activities outside lesson times and running holiday camps.

What the public said:

Youth services across the City of Nottingham are patchy, and there aren't enough facilities and activities for young people. How can this be better coordinated?

The Government response:

The Government is providing money for new facilities and more activities for young people, and is working to ensure that everyone involved (the police, youth workers, councils, and schools for example) works closely together to co-ordinate services and make sure young people know what is available in their area. The Government is also supporting local authorities to collect and publish information about local activities through channels that young people use such as Google and SMS text messaging.

What the public said:

What more can the public sector do to provide opportunities to young people directly?

The Government response:

The Government is providing money that young people control and decide how to spend – and more than a million young people have already helped to decide what should be available in their local area. The Government wants to involve young people in decisions so they have places they want to go to at times that suit them, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights. Money can be used for lots of different activities including sports, art and ICT. It can be used to buy new equipment or to revamp or build places to go such as youth shelters and mobile skate parks.

What the public said:

The media often portrays young people in a negative or stereotypical way, and this can affect their self-image and harm communities. How can we promote more positive images of young people?

The Government response:

Everyone benefits from the positive role that young people have to play in our society and the Government is working hard to provide the opportunities to develop and demonstrate that role. However, it is a long-standing principle that the Government does not intervene in media content. It is the responsibility of the broadcasters and their regulators to make judgements about what individual programmes contain.

What the public said:

Young people need to be engaged in the political process. Will the Government lower the voting age to 16?

The Government response:

The Government is committed to improving the connection between young people and our democracy. However, public opinion on the issue of lowering the voting age is divided, and there is a clear need for further consultation, particularly with young people. The Government has appointed Dawn Butler MP as the Minister for Young Citizens and Youth Engagement in the Cabinet Office. Her first priority is taking forward the Government's response to the Commission, which will be published in due course.

What the public said:

What policies are in place to ensure that school crossings and reduced speed zones are in place for every school across the country?

The Government response:

Local authorities now hold the power to ensure school crossing patrols and pedestrian crossings and 20 mph zones or limits are in place around schools. The consultation on a new road safety strategy has committed to update current guidance to further encourage highway authorities to gradually introduce 20 mph zones or limits into town or city streets where pedestrian and cyclist movements are high. These include the areas around schools.

What the public said:

What will the Government do to ensure that money is not diverted away from Sure Start and extra teaching assistants in the next Budget?

The Government response:

The Government has already set out a package to ensure that, in 2011/12 and 2012/13, spending on front-line schools will rise by 0.7 per cent a year in real terms and spending on Sure Start Children's Centres will be maintained in line with inflation. The commitment to protect funding for front-line schools and Sure Start Children's Centres will ensure that every school in the country can guarantee an education that is individually tailored to each child, including

through catch-up support in English and maths for every child aged seven to eleven who is behind expected levels of progress.

FAMILIES AND WELFARE

What the public said:

What is the Government doing to provide health care and support for undocumented/illegal migrants?

The Government response:

Undocumented/illegal migrants are, like any other person, entitled to free compulsory psychiatric treatment, treatment for certain infectious diseases, family planning services and treatment inside an Accident & Emergency department. Immediately necessary or urgent treatment (decided by a clinician) is not refused or delayed due to the patient's immigration status or ability to pay, although they will be charged. Non-urgent treatment will not be provided unless they are able to pay in advance.

What the public said:

Mental health issues affect a large proportion of the population but the support available is poor when compared to that available to those suffering from cancer and heart disease. What is the Government doing about this situation?

The Government response:

The Government's New Horizons strategy seeks to ensure that a more integrated approach to improving physical and mental health emerges. The Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme (IAPT) offers effective intervention and treatment choices to people with depression and anxiety disorders. Funding will rise to £173 million in 2010/11, and treat 900,000 more people.

What the public said:

What support is available for drug users, alcoholics and others suffering from addiction?

The Government response:

Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) are responsible for local health services, including addiction services, and jointly with their Strategic Health Authorities are responsible for deciding which services to plan, commission and develop to meet the health needs of their local communities. Meanwhile the Department of Health and the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse have published best practice guidance to aid commissioners and providers in delivering effective interventions and treatment for alcohol and drug misuse.

What the public said:

Does the Government think that pricing alcohol on a unit basis would help to reduce alcohol abuse?

The Government response:

The Government appreciates that there is public concern that selling alcohol at heavily discounted prices fuels harmful drinking, and there is evidence that cheap alcohol is linked to people drinking more and subsequent harm to their health. Although no intervention has been ruled out, it will be important to strike the right balance between supporting enterprise and respecting the rights of responsible consumers, while also making a real difference.

What the public said:

The NHS is a major purchaser and supports thousands of local supply chains. What will the NHS do to engage with its suppliers to protect them from cuts in the NHS procurement budget?

The Government response:

There are no specific targets to cut the procurement budget for the NHS. Responsibility for expenditure falls to local NHS organisations - they are free to decide how and where they deploy their budgets to meet the needs of local communities. The NHS spends £20bn a year on goods and services and is committed to ensuring that it gets best value for money for the taxpayer. This will not be achieved through reductions in the cost of items alone, and the NHS will continue to work with suppliers to understand the impact that innovative products can have in the delivery of services.

What the public said:

What is the Government doing to ensure that that Foundation Trusts are not forced to cut services to pay back overspends incurred during the last year?

The Government response:

The Government established NHS Foundation Trusts as operationally independent and free from central Government control. As such, operational decisions are a matter for Trust boards, which are responsible for ensuring that each Trust delivers the services required of their local communities within a framework of good financial management and governance. Any changes to services outside of each Trust's terms of authorisation require prior approval from Monitor, the independent regulator of NHS Foundation Trusts, and must be agreed by the local Primary Care Trust.

What the public said:

What is the Government doing to address the problems people face accessing care services?

The Government response:

On 14 July the Government launched the Green Paper *Shaping the Future of Care Together*. The Green Paper sets out a vision of a National Care Service which is fair, simple and affordable for everyone, underpinned by national rights and entitlements and personalised to individual needs. The National Care Service will include an assessment process that considers

people's individual needs, means and eligibility for all forms of support in a more joined-up way.

What the public said:

What will the Government do to improve the quality of life for those who act as carers for friends or relatives?

The Government response:

Carers at the heart of 21st century families and communities is a ten-year Government strategy that aims to ensure that carers have increased choice and control, and are empowered to have a life outside caring. By March 2011 the Government will have invested over £1.7 billion for councils to use to support carers in a range of ways through the annual Carers Grant. Our vision is that by 2018, carers will be universally recognised and valued as being fundamental to strong families and stable communities.

What the public said:

The Government is cutting Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance, and at the same time Nottinghamshire County Council is planning to close care homes. What is the Government doing to protect this vulnerable section of community?

The Government response:

The Government is not cutting disability benefits. No decisions on the funding of the National Care Service will be taken until the Government has fully considered responses to the Big Care Debate consultation about

the future of care and support services in England. However, the Government has already stated that there will be no changes to Disability Living Allowance for under-65s. If disability benefits for older people are reformed as part of the National Care Service, those receiving the affected benefit at the time of reform would continue to receive the same level of cash support.

The Government's vision is for a fair and simple caring system for all adults in England, and one that allows people to receive care and support that is personalised to individual needs and will keep them independent for as long as possible. The Government will only reform disability benefits if there is certainty that any new system can better support the needs of older and disabled people

If a care home is closed the local authority has a statutory duty to arrange alternative accommodation for care home residents whose needs assessment indicates a need for residential care.

What the public said:

Derbyshire is running a pilot to allow patients to manage their own care budgets. What happens if people are unable to manage their budgets and run out of funds before the end of the year, or if they deliberately misuse the funds?

The Government response:

In line with the principles of the NHS Constitution, no one will be denied health care because their budget has run out. There will be an agreed care plan and tailored support to help people manage their personal health budget. If a personal health budget runs out because the condition or circumstances have changed or because the budget was set incorrectly in the first place the budget could be increased. The vast majority of people who have a Direct Payment or other form of self directed support do the right thing and express a high level of satisfaction with their improved quality of life.

What the public said:

What is the Government doing with regard to compensation for sufferers of mesothelioma?

The Government response:

People whose mesothelioma has been caused by their work may claim Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB) which will be paid immediately without the need for the waiting period that applies to other occupational diseases. In 2008 the Government introduced additional lump sum payments so that even where it is not clear that mesothelioma was contracted in the workplace, a rapid payment can be made.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL DEMOCRACY

What the public said:

The Government is overly reliant on the voluntary sector for the delivery of care and support services, and does not make enough resources available to support voluntary organisations.

The Government response:

The Government values the substantial contribution voluntary organisations and the wider third sector make to the delivery of high quality social care and support services. The provision of care and support services is a matter for local government, not central government. The Government is supporting third sector care providers by ensuring that they can compete for contracts on a fairer playing field with other providers. For example, through the National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning, the Government is supporting intelligent commissioning and providing training to improve practice for up to three thousand public sector commissioners.

What the public said:

What support will voluntary sector organisations get after March 2010?

The Government response:

The Government is committed to continuing to deliver its £515 million spending programme for the third sector, covering the spending period 2006-2011. In 2010, voluntary sector organisations will continue to be supported through a variety of mechanisms including £12,267,547 committed to supporting 40 strategic partners through continued core funding in 2010-11.

What the public said:

Grants to small third sector organisations are short-term, and local authority delivery contracts often go to large organisations.

The Government response:

It is important that third sector organisations benefit from a range of funding mechanisms, including grants, loans and public service contracts. On average 65.7% of grants are provided for three years or more. The Government believes that supporting third sector organisations to deliver of public sector contracts promotes sustainability and capacity building in the third sector. This approach is backed up by almost £215m investment in the Futurebuilders fund, and amongst many other policy initiatives, the National Third Sector Commissioning Programme.

What the public said:

How can volunteer groups recruit disabled volunteers if they do not receive funding and support to allow them to meet their needs?

The Government response:

The Government recently launched a fund called Access to Volunteering. The fund will provide organisations with grants to enable them to involve more disabled volunteers. This is a pilot fund, which will operate in the North West, West Midlands and London. The programme will run until March 2011 before a decision is made on whether it should be rolled out nationally. More information about the fund is available at <http://accesstovolunteering.org/>

What the public said:

Rules on public liabilities insurance prevent voluntary organisations from supporting charities and communities in many cases. Can the Government provide exemptions?

The Government response:

Charities are not legally required to take out public liability insurance. However many charities consider it prudent to do so to indemnify the charity and its trustees, employees and volunteers against claims from members of the public for injury, loss or damage inflicted on the charity's property or in the course of the activity, event or supply associated with the charity. At the moment, there are no plans to exempt charities from public liabilities.

What the public said:

Will the Government provide more support to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and Air Ambulance services?

The Government response:

The Government recognises the significant contribution the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and Air Ambulance services make to the country. The Government is delivering a £515million spending programme for the third sector to 2011, and has also made support available for third sector organisations hit particularly hard by the recession. The RNLI and the Air Ambulance services would need to apply for funding through these programmes if they felt they could demonstrate the need to be priority funded at this time.

What the public said:

Local authorities don't listen to the people they serve. What can the Government do to force them to take account of local views and concerns, and how can local people become involved in making decisions made about their communities?

The Government response:

The Government has placed a 'duty to involve' on local authorities. This came into force in April this year and is about embedding a culture of engagement and empowerment into the daily activities of authorities. Government has also recently legislated on a petitions duty which will give people who live, work and study in an area

the right to a public response if they sign a local petition. Furthermore, the new Comprehensive Area Assessment, the independent inspectorates of local services, considers how effectively local bodies engage local people.

What the public said:

There are too many local authorities, district councils and county councils, all of which replicate back-office work like HR and Finance. Can the Government cut some of these institutions, and force them to share services?

The Government response:

The new unitary councils created in April 2009 have reduced the number of councils in these areas from 44 to 9 and are delivering savings of over £150 million in 2010. While there are no plans for creating further unitary authorities, the Government reaffirmed in the Pre-Budget Report that more needs to be done to reduce duplication and inefficiency between different tiers of local government. The Government is currently reviewing how councils share senior officers, back office functions and the delivery of services.

What the public said:

Why is there no democracy in local councils?

The Government response:

There is democracy in local councils. Local authorities are democratically elected bodies, with councillors elected by local people to serve their local areas for a four year term.

The role of councillors and councils, with their unique democratic mandate is critical to making sure that local services are responsive to the needs of their local communities.

What the public said:

What is the Government's view of existing regional, sub-regional and local partnership infrastructure, and what can be done to improve links between these providers?

The Government response:

The Government supports joined-up partnership working at local, sub-regional and regional levels and has been working with local government partners to develop a sub-national infrastructure that is able to address different opportunities and challenges as they occur at different levels. Government has legislated for a local economic assessment duty so that local authorities are able to properly address employment and business conditions in their areas. Also sub-regional working has been boosted by introducing statutory duties for Multi-Area Agreements to ensure that key local and regional public agencies are working together to support sub-regional partnerships. Taken together these new policy innovations will ensure strong partnership working at local and regional levels contributing to higher levels of sustainable growth.

What the public said:

How is the Government ensuring that policies and services are delivered flexibly to ensure that they take account of local circumstances?

The Government response:

Local Government is well placed to make decisions on behalf of their communities, and the Government has made policy according to this principle. Within the local performance framework, for example, Government has reduced reporting on indicators from around 1200 to 188, and set an upper limit of 35 improvement targets. *Putting the Frontline First: the Smarter Government White Paper* has set out how government will go even further in reducing red tape for local government.

What the public said:

Landlords are not maintaining buildings, and councils are not using their powers to ensure that housing is maintained to a good standard.

The Government response:

During the summer the Government consulted on a wide range of proposals aimed at improving quality and professionalism in the private rented sector and, as part of that process, helping local authorities to use the powers they already have to tackle the very worst privately rented housing. There has been an extremely positive and thoughtful response to the consultation, with over 250 responses

received. The Government have been considering these and plan to publish the results shortly.

What the public said:

Students are swamping my local community, and this is driving down the standard of housing in the whole area.

The Government response:

Problems caused by a high concentration of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), such as student housing, have been highlighted as an issue in a number of towns and cities across the country. The Government recently consulted on houses in multiple occupation and possible planning responses. The aim of the consultation was to enable us to properly consider whether planning legislation needs to be amended in order to address the problems often associated with high concentrations of HMOs. There has been a large response to the consultation and findings will be published shortly.

What the public said:

Would the Government consider lifting some planning restrictions to help small businesses grow and develop in the economic downturn?

The Government response:

The Government is already simplifying the planning system for businesses. An extensive programme of reforms is underway which will remove the need to obtain full planning permission for up to 25,000 minor schemes. It will also streamline the planning

applications process, leading to savings for business of between £50-100 million a year.

What the public said:

What is the Government doing to help people feel that they are a part of a local community?

The Government response:

While 76% of people feel they belong strongly to their local community, a strong predictor of good cohesion, there are still improvements to make. The Government has allocated £50 million over three years to be spent on improving community cohesion. £34 million of this has been given directly to local authorities to spend on what they see as the key issues. In addition nearly 100 neighbourhoods across 70 local authorities are now involved in the £12 million drive to ensure that all communities are well placed to share fully in future prosperity and emerge from the recession stronger and more cohesive.

What the public said:

Central government and local authorities fail to appreciate that engaging older people in service delivery builds community cohesion and saves money.

The Government response:

The Government and local authorities appreciate that engaging people of all ages and backgrounds in service delivery builds community cohesion and saves money. This understanding is reflected in the support

provided to engagement activities across the board. Government's commitment to improving cohesion is backed up with an investment of £50m over three years and a framework of guidance and support. Local government can use this investment to improve engagement with different community groups as they think appropriate.

What the public said:

The arts play a crucial role in our society. What will the Government do to protect funding for the arts during the economic downturn?

The Government response:

The Government remains committed to the arts in the current difficult economic climate, and is investing nearly £450 million in the arts this year through Arts Council England. This figure will rise to £463m in 2010/11. This represents a real-terms increase of 83% since 1997 and funds over 880 Regularly Funded Organisations. Arts Council England is investing a further £40 million in lottery money through the Sustain programme to help cultural organisations through the recession.

What the public said:

What support can the Government give to the regeneration of Welbeck Colliery Site?

The Government response:

The Homes and Communities Agency is currently conducting 'single conversations'

across all regions of the country. The aim is to provide everyone with an opportunity to influence the prioritising of regional regeneration investment. These conversations are ongoing and the Welbeck site may well form a part of the considerations in the North East discussions.

What the public said:

The lack of, or cost, of public transport limits opportunities for young people living outside major centres to engage in positive activities. What is the Government doing to break down these barriers by widening access to public transport?

The Government response:

The Government has introduced ‘accessibility planning’ into the local transport planning process to encourage local authorities and other agencies, who are best placed to consider the transport needs of their local areas, to assess whether people can access key services. The Government has also legislated so that local authorities may offer discretionary benefits over and above the statutory minimum. This can include extending public transport concessions to young people.

What the public said:

Why can’t English pensioners use their bus passes in Wales and Scotland, or on trains and trams in Nottingham?

The Government response:

Different concessions and funding arrangements apply in England, Scotland and Wales. The Government is in discussions with the Devolved Administrations about how reciprocal arrangements for cross-border concessionary travel could work, but there are no immediate plans to introduce such an arrangement. Local authorities are best placed to know about local needs and circumstances and can offer discretionary concessions over and above the statutory minimum. Such enhancements are not part of the statutory minimum and must be funded from an authority’s own resources.

What the public said:

Could the Government consider introducing tax vouchers for individuals who work unsociable hours and so cannot use public transport, to offset the costs of fuel?

The Government response:

The Government is not currently considering introducing tax vouchers in these circumstances. The Government only introduces vouchers and other reliefs where it is satisfied that they would be well-targeted and would not cause excessive cost to the Exchequer. The Government provides a range of advice to motorists that can help them reduce their fuel costs through the Act on CO2 website, available at: <http://actonco2.direct.gov.uk/actonco2/home.html>

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

What the public said:

How does the Government intend to finance and support the businesses and technologies we will need to develop 'clean energy' initiatives?

The Government response:

The development of new businesses and technologies is essential to addressing the challenges of climate change. The Government recognises the particular challenges faced by businesses in the low carbon sector, and has a range of measures in place to help address them. These include direct support for the early stages of innovation through bodies such as the Energy Technologies Institute, Carbon Trust and Technology Strategy Board. The Government is also providing funding in key sectors where the UK has a competitive advantage, such as up to £120 million for offshore wind announced in July 2009, and is supporting a new lending scheme to provide around £1.4 billion of project finance to onshore wind farms in the UK.

What the public said:

Why is 'green energy' so expensive?

The Government response:

There are a range of renewable energy technologies in the electricity generation, heat and transport sectors, many of which are at an early stage of development or deployment. As these technologies become established we would expect the cost of these technologies to fall.

What the public said:

Don't plans to continue with Nuclear Power, and destroying waste resources by incinerating them for power, contradict the Government's support for the EU Waste Framework Directive?

The Government response:

Recovering energy from waste that cannot be practically recycled or reused is perfectly compatible with the waste hierarchy and with the EU Waste Framework Directive. Energy from waste can make a contribution to renewable heat and energy targets and reduce green house gases by diverting waste from landfill sites.

What the public said:

The Mineworkers Pensions Scheme has not been reviewed since 1994, but the recession has had a significant impact on the people who use it. Will the Government look again at the scheme?

The Government response:

The pension scheme arrangements for the Mineworkers Pension Scheme and the British

Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme were established as part of the privatisation of the British Coal Corporation in 1994. At the time the Government provided a solvency guarantee that ensured entitlements rose at least in line with inflation, and would not fall in cash terms. In providing this guarantee, the Government, on behalf of the taxpayer, accepted a very significant contingent liability. In return the Government receives, over 10 years, a 50% share of any valuation surpluses. The Government continues to believe that the surplus sharing arrangements represent a fair balance between the interests of scheme members and taxpayers, but remains in regular contact with the trustees of the schemes.

CRIME AND JUSTICE

What the public said:

The police spend too much time filling in paperwork rather than patrolling the streets. Shouldn't clerical staff be employed to complete paperwork?

The Government response:

The Government is determined to boost the capacity of the police service by reducing red tape and freeing it from unnecessary bureaucracy. Capacity has already been freed up by scrapping centrally imposed targets for each force. In the recent White Paper 'Protecting the Public: Supporting the Police to Succeed', the Government sets out how more frontline delivery can be achieved by improving business processes, cutting bureaucracy and better use of the workforce. A considerable number of forces have already recruited police staff to undertake tasks that do not need the skills or training of a police officer.

What the public said:

The police issue too many cautions when they detect Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). Does the Government think that they are using their powers effectively?

The Government response:

The Government advocates a scaled approach in the use of interventions to tackle ASB, but tougher tools and powers should be used straight away where appropriate and proportionate.

What the public said:

Should Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) be given powers of arrest?

The Government response:

There is a deliberate and clear distinction between a police officer and a PCSO. The role of the PCSO is about communicating, listening and supporting people in their own community. This does not require a power of arrest. Instead, PCSOs have a limited range of enforcement powers (such as issuing penalty notices) to deal with anti-social behaviour and low-level offending. That allows the PCSO to deal quickly and effectively with these issues in their neighbourhood and to ensure that police officers can be deployed to best deal with local needs and priorities.

What the public said:

Is the Government planning to devolve any powers to local authorities to allow them to tackle ASB directly in their areas?

The Government response:

The Government is committed to driving down anti-social behaviour by supporting victims and making all local partners take fast

and effective action against it. This includes a £10 million package of support to help councils and other partners tackle ASB, and the Government is confident that the measures that have been put in place will reduce ASB in communities across the country.

What the public said:

What is the Government doing to improve support for the victims of crime?

The Government response:

The Government has announced a National Victim Service that will begin by providing additional support services to those bereaved by murder and manslaughter and will be delivered, on behalf of government, by the national charity Victim Support. The service will offer a key worker for each family member bereaved by homicide to help access information, support and additional services. This will begin in the New Year. This will lead to a wider National Victim Service, expanding coverage to all victims of crime who need tailored support, advice about accessing non criminal justice services, and other practical help.

What the public said:

How will domestic violence provision in Nottingham address the sensitivity of particular needs of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities?

The Government response:

The Government believes that all local areas should provide adequate support services to meet the needs of their victims of domestic violence. In Nottingham the City Council has recently undertaken a domestic violence services review and, in the light of the changing nature of its BME Community, has commissioned a new BME Service to meet the needs of the new and existing BME Communities. The new service has been developed in consultation with local communities and existing services and will ensure that the specialist needs of individual communities are met.

What the public said:

The Government spends a lot of money on initiatives to reduce crime, such as installing CCTV cameras, but doesn't provide money to local authorities to enable schemes to be continued in the long-term. What will the Government do to ensure that it prevents these situations from arising?

The Government response:

Reductions in crime have been achieved over recent years through a balance of specific solutions such as CCTV, and sustained investment in local delivery such as the Drug Interventions Programme (DIP). During the past five years the DIP has received over £900 million to get adult drug-misusing offenders out of crime and into treatment.

A number of specific and individual Government grants have now been combined into Area Based Grants (ABG), allocated to local authorities on a three-year basis to maximise stability and certainty. The receiving authorities have flexibility to use ABGs as they see fit to deliver local, regional and national priorities.

What the public said:

When do the Family Intervention Programme (FIP) and community support get involved with families and young people to tackle the causes of ASB?

The Government response:

Many Family Intervention Programmes (FIPs) target families involved in persistent ASB. Referrals to the FIP will often be made when housing and community safety agencies are aware of numerous complaints being made about a family and the family is at risk of losing their tenancy and becoming homeless.

What the public said:

Does the Government plan to extend the Family Intervention Programme nationwide, to ensure that it makes the biggest difference?

The Government response:

Yes. This is already happening. All local authorities are receiving funding for at least one Family Intervention Project from April 2009 to March 2011 (and beyond, if funding permits). The Prime Minister has committed to ensuring there is funding to support 10,000

families a year from 2012-13 and 50,000 families by 2015.

What the public said:

The Family Intervention Programme is a worthwhile initiative, but it may be too late for some families. What will the Government do in those cases?

The Government response:

In addition to FIP investment, the Government provides funding to support families when problems first emerge. For example, all local authorities receive funding for the Parenting Early Intervention Programme which provides support for parents of children considered to be at risk of negative outcomes.

Evaluation shows that FIPs are helping to turn around these families although many agencies had given them up as a lost cause. In the small number of cases where families do not make progress through FIPs the family may face enforcement action such as eviction.

FOREIGN AND DEFENCE

What the public said:

What is the likelihood of further nuclear disarmament in the future?

The Government response:

The Government strongly believes in striving to achieve the goal of a safer world free from nuclear weapons and has led international efforts in that direction. Since 1997 the Government has reduced our warhead stockpile by around 50%, and has taken steps to increase transparency and reduce the readiness of our remaining system.

Other states continue to make reductions too. But the Government believes it is only through a multilateral process that sustainable global nuclear disarmament leading to the elimination of nuclear weapons can be achieved. This will be a complex, difficult and sensitive process and will not happen quickly. But the UK stands ready to enter such a process when others are willing to do likewise. In the interim, while some states retain large nuclear arsenals, and others seek to acquire nuclear weapons, the Government is committed to retaining a

minimum credible and continuous nuclear deterrent capability.

What the public said:

How is the war in Afghanistan making the UK a safer place?

The Government response:

The Government is contributing to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan because of the terrorist threat facing the UK. If the Taliban were to regain control of Afghanistan, it would again become a terrorist breeding ground as it was before 11 September 2001. British troops are therefore keeping the UK safe by preventing the Taliban from regaining power and al-Qaeda from returning.

What the public said:

Shouldn't the Government be doing more to prevent home-grown terrorists rather than sending our troops to fight in Afghanistan?

The Government response:

Afghanistan has been the epicentre of global terrorism, and stability there makes for a securer Britain. This contributes to the Government's comprehensive strategy for countering terrorism, whether at home or abroad, called CONTEST. This strategy includes a £140 million programme called *Prevent* to stop people in the UK from becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism in the first place. Significant programmes are now in place in a range of key sectors and these are starting to make a

real difference in reducing vulnerability to radicalisation.

What the public said:

Can we be sure that our troops are getting the very best equipment to ensure that they can do their jobs?

The Government response:

The quality and versatility of the equipment issued to British troops is higher than it has ever been, and the Government is continually working to improve the range and reliability of all equipment. The Government is ensuring that British troops have the very best protection possible. For example, over the past three years the Government has spent over a £1 billion on protected mobility vehicles for Afghanistan. Military commanders on the ground have confirmed that they have the equipment they need.

What the public said:

Can we trust the Afghan army to tackle corruption and protect our personnel?

The Government response:

The Afghan National Army has a good reputation among both the British troops who operate alongside them and the Afghan population. However, serious problems are recognised in some elements of the Afghan National Police. Following the tragic incident of 3 November when an insurgent dressed as a policeman killed 5 British soldiers, British forces have been working closely with their Afghan counterparts to investigate the

incident and to further reduce the risk of Afghan security forces being infiltrated by insurgents.

What the public said:

Can our soldiers actually change anything in Afghanistan?

The Government response:

British troops are in Afghanistan as part of the international civilian-military effort to increase the capacity of Afghanistan's government and security forces so that they can take responsibility for Afghanistan's future and prevent the return of al-Qaeda. As well as contributing to this mission directly by training the Afghan National Security Forces, British troops' operations in Helmand province are providing the security which allows civilian-led development projects to build local governance, economy and infrastructure. Examples of the progress that has been made can be found at <http://afghanistan.hmg.gov.uk/en/development>

What the public said:

Is there an exit strategy for our forces in Afghanistan?

The Government response:

British troops will withdraw from Afghanistan when the conditions are right - once the Afghans are themselves able to defend their people and deny the territory of Afghanistan as a base for terrorists. To this end, international forces are training the Afghan

National Security Forces. As the Afghans' capability increases, responsibility for security will gradually transfer to them.

MAKING GOVERNMENT WORK BETTER

What the public said:

What was the Government hoping to achieve by holding the Cabinet in Nottingham, and why aren't more Cabinet meetings held outside London?

The Government response:

It is vital that the Cabinet gets the chance to hear and take on board the views of people across the United Kingdom. Holding the Cabinet in Nottingham allowed local people to discuss the experiences and challenges they face on a daily basis, outline the things they feel the Government could do to improve life in their area, explore ideas, and share different views and opinions. Since the first meeting of the Cabinet in Birmingham in 2008, there have been similar events in Leeds, Liverpool, Southampton, Glasgow and Cardiff. Other events are currently being considered. However because of the time and resource implications of holding such meetings, careful consideration needs to be given to their number and frequency.

What the public said:

Public sector organisations should pool their procurement activity so that they can secure the best value for money.

The Government response:

The Government recognises that better value for money can be achieved through collaborative procurement, and has already made savings of £1.4 billion in 2008/09 in areas such as energy, ICT, food, travel and construction. The Government aims to deliver further savings of £4 billion per annum by 2010/11.

What the public said:

The Government should do more to ensure that UK companies have priority over foreign companies when bidding for Government contracts.

The Government response:

As a member of the EU and World Trade Organisation, the UK is required to give equal treatment to suppliers from other member states, as well as suppliers from some other countries. However, well over 95% of public sector contracts do go to UK-based suppliers. UK companies can also benefit from opportunities overseas.

What the public said:

The Government invests billions of pounds in procurement, but small companies are often blocked from bidding for contracts because Government always evaluates bids on cost

alone, rather than wider benefits to the community.

The Government response:

The Government wants to see more small and medium-sized enterprises benefiting from opportunities to supply goods and services to the public sector. Bids are considered on value-for-money, which includes quality considerations, rather than lowest price.

What the public said:

People are expected to provide Government with the same personal information a number of times to gain access to public services. What is the Government doing to improve its approach to collecting and sharing information?

The Government response:

The Government recognises that the same information is often requested several times. Departments are working together to reduce this burden. For example, central and local government have developed an approach called 'Tell Us Once'. This project is looking into ways to make it possible for information to be given to Government just once, and then shared with all other relevant parts of Government with the informed consent of the person providing the information. Tell Us Once will be rolled out nationally to enable people to notify Government of a birth or death, and the Government will look to apply this system to more information in the future.

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