

# Response to Cabinet public engagement event

Exeter 2010

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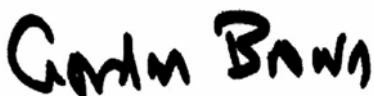
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# INTRODUCTION

Thank you to all those people who met with the Cabinet in Exeter on 5 February. The Cabinet valued the opportunity to sit round the table and discuss the issues which you felt to be most important.

Meeting in Exeter gave the Cabinet a chance to visit several places across the South West, find out more about regional and local issues and better understand what people across the region really think.

I promised that we would respond to all who participated, to record the day, answer your questions and look at our policies in the light of what you said. This note sets out the wide-ranging comments from the public, along with the Government's response.



**Gordon Brown**  
**Prime Minister**

# ECONOMY

## **What the public said:**

Does the Government expect interest rates and inflation to rise in the next three years?

## **The Government response:**

The 2009 Pre-Budget Report sets out the Government's inflation forecast. The forecast was for the Consumer Price Index inflation to rise in the near term, before falling through 2010 and in 2011, then rising again to the 2% target by the end of 2012. Market expectations are for the Bank Rate to remain at 0.5% until the second half of 2010. Monetary policy is expected to provide an ongoing stimulus to spending by businesses and individuals throughout the year.

## **What the public said:**

Cuts in public spending could have a negative impact on the private sector, which has not yet fully recovered from the recession.

## **The Government response:**

The Government is committed to maintaining sustainable public finances, creating a stable platform for growth as Britain emerges out of recession. It has set out a clear plan to halve the deficit over four years. This has been embedded in legislation through the Fiscal Responsibility Bill. However, risks to growth

remain and so the Government will maintain departmental spending in 2010-11, supporting the economy in the early phase of the recovery. From 2011-12 onwards, the Government will take the tough choices required to tighten spending, but will continue to protect its key priorities - the NHS and giving children the best start in life.

## **What the public said:**

The South West economy is heavily dependent upon public services and deep cuts will prove devastating. Will the Government hold its nerve and protect public services?

## **The Government response:**

NHS front line services, schools, 16-19 year-olds' participation and Sure Start Children's centres remain key public service priorities and the Government will continue to protect these as the rate of spending growth slows in 2011-13. The Government will also ensure that there is funding to maintain the number of police and community support officers and keep spending on overseas aid on track to meet the United Nations target. In the White Paper *Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government*, the Prime Minister stated that in meeting the fiscal challenges ahead "we must ensure that we do not damage the public services on which so many depend"<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Putting the Frontline First: smarter government*, HM Government, December 2009 - [www.hmg.gov.uk/media/52788/smarter-government-final.pdf](http://www.hmg.gov.uk/media/52788/smarter-government-final.pdf) (page 5)

**What the public said:**

How is the Government going to pay for public services and reduce the cost of the public sector?

**The Government response:**

Commitments on key public service priorities will be met by making tough choices across the rest of government. The Government will increase efficiency, cut lower value programmes and lower priority budgets (for example, by reducing the cost and scope of the NHS IT programme). The 2009 Pre-Budget Report announced over £25 billion of savings by 2012-13. These included reducing the cost of administration, rationalising arms-length bodies, targeting spending and taking a tougher stance on public sector pay and pensions.

**What the public said:**

What plans does the Government have for ensuring that public investment in banks is repaid?

**The Government response:**

UK Financial Investments Ltd manages the Government's holdings in financial institutions. Its objective is to dispose of the investments in an orderly and active manner. This will be undertaken while protecting and creating value for the taxpayer, paying due regard to financial stability and promoting competition. The Government believes that this is the best way to protect and enhance the taxpayers' stake in financial institutions, and to restore the banks to health and return

them in full to the private sector, while protecting consumers and homeowners.

**What the public said:**

The Government should not alter the rate of VAT again, as it causes difficulties for businesses.

**The Government response:**

The temporary reduction of the VAT rate between December 2008 and December 2009 put as much as £12 billion into the economy. Some leading business organisations, such as the Institute of Directors and the British Chambers of Commerce, have advocated that the Government should increase VAT instead of raising National Insurance rates. However, at the last two Pre-Budget Reports the Government decided that raising National Insurance would be a fairer way of reducing the deficit, spreading the burden over a wider area.

**What the public said:**

The transport industry cannot cope with more increases to fuel duty. What is being done to look at other ways of raising revenue?

**The Government response:**

To help secure the public finances, the Government has announced a package of measures including fuel duty increases, and changes to income tax and pensions tax relief for the highest earners. Fuel duty increases also support the environmental agenda, incentivising greater fuel efficiency

on the roads. The Government recognises the importance of the transport industry, but decisions on tax need to consider a wide range of concerns including economic, social and environmental factors.

**What the public said:**

In the current financial climate, will the Government be strong enough to impose a pay freeze in the NHS, given that the majority of costs relate to pay?

**The Government response:**

The Government uses independent pay review bodies to make recommendations about pay increases. For 2010-11, the Government is fulfilling its previous commitment to the majority of NHS staff on Agenda for Change contracts, by giving them a 2.25% increase. For the best paid staff in the NHS, the Government has submitted evidence to the Pay Review Body for a pay freeze this year. For doctors and dentists below consultant level, it has proposed a 1% pay cap. For 2011-12 and 2012-13, the Government will seek a 1% cap on public sector pay, producing savings of £3.4 billion by 2012-13.

**What the public said:**

How will the Government encourage greater investment in the South West, which has one of the lowest proportions of FTSE 250 companies?

**The Government response:**

The South West is characterised by small businesses. This is in part a reflection of the dispersed rural nature of the region. There are 11 FTSE 250 companies in the South West, placing it around the middle rankings when compared to other regions. To encourage greater investment, the Government is making strategic investments in the industries of the future, such as the Wave Hub and the National Composites Centre. It is also investing to reduce the effect of the geography of the region, to encourage the sort of clustering which creates large companies.

**What the public said:**

Long-term regional partnerships to encourage economic development have been successful in Cornwall. Will the Government apply this model more generally?

**The Government response:**

The Government recently set out the roles and benefits of partnership working in *Partnerships for Growth: A National Framework for Regional and Local Economic Development*. The Government will work with Regional Development Agencies to encourage this new approach.

**What the public said:**

Why has regeneration funding been redirected to business support?  
Regeneration already helps support the local economy.

**The Government response:**

Many regeneration projects bring benefits to local economies and the Government recognises this. In response to the recent downturn, it has asked Regional Development Agencies to allocate funding to projects on the basis of their effectiveness in delivering economic growth. Each region decides on the best mix of activity to achieve this.

**What the public said:**

Regional Development Agencies are bureaucratic and detract from the process of getting grants to the areas where they are needed.

**The Government response:**

Regional Development Agency (RDA) funding is relatively flexible, allowing investment in projects which are strategically significant from a regional point of view and are consistent with the regional strategy. RDAs ensure that there is coherence between programmes and projects within the region and that lessons learnt about effective delivery and value for money are adopted. An independent report last year revealed that, on average, every £1 spent by an RDA adds £4.50 of value to the region.

**What the public said:**

High business rates for empty properties prevent speculative development. What is the Government doing to mitigate this?

**The Government response:**

Reforms to empty property relief are right for the long term, providing strong incentives to bring property back into use and helping to reduce rents. The Government has listened to the concerns of stakeholders and introduced a temporary measure raising the threshold for empty property rates to £15,000 for 2009-10 and to £18,000 for 2010-11. 70% of property is below this threshold and will benefit if empty. This includes developments of new-build properties suitable for smaller businesses.

**What the public said:**

Are there any plans to rejuvenate seaside towns, crucial to the tourism industry, as the Government has done so well in larger cities?

**The Government response:**

The Government supports the regeneration of seaside towns and aims to give these areas the tools and funds they need. Local circumstances vary greatly, so there is no one-size-fits all-approach. Regional Development Agencies are helping seaside towns fulfil their economic potential through Regional Economic Strategies. The Sea Change programme has also helped 32 seaside resorts, providing them with £38 million in funding since April 2008. This has been used for projects supporting cultural regeneration and the visitor economy. Since 1997, the Heritage Lottery Fund has given over £234 million to 864 projects to support the regeneration of English coastal resorts.

**What the public said:**

Why has a decision on the new Deep Sea Container Terminal for Bristol Port Company been delayed? This delay is affecting investment in the port.

**The Government response:**

A decision on a new deep sea container terminal has not been delayed or blocked. The decision process involves careful examination of a number of issues, including diverse environmental impacts. This is progressing and will come to a conclusion shortly. There is no evidence that investment in the port is being affected.

**What the public said:**

Will the Government agree a three year trial for extended daylight hours, moving clocks forward an additional hour? This would boost the tourism sector, save on carbon and be safer for children.

**The Government response:**

There are a range of views on this subject, with opinions and requirements varying in different parts of the country. While there are no current plans to change the arrangements, the Government continues to listen to representations and consider any evidence.

# BUSINESS

## **What the public said:**

Small businesses have limited resources and time, but have to comply with health and safety, employment and other regulations.

## **The Government response:**

There are free tools at [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk) to help small businesses comply with employment issues. These include a tailor-made list of regulations with plain English guides and free email alerts when a regulation changes. The Health and Safety Executive also offers a free CD-ROM on risk assessment and a policy toolkit on coping with health and safety obligations.

## **What the public said:**

How will the Government support small businesses to set up, expand and take on large contracts?

## **The Government response:**

The Government remains committed to making the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a business, with more entrepreneurs and successful small businesses. *Solutions for Business*, available at [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk), provides comprehensive assistance to help companies start, grow and succeed.

Businesses can find out about large public sector contract opportunities on [www.supply2.gov.uk](http://www.supply2.gov.uk) and learn how to bid for them by taking the free "Winning the Contract" online course.

## **What the public said:**

How will Government ensure small business loan guarantees are getting through to where they are needed?

## **The Government response:**

The Enterprise Finance Guarantee (EFG) is open to businesses with an annual turnover of up to £25 million. It is aimed at viable firms who, due to the banking crisis, are unable to obtain credit. Most small and medium-sized enterprises get the finance they need from commercial loans and EFG is designed to account for only a small proportion of bank lending. The Government has worked with 38 lenders, including all the major banks, to make EFG as widely available as possible. So far nearly 8,400 businesses have been offered loans totalling over £850 million.

## **What the public said:**

How will the Government ensure businesses have high-speed, affordable broadband access, especially in rural areas?

## **The Government response:**

In its *Digital Britain* report the Government set out its plans for delivering broadband in the UK, including to rural areas. It has pledged to support the deployment of 2

megabits per second broadband to virtually every community by the end of 2012, and the deployment of next-generation access to 90% of the UK by 2017.

**What the public said:**

How can businesses exploit UK inventions?  
Could the Government help to protect patents in return for a share of licence fees?

**The Government response:**

Exploitation of a patented invention is a commercial decision, so businesses are best placed to make the necessary judgement. The Government offers help and advice through the Business Link network, whilst the Intellectual Property Office also has a range of low cost services to support patent holders, including mediation, arbitration and an opinions service.

**What the public said:**

Revaluations of small businesses can lead to large tax increases. Could such increases be phased, or suspended during an appeal?

**The Government response:**

Revaluation of business rates maintains fairness in the rating system by reflecting changes in the relative value of property every five years. There will be winners and losers across all regions and sectors, but in England around 60% of business properties will see their rates fall as a result of revaluation next year. Those worst affected by increases are protected by a transitional relief scheme, which will limit the increase for

smaller properties to 3.5% in 2010-11. As with all taxes, the Government's approach is that liabilities are due while an appeal is in process, but if an appeal reduces the rates, the occupier can obtain a refund.

# EMPLOYMENT

## **What the public said:**

Stronger links are needed between universities and local employers, to increase opportunities for internships and employment. There is a lack of opportunities for graduates in the current economic climate.

## **The Government response:**

The Government recently joined forces with the Federation of Small Businesses to offer up to 10,000 graduates a boost to their future employability. More than 50 universities have been successful in the Backing Young Britain campaign to support graduates and small businesses. The Graduate Talent Pool also provides opportunities for graduates, advertising a range of internships with employers, with over 14,500 vacancies advertised since its launch in July 2009.

## **What the public said:**

What guarantee can the Government give that jobs will be available for medical students when they graduate?

## **The Government response:**

The first stage of postgraduate medical training is the two-year foundation programme. Since its establishment in 2005, all eligible graduates from UK medical

schools who applied for the programme have received a place, with 91% of applicants allocated to their first choice foundation school in 2010. There are more foundation training places per year than graduates of UK medical schools. The latest estimates indicate that the numbers coming out of UK medical schools into the foundation programme are broadly aligned with the future demand which has been forecast for trained doctors.

## **What the public said:**

What is the Government doing about youth unemployment?

## **The Government response:**

A wide package of measures has been implemented to address youth unemployment. The Backing Young Britain campaign brings together business, public and voluntary sectors to provide jobs, apprenticeships and work experience to 16-24 year-olds. All long-term jobseekers aged 18-24 are offered the guarantee of a job, training or work experience. These are provided through the Future Jobs Fund, Routes into Work (jobs with pre-employment training if required), Work-Focused Training, the Community Task Force, internships and access to help with self-employment. To date, the Government has agreed to fund around 110,000 jobs through the Future Jobs Fund. This amounts to 65% of the 170,000 jobs that the fund will create.

**What the public said:**

Could the Future Jobs Fund be made more flexible, so that more young people are eligible?

**The Government response:**

Flexibility has been introduced recently for Jobcentre Plus advisers to refer young people to the Future Jobs Fund who have been unemployed for 26 weeks, rather than a year. This enables advisers to target more young people. It also ensures that finite resources are used to help priority customers.

**What the public said:**

How will the Government ensure that people are not better off on unemployment benefits than in work?

**The Government response:**

The Government is committed to ensuring there are employment opportunities for all and that the benefits system provides effective support for people to return to work. The design of the tax and benefit system means that there are very few circumstances in which an individual working 16 hours or more receives less money than they would receive in out-of-work benefits. The Better Off In Work Credit, available nationally from January 2011, will ensure that people who have been on benefits for at least six months receive at least £40 a week extra income on moving into work.

# SKILLS AND EDUCATION

## **What the public said:**

How will the Government ensure that it invests in skills for adults as well as for young people?

## **The Government response:**

£4.4 billion will be invested in further education and skills in 2010-11. This is because the Government recognises the importance of investing in adult skills, especially in difficult economic times. Improving skills encourages economic growth, raising productivity and enhancing people's employment and life chances.

## **What the public said:**

How will the Government engage more with business to ensure qualifications and skills are useful to employers, for example introducing a more modular approach? More progress is needed.

## **The Government response:**

The Government is ensuring that every industry in the UK has access to relevant, modular qualifications. These are available through the new, flexible Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). Employers only approve qualifications for the QCF that meet

their skills needs. The Government is also making it easier for employers to engage with the skills system. For example, it is reducing the number of publicly funded agencies, cutting down the time it takes to create qualifications and encouraging employers to develop their own.

## **What the public said:**

Will the Government prioritise new qualifications in 'green skills', important for a low carbon economy?

## **The Government response:**

The *New Industries, New Jobs* strategy identifies low carbon skills as a priority area. The Low Carbon Industrial Strategy and the *Skills for Growth* White Paper also set out an active approach to equipping the country with skills for the future. The Government will publish a Low Carbon Skills Strategy consultation to look at priorities and barriers to progress, including decarbonising the power industry, manufacturing industry, transport, buildings and construction sectors.

## **What the public said:**

Does the Government recognise the value of specialist further education colleges? For example, they can make significant contributions to improving food and energy security.

## **The Government response:**

This type of provision is clearly of value. As a result the Government is supporting the development of University Technical

Colleges. These will enable 14-19 year olds to undertake vocational and applied study. They will also strengthen the flow of young people coming into the labour market with the skills and capabilities employers want. National Skills Academies have been set up to ensure the skills that employers need in each sector are delivered, working through a network of specialist Further Education colleges and training providers.

**What the public said:**

Apprenticeships are valuable and can inspire greater ambition than classroom training. But there are costs and risks for businesses, especially in a recession.

**The Government response:**

Apprenticeships are both an investment and a risk, which is why the Government fully funds the training costs of apprenticeships for young people. In addition it is encouraging employers to take on and retain apprenticeships through the downturn, for example through a recruitment subsidy for employers taking on 16-17 year old apprentices. Employers know that investing in workforce skills through difficult economic times will enable them to respond when the situation improves.

**What the public said:**

When will the ProAct scheme in Wales, which provides wage subsidies while employees are in training, be available in England?

**The Government response:**

England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland decide separately on training provisions which best suit their needs. In England, Train to Gain continues to provide effective and direct support to employers through the economic downturn, helping them to invest in training and skills. Business support through wage subsidies is not a cost-effective, sustainable or feasible option in England.

**What the public said:**

Sub-contracting in the construction industry can encourage a focus on cheap labour, rather than workforce skills.

**The Government response:**

The Government is committed to encouraging all businesses to invest in skills, yet it is important that they remain free to make their own decisions, as long as they comply with relevant legislation. ConstructionSkills, the Sector Skills Council for the construction industry, works with the Construction Industry Training Board on skills. It raises a levy from employers, including sub-contractors, to fund training grants for employers, apprenticeships and support for workforce training. These grants can be accessed by all employers in the industry.

**What the public said:**

Jobcentre Plus refers people to training but it is sometimes too short. Can it be extended?

**The Government response:**

Jobcentre Plus refers people to a variety of skills training, depending on their individual needs and those of the labour market. This training varies in length but might include modular units, short pre-employment training, 8-week training linked to local job opportunities, or training through the Young Person's Guarantee for 13 weeks. This can be extended by a further 13 weeks. When a customer completes training, their skills needs are always reviewed with their Jobcentre Plus adviser. It is possible to extend training for a further 6 months if it is agreed that this would be in the customer's best interest – for example to achieve a qualification or take up a job offer.

**What the public said:**

Will the Government make further education funding simpler and more flexible for local needs? The system is too complicated and requirements to provide certain qualifications limit wider skills training.

**The Government response:**

It is clearly important that funding is responsive to local needs. This is why the Government has asked Regional Development Agencies to develop regional skills strategies to reflect the needs of every area in the region. These are being developed in close consultation with local partners and employers. The strategies will inform the annual Skills Investment Strategy and ensure the Skills Funding Agency funds colleges and training organisations so they

can deliver the right skills to meet the national, sector and local priorities.

**What the public said:**

Why does the Government put so much emphasis on university degrees when vocational training would be more useful?

**The Government response:**

Vocational training has a clear value and importance. The Government is investing £4.4 billion in further education and skills in 2010-11 and continuing to deliver vocational training through programmes like apprenticeships and Train to Gain. The [Skills for Growth](#) White Paper committed to creating a new modern technician class and expanding apprenticeships, as well as broadening the Government's ambition that 50% of young people should go to university. The new ambition is for three-quarters to participate in higher education, or complete an advanced apprenticeship or equivalent technician level course.

**What the public said:**

How will the Government support students from low-income backgrounds to go to university, including to our highest-ranking universities?

**The Government response:**

The Government has always been committed to broadening participation and fair access to higher education. It is actively supporting pupils from poorer backgrounds who are in the top 50% of performers, to help them

pursue higher education. The *Strategy for Young People's Information, Advice and Guidance* aims to ensure that all pupils know about the support available. Some of the most selective universities have committed to giving the best performing pupils from challenging backgrounds the chance to show what they can achieve. The 2009 Higher Education Framework also sets out how to improve the opportunities for talented people from disadvantaged backgrounds to access the most challenging courses at the most selective universities. The likelihood of people from poorer areas participating in higher education has increased by 50% over the last 15 years.

**What the public said:**

People can't afford to go to university without taking on huge debt, especially if tuition fees increase.

**The Government response:**

It is important that access to finance should not be a barrier to participating in higher education. A comprehensive package of student support is available, with Government spending at almost £6 billion next year. There is currently little concrete evidence of any negative impact from the introduction of tuition fees. However, when these fees were introduced the Government agreed that they would be independently reviewed once the first cohort of students had completed their studies. This review is well underway and will report in the autumn.

**What the public said:**

Will the Government review the support available to students for post-graduate study?

**The Government response:**

Yes - this will be looked at as part of the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance and will be informed by the findings of the Postgraduate Review. This Postgraduate Review was asked to assess whether there are any barriers affecting access to postgraduate study and will report in the spring.

**What the public said:**

Reducing funding to universities will have a negative impact on growth. How will the Government encourage a continued increase in the educated work force?

**The Government response:**

The Government wants as many people as possible to benefit from higher education, but in a way that it can afford, through managed growth. There are many ways of benefitting from higher education, which is why the Government wants to explore routes such as part-time courses, foundation degrees or courses co-funded with employers. The Government's ambition is for three-quarters of young people to participate in higher education, or complete an advanced apprenticeship or equivalent technician level course.

**What the public said:**

Does the points based system for people coming to the UK to study discriminate against international students?

**The Government response:**

No. The UK welcomes international students and recognises the valuable cultural and economic contribution they bring to the UK. The new points based system was designed in consultation with the education sector to provide a clear system for education providers to bring genuine international students to the UK using objective and published criteria. The Government is confident this is an objective, transparent system.

**What the public said:**

Will education spending in Devon rise to at least the national average, especially given the high cost of running small local schools?

**The Government response:**

Under the current system the Government gives more to sparsely populated areas because they may need to maintain small, rural primary schools, which are more expensive to run per pupil. Devon will receive £9.38 million this year through the dedicated schools grant for sparsity. A major review of the formula used to distribute funds is taking place and a consultation on proposals for a new funding formula will be issued in the near future.

# HEALTH, WELFARE AND FAMILIES

## **What the public said:**

How does the Government plan to support low-income families to increase social mobility?

## **The Government response:**

Improving social mobility is key to the Government's social and economic policies. This is demonstrated by its commitment to ending child poverty, tackling social exclusion and supporting families. In response to the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, the Government is introducing a new duty on public bodies to tackle socio-economic inequalities, as well as a national scheme for career mentoring to support young people. The Government is also establishing a Social Mobility Commission to provide expert advice and report on progress towards a fairer, more mobile society.

## **What the public said:**

The Government funds free nursery care, but does not pay providers enough to cover the costs.

## **The Government response:**

In 2008-09 over £4 billion was spent by local authorities on provision for under 5s, including free nursery care. Local authorities are responsible for setting funding rates in response to local conditions, and the Early Years Single Funding Formula which is designed to provide greater consistency and transparency in decision-making, will be introduced in April 2011. In 2010-11, additional funding of £340 million will also be made available to local authorities to fund the 2.5 hours per week extension for 3 and 4 year-olds. This is being administered through the Standards Fund.

## **What the public said:**

How will the Government ensure care is available for older people, especially disabled older people? How will the voluntary sector be involved?

## **The Government response:**

The Green Paper *Shaping the Future of Care Together* sets out the Government's vision to build a National Care Service for all adults in England, personalised for individual needs but with national entitlements. The Green Paper recognises that the vital role played by the third sector, which runs more than 3,000 care homes and almost 400 home care agencies, as well as helping disabled people with further education, leisure and social opportunities. The third sector will continue to play its many roles in the reformed system. In particular, the sector's long tradition of providing trusted advice and representing

people's views will help to deliver the easy access to care and support that is one of the key ambitions for the National Care Service.

**What the public said:**

Will the Government be able to pay for the proposed National Care Service? Will it reconsider plans to redirect Attendance Allowance from individuals to local authorities?

**The Government response:**

*Shaping the Future of Care Together* sets out a number of funding options for the National Care Service. The Government is analysing responses to the consultation and will set out its proposals in a White Paper this year. Any reform of the care and support system must be affordable and sustainable for all. There may be a case for considering how best to ensure that disability benefits and the adult social care system join up more effectively, to better support older and disabled people in the future. No decisions about benefit reform or changes to Attendance Allowance have been made. If changes are made in the future, those receiving the allowance will continue to receive the same level of cash support and would continue to have flexibility over how that money is spent within a better care and support system.

**What the public said:**

Will the Government increase local accountability for spending on end of life care?

**The Government response:**

End of life care is a key priority for health and social care services. The first national End of Life Care Strategy was published in 2008, supported by £286 million of new funding, and *High Quality Care for All* established end of life care as one of eight key areas on which strategic planning should focus. The Government is clear that local services are best placed to allocate resources, so does not dictate how funding should be utilised for specific areas of care. However, recognising the low priority which has been accorded to end of life care in the past, the Government has committed to monitoring how the additional funding that has been made available to support the End of Life Care Strategy is utilised.

**What the public said:**

Will the Government support carers' entitlement to respite breaks, emergency care and end of life care leave?

**The Government response:**

The Carers' Strategy identified the funding that was already available for Primary Care Trusts to improve support for carers. An additional £150 million was announced that could be used to provide breaks for carers. The Government is also providing £7.9 million to test different ways of supporting all carers. This will provide evidence of good practice in respect of health and wellbeing checks for carers, breaks for carers, and how the NHS can better support carers.

**What the public said:**

When will the Government publish a timetable for the review of Carer's Allowance, as this payment is very low compared to other benefits?

**The Government response:**

The Carers' Strategy included a long-term commitment to reviewing the structure of benefits for carers. The Government is developing its thinking on longer-term benefit reform, taking into account the need to simplify the entire benefit system and the current review of the care and support system. The Government is committed to providing real help to carers, particularly through the early stages of economic recovery. As a result, from April 2010 the rate of Carer's Allowance will increase by 1.5% to £53.90 per week.

**What the public said:**

Investment in the NHS has improved waiting times significantly. But there is still a need to encourage joined up working across health and social care.

**The Government response:**

The Green Paper *Shaping the care of future together*, the *Good to Great* plan for the NHS, and the NHS Operating Framework all reaffirm the Government's commitment to join up health and social care. Pooling local funding through 'Total Place' and the plans in *Smarter Government* will also improve the way local services are delivered over the next five years.

**What the public said:**

What is the Government doing to resolve car parking for staff at community hospitals, or to ensure public transport is available?

**The Government response:**

NHS staff clearly do need to access their places of work in an efficient manner. NHS Trusts are locally responsible for policies on transport for staff, including car parking. Policies will depend on many factors including the nature, location and environment of their facilities. The needs of staff must be taken into consideration, especially where shift work means that staff cannot utilise public transport and need to rely on their own vehicles.

**What the public said:**

How will the Government address the significant health inequalities that exist in the South West?

**The Government response:**

Tackling health inequalities is a high priority for both the Government and the NHS. Action on health inequalities is backed by a national target on infant mortality and life expectancy. *Fair Society, Healthy Lives*, the report of a strategic review of health inequalities led by Professor Michael Marmot, was published recently. It highlighted the need to act on all the social determinants of health, and will inform the development of a national cross government health inequalities strategy for the next decade.

**What the public said:**

How will the Government ensure that the 2012 Olympics result in health benefits for people in the UK?

**The Government response:**

Physical activity brings important health benefits, from reduced risk of heart attacks and strokes to better mental health and overall wellbeing. The Government has committed to making the UK a world-leading sporting nation. The Legacy Action Plan *Before, during and after: Making the most of the 2012 Games* set a target that 2 million more adults should be physically active by 2012. This is the first time a country hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games has made such a commitment to a health legacy. *Be active, be healthy: A plan for getting the nation moving* describes initiatives to help create a healthier, fitter nation through physical activity.

**What the public said:**

Will the Equality Bill become law or will parts be lost at the end of the session?

**The Government response:**

The Government's priority is to press ahead with all the Bills in the current legislative programme - and it is doing so. Future Parliamentary business will be announced in the normal way at [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

**What the public said:**

Will the Equality Bill fully meet people's needs on transgender issues?

**The Government response:**

One important advance is that the Equality Duty will apply in full to transsexual people, so public bodies will need to think about the needs of trans people before designing their services for the community. For example, a police force may hold meetings with their local trans community to help address hate crime in their neighbourhood. The Equality Bill also covers more people within the transgender community than is the case under current discrimination law. The Bill will also ban discrimination against trans pupils in schools.

# TRANSPORT

## **What the public said:**

What will the Government do to improve access to transport in rural areas, particularly for disabled people and young people?

## **The Government response:**

The Government believes that local transport decisions should be made locally. However, over £57 million is paid annually to local authorities to assist them in providing rural transport. The Government also recognises the valuable contribution which community transport providers make to rural communities and in particular to disabled and younger people. The Government will continue to promote the use of these services.

## **What the public said:**

What is the Government doing to resolve bottlenecks caused by the A303 and improve regional transport infrastructure? The A303 is a key route into the South West.

## **The Government response:**

The A303 is designated as a route of regional importance. Any major improvements would have to be funded out of the South West's Regional Funding Allocation. Following the Government's decision in 2007 to cancel the

A303 Stonehenge Improvement Scheme due to a substantial increase in the cost of the project, the Region has decided not to prioritise any further major improvements along the A303. However, the Region has indicated its wish to pursue more localised improvements. These will be identified through a Highways Agency study, which will conclude later this year and will inform the Region's decisions.

## **What the public said:**

Who should control local transport planning, especially for buses? Could more bus or freight lanes be introduced to improve transport in and out of cities?

## **The Government response:**

In 2000, the Government placed a statutory duty on English local transport authorities outside London to prepare a Local Transport Plan covering strategy and delivery plans for their areas. It is right that local authorities are given the flexibility to decide on the right solutions for their areas. These may include lanes for buses, freight, cyclists or other selected road users, or real-time journey information. The Government allocates over £1.3 billion funding per year for investment in small transport improvement and maintenance schemes.

## **What the public said:**

The Government encourages us not to travel by car, yet train tickets and car parking at stations are very expensive. Why is this?

**The Government response:**

The Government protects commuters by limiting most train operators to average increases in regulated fares of no more than 1% above inflation each year. Most long distance, off-peak fares are also regulated at the same levels. The Government does not control car parking fees charged by train operators, but it is not in operators' interest to set high fees which discourage rail travel. A balance must be struck between what passengers should be asked to pay and how much is it reasonable to demand as a subsidy from the taxpayer, to cover the costs of providing the service.

**What the public said:**

How can communication between Network Rail and other organisations be more effective?

**The Government response:**

Network Rail is an independent private sector company, so the Government cannot intervene in its operational decision-making. However, the independent Office of Rail Regulation monitors Network Rail's performance. Network Rail also engages extensively with other parties in the rail industry via a number of industry forums.

**What the public said:**

Has the Government considered the financial pressure regional airports are under if required to use body scanners?

**The Government response:**

The Government believes that the cost of transport security should be borne by those who use the transport systems, rather than by the taxpayer. The costs are passed on to the end user by the transport industry. The Government already commits considerable resources in this area, for example by collating and assessing threat information to advise industry on security measures. Body scanners are already in operation in Heathrow and Manchester airports and are an option for other airport operators. The Government will actively encourage airports to invest in this technology, because of the security benefits.

**What the public said:**

Will the Government clarify drink-drive laws to reduce accidents?

**The Government response:**

Drink drive casualties have fallen by 75% in the last 40 years as a result of tough campaigning and enforcement policies. However they still account for one in six road traffic fatalities. The Government has asked Sir Peter North to advise on changes to the legislative regime for drink driving, reporting by March 2010 on the case for changes to the prescribed alcohol limit for driving. The Government will then consult on the findings, in parallel with publishing a road safety strategy which will set out new casualty reduction targets.

# DEMOCRACY AND ENGAGEMENT

## **What the public said:**

People feel disenfranchised and uninvolved in the political process.

## **The Government response:**

The Prime Minister outlined his vision for a new politics in a speech on 2 February 2010. This included a range of radical reforms to help to build trust and engagement in politics. Among these was a proposal to hold a referendum on changing the voting system to give MPs a stronger mandate from constituents, by allowing voters to express preferences on all candidates. The Government has also proposed reforms to the House of Lords and measures to increase the diversity of elected representatives. On a range of constitutional issues, such as a Bill of Rights and Responsibilities and a written constitution, the Government has sought to engage the public in debate through a programme of deliberative research.

## **What the public said:**

Why are there proposals to change the national voting system?

## **The Government response:**

The House of Commons has voted in favour of Government proposals for a referendum to take place before the end of October 2011. This would offer the public a choice between the current system for electing MPs and the Alternative Vote system. Alternative Vote maintains all the positive characteristics of the current system, but provides voters with increased choice by allowing them to express more than one preference. This would reduce the need for tactical voting and mean that each MP had a majority mandate from the voters.

## **What the public said:**

How will the Government ensure it listens to the views of young people when it makes decisions that impact on their lives?

## **The Government response:**

The Government's ambition is to ensure young people have more opportunities to engage with the issues they are passionate about, so that they are empowered as citizens, connected to the political process and offered a meaningful say in the decisions that affect them. There have already been substantial steps towards this goal. As recommended by the Youth Citizenship Commission, a series of youth panels have been established across Government to provide advice on specific issues.

**What the public said:**

Why do we focus on Muslim extremism and ignore the far-right extremism of the British National Party? What will the Government do to help counter the growth of the British National Party in the South West?

**The Government response:**

The threat from Al Qa'ida inspired terrorism remains the greatest risk in terms of the number of plots and threats of death and destruction.

However, the Government and society as a whole must oppose extremism wherever it exists. The far right is not, and cannot be, part of any solution to community problems, and the vast majority of the British people believe this too. The Government is investing a further £5 million in cohesion and will ensure that all authorities at risk of far right or racist extremism share in these funds.

# COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL DEMOCRACY

## **What the public said:**

The Plymouth Centre for Faith and Cultural Diversity promotes education about different faiths and cultures and explores their common values. Can the Government use this as a model to promote community cohesion?

## **The Government response:**

Plymouth Centre for Faith and Cultural Diversity is a nationally renowned centre of expertise for the advancement of education in world religion and culture.

The Government welcomes the centre's support to Plymouth schools and is always willing to recognise outstanding good practice in promoting community cohesion. It will be looking for opportunities to feature the centre as a case study in guidance documents, speeches and publicity material.

## **What the public said:**

How can we improve community cohesion in the context of terrorism?

## **The Government response:**

A community in which extremism is challenged builds relationships that increase community cohesion and racial equality. Equally, a community that is cohesive, integrating people from different backgrounds, is likely to be more resilient to extremists who seek to divide it. However, we have seen that violent extremism can emerge from even the most cohesive and empowered communities. Tackling extremism and promoting community cohesion are both important and need to support one another.

## **What the public said:**

How will the Government extend its Faiths in Action grants for interfaith work and provide sustainable resources in future?

## **The Government response:**

Under the Faiths in Action scheme, grants of up to £6,000 are available to voluntary groups, places of worship and inter faith forums wishing to run local innovative inter faith projects. The second round of applications opened in November 2009 and will continue until the £2 million allocated for the grant is exhausted. In conjunction with the Community Development Foundation, the Government is also considering whether training in fundraising and sustainability can be made available, initially to national and regional faith representative organisations.

**What the public said:**

What are the plans for communities that have suffered from deprivation over the last few decades? Funding for local community projects has been cut.

**The Government response:**

The Local Enterprise Growth Initiative is a targeted £100 million a year fund which aims to release the productivity and economic potential of the most deprived local areas. It does this through enterprise and investment, boosting local incomes and employment opportunities and building sustainable communities. In addition, the Working Neighbourhoods Fund is a £1.5 billion fund targeted at a number of local authorities with high levels of unemployment.

**What the public said:**

How can local councils maintain their services with current budget pressures?

**The Government response:**

The Government has invested significantly in local services. Between 1997-8 and 2007-8 the total Government grant increased by 39% in real terms. Over the current three year settlement, an additional £8.6 billion will be provided to local government. This amounts to an average 4% cash increase per year in funding. A further 4% will be available in 2010-11 through efficiency savings.

**What the public said:**

Should Local Strategic Partnerships be statutory bodies, given their role in community engagement? How should they

fit in with changes to local government structures?

**The Government response:**

Local Strategic Partnerships are a collection of local organisations and representatives coming together voluntarily to work in partnership. Their structures should be driven by and reflect local circumstances. However, the Government does not prescribe how areas should run their Local Strategic Partnerships. Instead, it sets out in statutory guidance the key principles that it expects them to follow.

**What the public said:**

Will the replacement of Regional Assemblies with Local Authority Leaders' Boards lead to a loss of regional stakeholder input?

**The Government response:**

The move from Regional Assemblies to Local Authority Leaders' Boards will not result in a loss of regional stakeholder input. Throughout the debate on the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act which introduced Leaders' Boards, the Government was clear that new arrangements must maintain the strong linkages with local stakeholders. For example, the arrangements for producing new Single Regional Strategies include a requirement for Regional Development Agencies and Leaders' Boards to produce a consultation plan which clearly outlines their intentions on engagement with stakeholders.

**What the public said:**

Will the Government support proposals for a unitary council in Exeter?

Area Assessments, which were introduced in April 2009 and encourage partnership working.

**The Government response:**

Having had regard to the Boundary Committee's advice and all the representations it received, the Government announced in February 2010 that subject to Parliamentary approval, it would establish unitary authorities in Norwich and Exeter. It has laid structural change Orders to that effect for approval by Parliament. It is now up to Parliament to decide when to debate the Orders.

**What the public said:**

How can the Government encourage local authorities to work together, for example when pooling local funding through 'Total Place'?

**The Government response:**

'Total Place' looks at how local partnership and leadership could work to improve quality of life and value for money. Many have highlighted the issue of silo-based funding and ring-fencing as barriers to progress and the Government will publish its thinking in Budget 2010. The White Paper *Putting the Front Line First: Smarter Government* outlines a commitment to producing guidance on pooling and aligning of budgets at a local level by Budget 2010. In addition, the Audit Commission will include assessments of how local authorities and other organisations are managing their resources in Comprehensive

# THIRD SECTOR

## **What the public said:**

How can the Government encourage community and voluntary sector organisations to work together?

## **The Government response:**

The Government is keen that third sector organisations maximise opportunities for joint working, as this can bring many benefits, including cost savings, creating a better service for clients and combining skills. The Government has invested £16.5 million through the Real Help for Communities Modernisation Fund. This offers funding for organisations which want to collaborate, merge or undergo other kinds of organisational development. A £7 million grant programme is delivered by Capacitybuilders and a £9.5 million loan programme by the Social Investment Business.

## **What the public said:**

How can the third sector be more involved in decision-making?

## **The Government response:**

Locally, each top-tier local authority in England has a Local Area Agreement with a set of targets agreed by the Local Strategic

Partnership (LSP). The third sector is represented on all LSPs and plays a crucial role. In 2007 the Government facilitated a third sector stakeholder group to draft guiding principles to assist the third sector to maximise its impact on LSPs. Centrally, Government has mechanisms for third sector organisations to influence decision-making. The Government has also funded nine regional infrastructure organisations to provide a voice for the third sector at regional level.

## **What the public said:**

What is the Government doing to ensure a level playing field when the third sector competes or negotiates with the public and private sector?

## **The Government response:**

Since 2007 the Government has introduced a range of measures. These include setting up the first Cabinet Committee focusing on levelling the playing field for the third sector's involvement in public services and creating a National Indicator on an environment for a thriving third sector. Through the Partnership Improvement Programme and Targeted Support Commissioning Fund, key figures from local public and third sectors come together to identify the areas for building relationships. A refreshed 'Compact' agreement between the Government and the voluntary sector also sets the framework for public and third sector partnerships.

**What the public said:**

How can the Government encourage business and the public sector to take social enterprise seriously in delivering services and tackling the recession?

**The Government response:**

Social enterprises make a valuable contribution to delivering flexible and responsive services and the Government is committed to maximising their contribution to the UK's economic recovery. Research has shown that a key barrier to the growth of social enterprise is lack of awareness among people who might otherwise choose to set up, work for, invest in or buy from a social enterprise. The Government recently launched Social Enterprise Mark to help the sector to market itself better. It also supports the Social Enterprise Ambassadors to educate public sector officials and senior leaders from the private sector. The National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning is also working to ensure that up to 3,000 public sector commissioners understand and work better with social enterprise.

**What the public said:**

Government should do more to mitigate the impact of the recession on third sector organisations, which often suffer disproportionately. Valuable services can be lost if funding for the third sector is cut.

**The Government response:**

*Real Help for Communities: Volunteers, Charities and Social Enterprises* is the

Government's action plan, outlining up to £42.5 million of support for the third sector during the recession. This is in addition to over £515 million already committed. One year later, over 1,500 charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises have received financial support through grants, loans and bursaries. The plan included support to sustain organisations through the economic downturn, enabling them to support their communities through recession-focused services such as information on finding employment and increasing volunteering opportunities. The latest figures from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations show that third sector income from Government was £12 billion in 2006-7. This represents an all-time high.

**What the public said:**

Given the low rate of interest charged on loans by clearing banks, is it possible for the Government to reduce interest for loans such as Futurebuilders for third sector organisations?

**The Government response:**

Futurebuilders Fund is intended for organisations that are unable to secure finance from mainstream lenders. The loan rates are set by the Futurebuilders board and compare very favourably with rates charged elsewhere for high risk investment. However, Futurebuilders cannot risk being declared unlawful by offering funds at below the market rate. The Government works closely with Futurebuilders to ensure the Fund has

sound policies that are reflective of market conditions. This includes encouraging investees to move to commercial funding lines and supporting them to do this by not having penalty charges for early repayments.

# HOUSING

## **What the public said:**

Affordable housing is a real concern, especially when there are high property prices in areas where many people are on low incomes.

## **The Government response:**

There is an acute lack of affordable housing in England and the Government recognises the impact of current market conditions on housing providers' ability to deliver new affordable housing schemes. It has therefore committed investment of £7.5 billion over two years, 2009-11, to provide 112,000 new affordable homes for either rent or sale. The Government's Housing Pledge is assisting local authorities to build around 4,000 additional council homes over the next two years, as well as delivering 15,000 other new homes.

## **What the public said:**

Recently announced powers on Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) will allow councils to discriminate against students. How will the Government ensure they are protected?

## **The Government response:**

These new powers for local authorities were announced after many communities expressed disquiet about the impact of high concentrations of HMOs on their quality of life. The powers allow local authorities to deal with some very real problems but do not discriminate against any particular group. Any policy to restrict new HMO development will be supported by a strong evidence base and will apply to all HMOs in the designated area, regardless of their occupants. Local authorities will be able to use these powers to ensure that HMOs still provide a valuable source of lower cost accommodation in mixed, thriving and sustainable communities where people of all backgrounds wish to live.

## **What the public said:**

How can rural deprivation be tackled and rural issues taken into account in making policy, for example on housing?

## **The Government response:**

Tackling deprivation in rural areas is a priority for the Government and in 2007 it commissioned Matthew Taylor MP to undertake a review on the rural economy and affordable housing. The Government has accepted most of his recommendations and made progress on implementation. It also recently consulted on giving landowners incentives to make land available for rural affordable housing. The Government has promised £1 million to help rural councils develop masterplans to create new neighbourhoods of high-quality housing in

rural areas, and has now named the 36 rural councils in England that will benefit from this funding to help design and plan up to 10,000 new homes.

**What the public said:**

What extra funding will be made available so accommodation can be provided for homeless 16-17 year-olds?

**The Government response:**

The Government has pledged that by 2012 it will provide housing with support for all 16 and 17 year-olds who cannot stay with their families, including teenage parents. This commitment is backed by £30 million capital funding over 3 years to support local authorities in reviewing and reshaping their provision for young people. This funding will provide up to 500 new places in Foyers and specialist supported housing. Young people and parents will be offered a range of different support options, depending on their needs.

# ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT AND AGRICULTURE

## **What the public said:**

What present and future initiatives exist to foster sustainable and secure food production in the South West?

## **The Government response:**

The Sustainable Food and Farming Strategy includes projects to foster sustainable and secure food production. In the South West, this is carried out through a Regional Board and the Government Office South West. Recent projects include supporting programmes on addressing the impact of human and animal disease, and mapping and information provision on land availability in Somerset for community growing of fruit and vegetables. They also build on the 2007-08 Year of Food and Farming aimed at reconnecting school children to food and farming. In addition the South West Regional Board is supporting measures to demonstrate the potential impact of climate change on agriculture in the South West.

## **What the public said:**

What is the Government doing to stop supermarkets driving food prices down and putting suppliers out of business?

## **The Government response:**

In its 2008 Report on the UK groceries market, the Competition Commission found that the groceries market is generally delivering a good deal for consumers. However, it also revealed that grocery retailers were passing on excessive risks and unexpected costs to their suppliers. The Competition Commission believed this could damage future investment and innovation and so in 2010 it introduced a new strengthened Groceries Supply Code of Practice. The Government agrees that the Code needs to be enforced and is consulting on the nature of the enforcement body and the powers it would need.

## **What the public said:**

Changes to capital gains tax are preventing farmers from passing farms on to the next generation.

## **The Government response:**

Gifts holdover relief allows agricultural property, or shares in a business carrying on a farming trade, to be gifted without the original owner incurring a Capital Gains Tax charge. This did not change when Capital Gains Tax was reformed in 2008.

Entrepreneurs' relief, which was introduced in 2008, is also available for farming

businesses, and covers passing them to the next generation.

**What the public said:**

How can the Government ensure the South West remains a low carbon economy?

**The Government response:**

Since July 2009, when the Government announced that the South West would be the first Low Carbon Economic Area, significant progress has been made in developing a low carbon economy in the South West. A £100 million programme of work on marine renewables will be supported by up to £19.5 million from Government. Over £40 million has been invested in the pioneering Wave Hub project, including up to £9.5 million of Government support. Wave Hub will be the UK's first offshore facility to demonstrate the operation of arrays of wave energy generation devices, with the first wave energy devices expected to be deployed in 2011. In addition, the new South West Marine Energy Forum brings together representatives from across the marine industry and is working closely with research institutions to meet the industry's developing needs.

**What the public said:**

How can we support and communicate innovative low carbon technologies, so that people can benefit and jobs are created?

**The Government response:**

In July 2009 the Government launched its Low Carbon Industrial Strategy, setting out how the transition to low carbon can be a source of quality jobs and business growth for Britain. A number of measures will help achieve this. These include the creation of Low Carbon Economic Areas such as the one in the South West focusing on marine energy demonstration, servicing and manufacture to capitalise on the region's geographic and industrial assets.

**What the public said:**

Will ports have the necessary infrastructure to support renewable wave, tidal and wind energy?

**The Government response:**

The UK ports industry has been successful in developing the infrastructure needed for new forms of energy such as liquefied petroleum gas. Looking to the future, ports have expressed the view that they can deliver a range of options for the varied renewable energy industries, although in many cases this is still early in the development process. For wind energy, the Government has been encouraging developers to engage with ports to determine the most efficient approach.

**What the public said:**

How can the Government ensure that energy suppliers disclose to local authorities any energy efficiency measures they implement in individual properties?

**The Government response:**

The Government is working with the Energy Saving Trust and energy suppliers to develop a new voluntary agreement on the collection of data on all household energy efficiency measures under the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target. Local authorities should have access to this important information shortly. The Government has also published its Household Energy Management strategy. This considers future energy efficiency initiatives including the role of local authorities and data collection in relation to the installation of household energy efficiency measures.

# POLICING AND CRIME

## **What the public said:**

The National Policing Pledge and its promises to the public are positive, but is there a risk in areas with low crime that more minor concerns expressed by the public could skew resources away from police priorities?

## **The Government response:**

The Policing Pledge aims to deliver a police service that is responsive to the needs of local communities. Discussing the issues that matter most to people locally is an important way for communities and the police to work together to identify, agree and tackle local priorities. Working in partnership with other key agencies, such as the local council, ensures resources can be shared and used proportionately in response to identified, local and national priorities.

## **What the public said:**

There is some grassroots support for combining smaller police forces. But why has overall funding for rural policing been cut?

## **The Government response:**

The Government grant for the police in England and Wales will have increased by over 60% between 1997-98 and 2010-11 and funding will increase by £259 million in 2010-11. This includes around £30 million funding targeted at rural forces and funding for areas with low population density. In challenging economic times the Government expects all police forces and authorities to be thinking even harder about how to continue to deliver their services for the public efficiently. One option for some police forces may be to merge with their neighbours and the Government will support any forces and authorities that wish to merge, if it is in the best interests of the public they serve.

## **What the public said:**

Politicians' reaction to terrorism has led to problems, for example stop and search powers violating human rights.

## **The Government response:**

The protection of human rights is a key principle underpinning the Government's counter-terrorism work. The first priority must be to stop terrorist activity taking place, rather than dealing with its consequences. There can be no doubt about the complexity of the threat we face and the aspiration of those intent of committing acts of terrorism. Stop and search powers in the Terrorism Act 2000 are an important tool in a package of measures in the ongoing fight against terrorism.

# INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

## **What the public said:**

Government should do more to enable the South West to play a bigger role on the world stage.

## **The Government response:**

The Government has created a new focus for regional leadership through Regional Ministers and new local authority Leaders' Boards. The Regional Minister in the South West has led a task group focused on helping the region grow out of the recession. This will help the area build on recent successes, including iconic projects such as Eden which have helped place the region in the world's eye; world-class research and innovation in composites, low carbon, silicon technologies and life sciences; major airport development; and export programmes with overseas companies bringing investment to the region.

## **What the public said:**

What is the future of the Department for International Development's 'Building Support for Development' programme?

## **The Government response:**

Building and maintaining public support for development is a priority for the Government. The future focus will be on working with schools to increase understanding of the challenges faced by the poor around the world. Development education centres in England are encouraged to join with partners in a new programme to engage school children with the key global development challenges of our time. The Government will also continue to provide tailored support to global learning in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and expect development education centres to play a role in this.

## **What the public said:**

Can the Government give reassurances that the economic recovery plan will not affect funding for international development?

## **The Government response:**

The Government remains firmly committed to tackling the problems of the poorest people and countries. It announced last year that spending on international development would continue to rise in order to meet the United Nations target of 0.7% of national income from 2013. A draft Bill has been published to make this target binding. Parliament is currently scrutinising the draft Bill. The Bill will give further assurance that the UK will deliver on its commitment and encourage other donor countries to achieve the target.

**What the public said:**

Is the Government really committed to replacing older aircraft with the Joint Strike Fighter?

**The Government response:**

The Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) will replace the Royal Navy's Sea Harriers and the Royal Air Force's GR9 and T10 Ground Attack Harriers. The Government's early investment in the JSF programme has given UK industry the opportunity to provide 15% of the value of each JSF to be built. With plans for more than 3,100 aircraft to be produced, the return on UK investment is estimated at £30 billion.

Early planning estimates suggest that up to 150 aircraft may be procured.

# MAKING GOVERNMENT WORK BETTER

## **What the public said:**

Why is the Government still saying there is a need for radical public service reform after over twelve years in power? It is bringing in new guarantees but should improve the quality of existing services first.

## **The Government response:**

Investment in public services has created a new relationship between central government and the frontline. Building on this, the Government wants to ensure that local areas and frontline services are able to collaborate more easily to devise innovative ways to deliver the services citizens want and need. This includes enabling comparisons to be made more easily between service performance and costs. Introducing new guarantees for citizens sets out clear minimum standards in public services. Citizens and professionals can then work to secure ever more personalised delivery.

## **What the public said:**

How does the Government make sure people have a say in designing the services they use?

## **The Government response:**

The Government recognises the importance of engaging with users in the design and delivery of services. Guidance such as the *Code of Practice on Consultation* and *Effective Public Engagement* demonstrates continuing efforts to improve effectiveness in this area. In addition, individual departments are leading on the design and delivery of services in their own areas, where they have an insight into the needs of service users.

## **What the public said:**

More data is needed to evaluate the provision of public services, especially in rural areas. This would support commissioning decisions.

## **The Government response:**

As part of monitoring 30 Public Service Agreements, the Government collects and analyses data on the impact of public services in both rural and urban areas across the country. Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government, set out a clear vision for developing and publishing better comparative data on public services, to support benchmarking of performance. It also committed to radically opening up valuable data to the public and making data free for reuse, including postcode datasets from April 2010. This new approach will mean that people can use data for their own purposes including evaluation,

commissioning and holding the Government to account.

**What the public said:**

The public sector is heavily target driven and bureaucratic.

**The Government response:**

*Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government* committed to reducing the number of indicators that local authorities are obliged to report on. It committed to aligning different performance management frameworks, streamlining the number of inspectorates and simplifying funding streams. This is part of a move towards greater local decision-making, where local areas set priorities, guide resources and identify local solutions.

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