

Response to Cabinet public engagement event  
Birmingham 2008

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# Introduction

On the afternoon of Monday 8 September 2008 the Cabinet met in Birmingham – its first meeting outside London since 1920.

Ministers spent the morning visiting local hospitals, schools and cultural centres before meeting around 200 local people for a round table discussion and Q&A session.

Participants had been asked which topics they would like to cover. Crime, Economy, Employment and skills, Health and Education were chosen, although the discussion also covered a range of other topics including Climate change and Housing. Opening the event, the Prime Minister promised to continue the dialogue with the wider public.

This document summarises the points made by participants and gives the Government's response. Each chapter covers one of the five main themes, with the final chapter addressing other issues raised in discussion.

# Crime

## Neighbourhood policing

### What people said:

Neighbourhood policing had been **very successful** in the West Midlands region, particularly in tackling youth crime. Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) were a welcome sight on the streets.

### The Government response:

The Government has delivered its commitment to a Neighbourhood Policing Team in every area of England and Wales by 2008. There are now around 3,600 dedicated teams in place consisting of over 29,000 Police Sergeants, Constables and Police Community Support Officers dedicated to Neighbourhood Policing.

## Police Reform

### What people said:

One participant welcomed the Government's recent **Green Paper on Policing** and its recognition that policing was not just about statistics and recording crimes. Officers on the ground needed to be allowed to get on with the job, with less "meddling" from the top.

### The Government response:

To increase public confidence in the police, the Policing Green Paper, launched in July 2007, proposed the removal of all but one top-down target for police forces. The new Policing Pledge, announced in July, will ensure that each police force makes a deal with its community. This pledge will set out the levels of service people can expect from the police and show how local Neighbourhood Policing teams will work with local communities.

## Perception of crime

### What people said:

Birmingham had a low rate of crime and, overall, people felt safe round the city. However, there was a **perception problem**, partly because vandalism and other forms of anti-social behaviour (ASB) had such a big impact on how safe people felt in their communities. The Government needed to do more to communicate what it was doing to combat crime and to address fear of crime.

### **The Government response:**

Public attitudes about safety have a major impact on the quality of life for individuals and communities. They also affect how well the criminal justice system works. Over the last 10 years British Crime Survey crime has fallen by nearly 40% but around two-thirds of people (65%) still believe that crime levels in the country as a whole have increased in the previous two years.

The importance of public confidence is at the heart of the new Policing Green Paper and the recent Crime and Communities Report (Casey Review). Together these reviews set out the Government's expectation that there will be a significant improvement in public confidence over the next three years.

Communicating the work that is being done at a local and national level to tackle crime is crucial. Government campaigns such as 'Not in my Neighbourhood Week', and National Tackling Drugs Week provide a strong platform for local agencies to raise awareness of the work being done to make communities safer.

## Community engagement

### **What people said:**

The community as a whole had to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. **Neighbourhood Management** had been received positively, with a number of successful pilot schemes in the West Midlands area.

### **The Government response:**

Independent evaluations show that Neighbourhood Management can help to improve people's satisfaction with local public services, and their overall satisfaction with where they live. The Government recognises the need to work with communities to tackle crime which is why it commissioned the Crime and Communities Report (Casey Review), published earlier this year. The review found that public engagement in tackling crime was dependent on communities having confidence in the criminal justice system and confirmed that one of the best methods for achieving this is through successful Neighbourhood Policing.

## Crime against small businesses

### **What people said:**

Crime against businesses was a concern for a number of people. There had been a rise in the theft of raw materials due to global increases in commodity prices. This sort of crime could affect the whole community if it discouraged investment.

### **The Government response:**

Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) offer local businesses an opportunity to work in partnership with the police and local authorities. Partnership working has perhaps been the single biggest factor in tackling crime over the past ten years. For example, the Government-funded Action Against Business Crime Group set up 200 successful business crime reduction partnerships in towns and cities across England and Wales. The Government has been working closely with the police agencies to tackle the problem of metal theft.

## Youth crime

### What people said:

There needed to be a strong **focus on prevention** to address serious youth crime, as well as ASB. Solutions could be found in education and training and in building positive alternatives for young people.

**Unemployment** was seen as a key factor in youth crime and young people needed to develop the right skills to get a job. The Youth Parliament, citizenship courses and youth forums were all useful, but they needed stronger local and national backing.

More could be done to educate and empower parents, and if necessary, challenge them.

### The Government response:

In England and Wales the recent Youth Crime Action Plan will deliver almost £100 million of funding for a comprehensive package of tough enforcement and intensive prevention measures. It will enable more support for parents to tackle offending and reduce re-offending and give more support for young victims of crime.

There is a clear demand from young people, their parents and communities for more and better places for young people to go. Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities sets out the Government's vision for improving youth facilities. The Government's ambition is that this will lead to new and improved youth facilities in every constituency over the next 10 years.

myplace was launched on 3 April 2008 to deliver £190 million of Government capital investment over the next three years through grants of between £1 million and £5 million. It will deliver world class youth facilities driven by the active participation of young people and their views and needs.

The Government has shown its commitment to Citizenship by making it a statutory part of the National Curriculum in 2002. The Government is helping schools to improve the quality of teaching through the Citizenship Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme for teachers which is helping to train over 200 specialised Citizenship teachers every year.

In addition, The Children's Plan sets out the Government's plans to engage parents more in their children's learning. The Government has worked with trusted third sector providers to develop the Parent Know How programme, a suite of free services designed to ensure that everyone in a parenting role – mothers, fathers, carers and other adults with parental responsibility – has access to the information, advice and guidance they need to support them.

For details of the Government's policy on education and training for young people, please refer to the section on education and training.

## Alcohol and young people

### What people said:

Raising the **age limit** for purchasing alcohol from 18 to 21 would not discourage young people from excessive drinking.

### **The Government response:**

There is strong public support for maintaining the current age at which alcohol can be purchased from pubs and off-licenses. The evidence is unclear as to whether changing the age limit would deliver any reduction in the harm caused to young people by alcohol. The Youth Alcohol Action Plan, published earlier this year, set out to stimulate public debate on the issue of young people and alcohol and announced proposals to improve alcohol awareness amongst young people and parents.

## Re-offending

### **What people said:**

Prisons should invest more in **making prisoners employable** once they left prison. They should also provide support in other areas (e.g. securing housing) to reduce the likelihood of re-offending. **Community work** could also help reduce re-offending.

### **The Government response:**

The Government's aim is to provide more offenders with the skills and motivation to turn away from crime, improve their employability, and become productive members of society. Spending on offender learning now stands at over £160m for juvenile, young and adult offenders – almost a threefold increase since 2001.

To reduce the chances of prisoners re-offending after they have been released, the Government provides support to offenders in accommodation, health, finance and family issues.

Unpaid work, or Community Payback, is now one of the most frequently used requirements of a community or suspended sentence order. Community payback work projects have included bringing derelict areas and buildings back into public use, clearing litter, removing graffiti and repairing playground equipment.

## Prisons

### **What people said:**

According to one participant, there were now **too many offences**. As a result, there had been an increase in the number of people being given custodial sentences.

Another participant raised the issue of **foreign national prisoners** (FNP) asking why the Government didn't send back more foreign national prisoners as a way of increasing capacity within the prison system.

### **The Government response:**

New offences have been created to provide protection against activity that is rightly regarded as criminal. As society develops, new offences are needed to counter new threats. The sentences given in individual cases are at the discretion of the independent courts, and non-custodial disposals (such as community sentences) are available for the range of offences.

The highest ever number of foreign lawbreakers were deported during 2007, up 80% since 2006 – this is an additional 2,380 FNPs deported. The UK Border Agency aims to remove or deport more than 5,000 foreign prisoners in 2008. In addition, the Government's capacity building programme will provide around 20,000 prison places by 2014.

# Education

## Education initiatives

### What people said:

The burden on the education system was enormous. There were **too many education initiatives** and the frequent changes in the education system were seen as a cause of low basic skill levels. The impact of some initiatives would take generations which is why the Government needed to focus on priorities and give current initiatives time to produce results.

### The Government response:

Throughout England, the Government wants schools to provide excellent teaching and learning; to protect children's well-being; to identify and tackle children's problems; to work closely with other children's services, schools and parents; and to serve their communities. This progress will be made step-by-step and to achieve its vision for 21st century schools, the Government always listens to people who work in schools, and their unions, before introducing new initiatives.

## School discipline

### What people said:

Not enough was being done to **improve discipline in schools**, particularly when it came to unruly individuals. Schools found it too costly to exclude pupils who were having a detrimental effect on the learning environment.

On the other hand, much of the perception of the school discipline problem had been created by the media. The most important problem was that the **coverage had confused staff** as to what action they could and could not take against disruptive pupils.

### The Government response:

Behaviour is good at the overwhelming majority of schools – 90% of primary and about 70% of secondary schools. New or improved powers have been given to schools to control bad behaviour. These include:

- behaviour management training to help develop pupils' social and emotional skills
- personalised help for secondary schools with inadequate standards of behaviour
- practical guidance on dealing with bullying



- enabling schools and local authorities to make parenting contracts and seek court-imposed parenting orders relating to children's behaviour (strengthened by Education and Inspections Act 2006)
- Safer Schools Partnerships, which place police officers on school premises
- legal powers for head-teachers to search pupils for weapons (Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006)

There are clear statutory powers for controlling unruly pupils including:

- stronger powers to punish pupils in school and en route to and from school, for example bad behaviour on home-school transport
- powers to confiscate mobiles or music players that disrupt the class
- renewed powers to use physical force to break up fights.

These tough disciplinary powers strengthen teachers' rights to punish bad behaviour in and out of the classroom.

## Help for teenagers and young adults

### What people said:

Whilst there were good facilities for children aged 0-5, this was not the case for teenagers. Youth facilities were good, but there was a feeling that **services had diminished**. Better publicity for youth services was required while projects to bring together different generations should also be encouraged.

There was a sharp **transition between children's and adult services**, which did not reflect the different rates at which children matured. A number of vulnerable young adults were falling through the gaps between agencies.

### The Government response:

Aiming High for Young People: A ten year strategy for positive activities (published July 07) increases the opportunities for young people to take part in constructive out-of-school activities. Local authorities must provide activities and facilities for all young people, including those with disabilities or other disadvantages.

The Government is piloting ways of getting this information to young people in 20 areas. It will measure the impact on numbers taking part, especially among disadvantaged young people.

## Exam pressure and the narrow curriculum

### What people said:

Young **people were under pressure** to succeed, particularly in examination results. The focus on five GCSEs at grades A-C needed to be addressed. It should not be seen as the only marker of good performance. It gave children the wrong message with unintended consequences. The Government needed to do more to redress the balance and ensure schools were not **tailoring teaching exclusively to exam preparation**.

More needed to be done to provide **vocational alternatives** for young people disaffected by the traditional curriculum. The system also needed to cater for **different learning styles**.

Some schools were **losing sight of the delivery of education** and provision of resources and were instead focussing on accommodation standards and child welfare outside of school. Some governors felt that they were being distracted by such matters and being 'forced' not to monitor and address teaching standards and exam success.

### **The Government response:**

The new secondary curriculum is less rigid, creating time for pupils to catch up in English and Maths. It is more tailored to each child's needs with a sharpened focus on key skills.

The main purpose of National Curriculum tests is to provide an accurate picture of children's attainment, so that the education system can help them achieve their best. Good teachers in good schools will ensure that young people are able to work hard, sit tests and enjoy their education.

Passing the key tests, including English and Maths, will improve a pupil's life chances. Parents also want their children to be able to show employers that they have the right basic skills – they want their children to get good GCSEs or equivalents, especially in English and Maths.

The Government's 14-19 reforms (outlined in 'Learning Useful Skills in Schools') give all young people the opportunity to choose a mix of learning which motivates, interests and challenges them.

## School meals

### **What people said:**

One participant identified a conflict between menu descriptions for school meals and the quality of the food on offer. There were still too many chips!

### **The Government response:**

The Government has provided £220 million of funding over the three years 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2007-08, to help schools and local authorities in England provide school meals which meet the new food-based standards. This money is intended to help with necessary investment, such as training and increased hours for cooks. The Government is providing further funding of £240 million over the next three years, 2008/09-2010/11.

## Rural schools

### **What people said:**

According to one participant, the provision of rural education facilities was principally informed by urban considerations leaving **rural communities disadvantaged**, in some cases significantly increasing travelling times for young children.

Another member of the round table expressed concern that his college was suffering because of its small size and rural location. The college had students from three areas but the different local authorities were not willing to support students going there. One local authority, for example, was not willing to pay course fees for one student because it was in a different authority area, while another would not pay for travel even though it was the closest college.

### **The Government response:**

The Government understands that local schools are at the heart of many rural communities. It therefore supports rural schools where they contribute to standards, where parents want them and where they have the support of the local educational community.

That is why the Government introduced its presumption against the closure of rural schools in February 1998. Since then, the rate of closure has been reduced from an average of 30 a year to an average of just seven a year.

The case for closure needs to be strong and in the best interests of educational provision in the area. Decision-makers must consider the presumption and take account of other factors when proposing to close a rural school, e.g. transport availability and cost, alternatives to closure and the impact on the community.

## Differences in achievement

### **What people said:**

The Government should investigate why **some social groups struggled** at school, whereas children from some non-English speaking backgrounds progressed much faster.

### **The Government response:**

The Government is aware that certain groups under-achieve in comparison to the national average for each key stage. The Government is working to narrow the gap in educational achievement between children from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers, and there is a range of initiatives in place, including those targeted at specific groups (such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils).

## Guidance to young people of leaving age

### **What people said:**

The **connections between schools and colleges** were becoming weaker. Effective promotion of the route through secondary to higher education was essential. Schools were not flexible enough in their guidance to young people of leaving age.

### **The Government response:**

The Government wants all young people to be able to choose qualifications that offer an engaging learning experience, and that support their aspirations to progress to further study or employment. The government will ensure that apprenticeships are a mainstream option for 16-18 year olds, alongside other education (for instance, Diplomas) and training routes. The National Council for Educational Excellence has been set up to look at how to promote better links between businesses and schools.

# Employment and skills

## Skills at school

### What people said:

Academic qualifications did not provide young people with the **necessary skills** to succeed in the workplace. The Government should therefore encourage worthy vocational alternatives to GCSE and A-Levels. While schemes such as the new **apprenticeships were widely welcomed**, the Government needed to do more to support vocational training.

Not enough was being done to **promote alternative learning** and career paths for young people. More information needed to be provided on what skills were required for future growth sectors and in local industries, for example in manufacturing in the West Midlands.

Closer **links between businesses and schools** would ensure the demands of the economy were met. Better interaction and communication skills in the workplace needed to be a priority. The pursuit of business-orientated learning needed to be seen as part of the wider education package that included more socially-orientated outcomes. **Life skills**, such as managing household bills, could provide new educational avenues in schools.

### The Government response:

The Government believes that young people should leave school with skills that are relevant for adult life. That is why the new diplomas ensure qualifications are relevant to real-life contexts. Employers and higher education institutes are closely involved in the development of Diplomas, requiring students to achieve a minimum standard in English, Maths and ICT, complete a project and do a minimum of 10 days' work experience.

The first five Diplomas began being taught in September 2008 in Engineering; Construction and the Built Environment; Information Technology; Creative and Media; Society, Health and Development. This will increase to 17 choices by 2013. The Advanced Diploma will be equivalent to 3.5 A Levels.

It is important to foster better links between schools and businesses, which is why the Government has established the National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE). It will focus on promoting vital 'soft skills' as well as Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) skills.

The Manufacturing Strategy, launched on 8th September, has announced a new Manufacturing the Future campaign in schools. The campaign will encourage young people to consider manufacturing as a career. A Manufacturing Insight Centre has also been set up to inform public debate, liaise with the media and work to improve careers advice.

## Higher Education

### What people said:

The **Government's target of getting 50% uptake in higher education** could devalue degrees and any gains would not, in any case, be equitably distributed throughout the country. The West Midlands had become a "net exporter" of graduates, as young people did not return from higher education.

Some people doubted whether the **level of investment in higher education** and the personal debt accumulated by students was justified when many degrees had little vocational content. Even where degrees did have real vocational value, such as engineering, graduates often did not go on to work in related industries.

**Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP)** were useful conduits for sharing knowledge and mutual benefits between universities and business, although more investment and better incentives for post-graduate research were needed.

### The Government response:

The Government is committed to its target of 50% uptake of higher education in England, and there is no strong evidence to suggest that an increase in graduates has led to a decline in the value of degrees. Going to university is one of the best investments anyone can make, and average graduate earnings reflect this.

Over the last ten years, public funding for higher education has increased in real terms by around 24 per cent. Studies have also shown that while costs and debt concern students, there is a high level of support for student loans and the majority of applicants do feel that students should contribute to the cost of their degree.

Some regions, such as the West Midlands, are net-exporters of graduates. Moves to increase employer engagement with higher education and develop employer co-funded places will work to increase the numbers with higher level skills working locally.

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships enable companies to access knowledge and skills from the UK Knowledge Base (Further and Higher Education Institutions or research organisations) for use in the strategic development of the business. The KTP is in discussion with a number of key partners about significantly expanding its Partnerships.

## Skills for Employment

### What people said:

**Good quality apprenticeships** were crucial to the success of UK businesses. While acknowledging the greater availability of apprenticeships, some employers were of the opinion that Government initiatives such as Train to Gain did not always meet their needs.

Individuals also found it difficult to find the right apprenticeship for them, particularly in their local area. A better system of **matching apprenticeships to individuals**, comparable to the UCAS system for higher education, might improve provision and take up.

Faced with a range of training providers, employers were finding it hard to **establish what was right for their business**. For example, some were concerned that moving the funding of Connexions to local authorities could disrupt its effective operation, at least temporarily. (Connexions offers advice on education, careers, housing, money, health and relationships for 13-19 yr olds. It also provides support for young people up to the age of 25 with learning difficulties or disabilities.)

### **The Government response:**

The Government set out its vision for how apprenticeships can play a central role in growing the skills of our economy in World-Class Apprenticeships (Jan 2008). 130,000 employers are offering Apprenticeship places including over 180 different types across 80 industry sectors. Funding for Apprenticeships is planned to increase to over £1.1 billion by 2010-11 with the aim of making places available for all qualified young people by 2013. A new National Vacancy Matching Service will also be available from April 2009 which will match employer vacancies to suitably qualified candidates.

The Government has committed to increasing the investment in Train to Gain to over £1 billion by 2010/11. Train to Gain provides training support to employers in England through access to funding that sits alongside employers own financial contribution. Recent evaluations of the service show that employer satisfaction with the service is high. The Government has also been developing 'sector compacts' with the employers in key sectors of our economy to ensure Train to Gain is tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of each sector.

## Adult learning

### **What people said:**

Skills policy needed to give more consideration to **older people who want to re-skill**. Much of the support offered for education and retraining currently excluded those who already had qualifications. Removing funding for students who wanted to take a second qualification at the same level made it harder for people to retrain in later life. This ran counter to the Government's rhetoric on the **need to build a more flexible workforce**.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) had not been effective in responding to the needs of vulnerable groups. For example, **providing offenders with skills training** was key to reducing re-offending. The prison service had established a successful programme with Railtrack, training prisoners and providing guaranteed employment on release, but the scope to extend such schemes was limited because the LSC only recognises certain qualifications.

### **The Government response:**

The Government believes that learning should not be something that just happens at school, but continues throughout a person's life, especially in relation to new skills that can help in the workplace. The new Integrated Employment and Skills service, which is now being tested in the West Midlands, will offer a seamless service to help people learn the skills they need to enter and progress in sustainable employment.

The Government is providing more money than ever before to support the costs of teaching students in Higher Education, but thinks it is right in general terms to give priority to those who haven't yet had a chance to go to university. That is why the Government has asked the funding council to redeploy £100 million from its budgets to support students who have not participated in Higher Education before. The Government will continue to examine where investment is needed to meet national skill training needs, particularly for vulnerable groups and where skills bottlenecks are identified.

The Government has set out its plans to tackle re-offending by enabling offenders to gain trained employment. The West Midlands is one of two test-bed regions trialling plans set out in Reducing Re-offending Through Skills and Employment: Next Steps (the other is the East of England). The lessons learned from the test bed regions will be integrated with the new offender learning and skills arrangements as they go live across England in summer 2009.

## Unemployment

### What people said:

People needed to **understand the necessity of work**. Those seeking employment should be more willing to take up the jobs that were available and more willing to consider jobs that were not in their immediate locality.

The **long-term unemployed were at risk of being 'left behind'** as priority was given to helping people out of short-term unemployment. Better provision for the long-term unemployed could be achieved through more efficient cross-sector co-operation, in particular with the voluntary sector which could help prepare people to return to work (e.g. by developing interview skills). When it came to finding work, many **people could be put off applying for jobs** because of the time and complexity of applications.

### The Government response:

The Government believes that people in the UK who are capable of working have no right to a life on benefits. Jobseekers can expect support finding and retaining work, but if they fail to find work within a specified time in their preferred field, then they are expected to take any job that they are deemed suitable for, including jobs within the local travel-to-work area.

It is recognised that many long-term unemployed customers, and particularly those who have been in receipt of incapacity benefits and income support for long periods of time, will lack the necessary skills to compete in the job market. The Local Employment Partnership initiative, specifically aimed at supporting long-term unemployed customers, supports customers in making effective applications for jobs and addresses potential employability and skills barriers.

## Economy

### What people said:

Rural areas had been affected by the return of immigrant workers to their home countries. There appeared to be a **shortage of available workers** to harvest fruit crops and where labour was available in the local population, it tended to lack the necessary skills.

### The Government response:

Jobcentre Plus will be working with partners to ensure that customers are ready, able and equipped to respond to the needs and requirements of local employers.



# Health

## National targets

### What people said:

Targets placed an unnecessarily large **bureaucratic burden** on professionals, decreasing the amount of patient-focused time. Targets were too rigid and did not recognise local variations. The system should better cater for regional and local variations in circumstances, and trust local people to make the right decisions at a local level. Nonetheless, a move away from national targets to locally based flexibility might give rise to a 'postcode lottery' of care.

### The Government response:

The drive to meet national targets in England, together with sustained growth in resources over the past decade, has delivered significant benefits for patients. There have been big improvements in waiting times over the past ten years. To the point that the Government expects that by December 2008 no one should wait more than 18 weeks from the time their GP refers them to the start of treatment, including inpatient treatment (unless it is clinically appropriate to do so or they choose to wait longer). The NHS has also exceeded the target of halving the number of MRSA bloodstream infections compared to 2003/04.

The final report of Lord Darzi's NHS Next Stage Review, 'High Quality Care for All', describes how the NHS is now changing from a system where central government tells people what is needed, to one where clinicians and patients work together locally to determine how best to improve the quality of care. The NHS will begin the systematic measurement and publication of data about the quality of care, to identify where variation does exist and enable staff and patients to respond by learning from the evidence of what works best.

## Staying healthy

### What people said:

There needed to be a paradigm shift from **intervention to prevention**, health education and personal responsibility. Obesity and alcohol were particular health risks in the West Midlands. Such a move would require well coordinated public service partnerships across the NHS, local authorities and education and employment services.



A more **inclusive approach to urban planning** would also help, with more green spaces to encourage people to build exercise into their routines, and an increase in the provision of sports facilities. Diet, particularly junk food, was a key issue and education initiatives should focus more on healthy meals – rather than just what not to eat.

### **The Government response:**

As part of the NHS Next Stage Review, each health region in England has developed and published a vision for helping people to stay healthy. Drawing on these, the Government's primary and community care strategy will enable primary and community care services to support people in staying healthy throughout their lives. There will be a new vascular risk assessment programme for those aged 40 to 74, and improved access to services to help people give up smoking, control alcohol use and improve diet or exercise.

The Government wants our country to be the first major nation to reverse the rising tide of obesity. The strategy, Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives is supported by £372 million of investment.

## Diversity

### **What people said:**

At times, ethnic minorities struggled to access NHS services. More should be done to raise **awareness of cultural inhibitions**. Patients from South Asia, for example, sometimes had difficulties accessing mental health assistance.

The composition of the **NHS workforce** faced a challenge in attracting certain ethnic groups. Currently, the population demographic for the West Midlands did not match the demography of the health workforce. Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) should recognise the increased diversity in the region and create better links with communities and the public sector.

### **The Government response:**

The Government is committed to ensuring equal access to health services for minority ethnic communities. A range of programmes has been launched to achieve this, including the Pacesetters programme which tackles deep-seated problems of access and service delivery, and the Delivering Race Equality in Mental Health Care programme which addresses discrimination in mental health services.

The Breaking Through programme aims to give black and minority ethnic middle managers a better chance of competing for more senior posts in the NHS, and those organisations participating in the Pacesetters programme are tackling bullying and harassment, improving flexible working options and seeking a more representative workforce.

## Carers

### **What people said:**

More should be done to **raise the status of carers**. There were 70,000 carers in Birmingham alone, working 24/7 and only receiving £54 per week for their efforts. More respite care in homes should be made available to support carers getting back into employment. Neither the Carers' Strategy nor the Dementia Strategy fully addressed these issues.

### **The Government response:**

With most people living longer, carers will need to play an increasingly central role in family policy. In June the Government published Carers at the Heart of 21st Century Families & Communities. Underpinned by £255 million to implement immediate steps, this strategy set out a long-term vision for carers, so that by 2018 carers will be:

- respected as expert care partners and have access to the integrated and personalised services they need
- able to have a life of their own alongside their caring role
- supported so that they are not forced into financial hardship by their caring role
- supported to stay mentally and physically well and treated with dignity.

## Hospitals vs care closer to home

### **What people said:**

Given the changing nature of the population, **the NHS needed to be more flexible** about going out to the elderly and those with special needs. In 70% of cases in Birmingham, paramedics took patients to hospital “just in case” while Accident & Emergency wards referred patients to Consultants “just in case”. This consumed resources unnecessarily.

In terms of specialty hospitals, it was important to **spread the quality of provision** equally rather than focusing services in one location. Transport and car parking was also an issue. This needed to be a priority, particularly where hospitals were located on the outskirts of towns.

### **The Government response:**

The NHS is offering new models of care and a wider range of high quality, convenient and personalised services. As well as same-day appointments with their health care practice or going to A&E, people can now use NHS Walk-in Centres, NHS Direct, minor injuries units, pharmacies, out-of-hours primary care services, community social services and crisis resolution teams. The NHS Choices website provides health advice 24/7. Following the 2005 review, ambulance services are increasingly transforming to provide a range of mobile healthcare at the scene or in patients’ homes.

The NHS Next Stage Review found that some specialist services – e.g. trauma – are safer and better when concentrated in centres of excellence. A key principle is “localise where possible, centralise where necessary”.

## Patient experience

### **What people said:**

The NHS was **not sufficiently patient-centric**. Signing up with a GP could be difficult, car parks were expensive, and transport to hospitals inadequate. Appointments were not made from the patient’s point of view but arranged to fit around the doctors’ diaries and availability. Patient choice was also a concern.

Some participants felt access had improved but that communication, messages to the public and personal services need to be better tailored to meet individual needs. In particular, there needed to be better communication between consultants and specialists working on shared cases.

### **The Government response:**

Each region in England set out its vision for improving health and health services as part of the NHS Next Stage Review. These set out the goal of giving patients more say, through better information and more choice.

This year the NHS has begun to invest an additional £250m to secure over 100 new GP practices in under-served areas and 152 new GP-led health centres around the country. The health centres will be for use by any member of the public and will be in easily accessible locations with a GP or nurse available between 8am and 8pm, 365 days a year. In addition, the GP contract has been amended to reward GP practices that extend their opening hours. 45% of GP practices have already done so.

## Quality of care

### **What people said:**

Some NHS organisations performed better than others. This gap was not closing, partly because good practice was not routinely shared.

### The Government response:

The NHS has seen huge improvements over the past ten years. In 2008 92% of people surveyed by the Healthcare Commission rated their overall hospital care as either excellent, very good or good. Nevertheless, it also true that progress has been patchy, particularly in relation to patient experience. This was recognised by the NHS Next Stage Review. Lord Darzi's final report set out what the Government will do to enable frontline staff and patients to focus relentlessly on high quality care.

## Other matters

### **What people said:**

One participant felt that not enough was being done to deal with post-traumatic stress amongst servicemen.

### **The Government response:**

Working with the charity Combat Stress and the NHS, the Government is committed to improving support. It has recently announced the launch of six pilot schemes of community-based veterans' mental health therapists to be rolled out across the UK. Veterans can now also receive free mental health assessments from a consultant psychiatrist with a military background.

# Economy

## Global Financial Turbulence

### **What people said:**

The current challenges facing the economy stemmed, in-part, from the “credit-crunch” – but what exactly were the causes of the “credit-crunch” and what was the Government doing to tackle them? The effects of the tightening of lending criteria were beginning to affect some small businesses.

In the short-term, something needed to be done to make it easier to get a mortgage, especially for first time buyers. On the other hand, falling house prices were inevitable at some point and would help others to get on the housing ladder.

### **The Government response:**

The turbulence in financial markets has hit all the world’s economies, including the UK’s. At the same time there has been a surge in food and energy prices. These global shocks are unprecedented in their scope, scale and concurrence. As a result, they are delivering the toughest economic challenge for decades and it is the Government’s priority to guide Britain through these difficult times.

The “credit crunch” is extremely complicated, but put simply, the chain of events that have led to the current crisis are as follows:

- Concerns about the US sub-prime mortgage market triggered disruption in global financial markets.
- Uncertainties over where losses lay and how large they were left banks (here and in the rest of the world) reluctant to lend to each other, causing market interest rates to rise.
- Over the past year, financial institutions have written down the value of assets by more than \$500 billion.
- This has reduced access to credit – a major contributor to the global turbulence – and this has affected homebuyers and businesses across Britain and the world.

In the UK, the Government has put in place the right frameworks for economic stability, and has promoted open and flexible markets. This provides the UK with a strong platform from which to face economic challenges.

Since the current problems began a year ago the Government has already taken a number of measures to help families adjust to the tough state of the housing market:

- suspending stamp duty on homes worth up to £175k
- helping thousands of vulnerable homeowners facing repossession to remain in their home through a new mortgage rescue scheme
- reforming the Support for Mortgage Interest scheme to increase help for some of the most vulnerable homeowners on very low, or no, incomes.

More generally, the Government's £2.7 billion tax cut, announced before the summer, will give 22 million people a £120 boost over the next few months.

### **Sustainable recovery**

The Government understands, however, that it needs to do more to get lending for housing moving again. In April this year, the Chancellor of the Exchequer asked the Sir James Crosby to advise the Government on how it might improve the way that mortgage funding markets operate. The FSA has since held extensive consultations with a range of banks, building societies, specialist lenders, investment firms, brokers and trade associations. It is evaluating the options, working closely with interested parties, and will present its final recommendations to the Chancellor this Autumn.

The UK must be able to respond to the wider challenges posed by the recent financial market instability – and particularly those challenges faced by the banking sector. The Government, along with the FSA and the Bank of England, has therefore consulted widely on a strengthened **framework for financial stability** and **depositor protection**. Measures include enhancements to the compensation arrangements for depositors (in the rare event a bank becomes insolvent) and also widening the range of tools available to the authorities to respond effectively, in the event a bank gets into severe difficulties. The Government will be bringing forward new legislation to implement this shortly.

## Inflation

### **What people said:**

The rise in fixed costs, particularly in energy, was causing major problems for businesses. The rise in inflation could potentially lead to an additional increase in wage demands. Any depreciation of the pound would also make imported raw materials more expensive.

The local agricultural sector was particularly struggling. Increases in the cost of fuel and fertilizers were pushing up food prices just as people were moving away from premium priced foods, a market that had been through a good period.

### **The Government response:**

As outlined above, the combined shocks of the credit crunch and a surge in energy and food prices have hit every country in the world, including here in the UK. The Government recognises that the consequences are affecting the daily lives of families and businesses throughout the country.

## Energy

Regarding energy, the Government's policy is to deliver **affordable, secure energy supplies** through a competitive market policed by an independent regulator. The competitive market has delivered significant savings for UK consumers and there are still large gains to be made for consumers who are able to switch supplier and/or payment method. In response to public concern over energy prices, Ofgem, the regulator for gas and electricity markets, has announced a probe into the competitiveness of energy supply markets for households and small businesses. The Government welcomes this move.

Creating an open and competitive energy market in the UK has meant that UK consumers have benefited from **among the lowest energy prices in Europe**. High wholesale energy prices may be pushing up retail prices, but greater choice and transparency can continue to provide some restraint on prices. In each of the last ten years, both gas and electricity prices for households in the UK's competitive markets have been at or below the EU average.

The Government understands the difficulties that are caused for domestic consumers and businesses as a result of price increases of gas and electricity. It also recognises the need to help vulnerable and poor households in particular. **Core Government policies** including the Winter Fuel Payment, the Warm Front Scheme, the expanded Carbon Emissions Reduction Target, and help with energy efficiency and heating measures.

In addition, the Government announced a **Home Energy Saving Programme** on 11 September. This includes a new £1 billion package of energy efficiency measures, a high-profile information and marketing campaign, and greater help this winter for the most vulnerable (cold weather payments for the most vulnerable will be tripled from £8.50 to £25 a week for this year).

## Agriculture

The Government also recognises that the farming community, in common with a number of other sectors, has had to deal with an increase in energy-based costs. It has also had to deal with bad weather during much of the summer. Concerns are therefore high. It should be noted, however, that farmers have also seen **higher farmgate prices** during 2007 and 2008, partly as a result of such higher input costs. The farming community is also cushioned to a significant extent by the very substantial subsidies provided to them through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

## Migration

### What people said:

Agricultural businesses were suffering due to a **shortage of migrant labour** needed for seasonal work such as fruit picking. The Government should consider ways of making the UK more attractive for migrants, as the country would face increasing competition for talent from developing nations.

### The Government response:

Migration plays an important role in helping to meet the UK's economic objectives. By complementing domestic skills and labour market policy it can help ensure the best and most sustainable economic outcomes.

The Government is pressing ahead with the biggest shake-up to the immigration system and border security in 45 years. Part of this reform is the Australian-style points system which means only those that the UK needs can come here to work or study. Those that do come will need to work hard, play by the rules and speak English.

The UK Border Agency operates the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) which enables the provision of short term, low skilled workers to be employed in the agricultural industry. The scheme is exclusively available to Bulgarian and Romanian nationals and it is reviewed annually following discussion with stakeholders, including the National Farmers' Union. The Government is phasing out low-skilled migration from outside the EU because it thinks businesses should hire those close to home first. It does not make sense to have in place restrictions on people with rights of free movement and at the same time continue to admit people subject to immigration control to do the same type of work.

## Thinking locally

### **What people said:**

There needed to be an overall **economic strategy for the region** to drive investment, linked to other strategies on areas such as health and education.

### **The Government response:**

There is already an economic strategy for the region – developed by Advantage West Midlands with wide consultation throughout the area. In July 2007, the review of sub-national economic development and regeneration (SNR) was published by HM Treasury, the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). As part of the implementation of the review, the Government has been looking into a single regional strategy, pulling together economic and spatial planning and other strategies. The Government will respond to the consultation shortly.

## Bankruptcy protection

### **What people said:**

An economic downturn could potentially cause many businesses to face bankruptcy. The Government should therefore consider introducing a version of the **US Chapter 11** bankruptcy protection system.

### **The Government response:**

The Government believes that the administration system we currently have in place provides the best means of helping companies in difficulty, and that the wholesale adoption of a US-style "Chapter 11" system is not considered the best option for the UK economy. The current UK insolvency regime incorporates many of the positive aspects of the US Chapter 11 process and gives breathing space to firms in difficulty.



To help companies through challenging times, the Government has recently made improvements to the insolvency regime in the Enterprise Act 2002. However, a wholesale adoption of the Chapter 11 regime would not help British companies. Unlike Chapter 11, the current UK system allows for a qualified professional to manage the administration process, rather than the directors under whom the company has got into difficulties. It also provides a non court-based procedure that, in almost all cases, is completed within 12 months, meaning that the value of the company is not eroded by legal fees thereby making rescue of the company more viable. The introduction of Chapter 11, in the current economic climate, could even hurt British businesses, as banks may tighten up their lending in advance of the new rules coming into force.

## Financial education

### **What people said:**

The Government should **prioritise financial education** to ensure people understood the importance of saving, particularly for their pension.

### **The Government response:**

The Government is committed to improving financial capability in the UK. It believes people should be able to make informed financial decisions and be equipped with the skills and confidence to manage their money well – now and for the future. In July, the Government and the Financial Services Authority set out a series of measures to improve financial capability in a joint financial capability action plan.

### **Savings and assets**

The Government recognises the importance of saving and assets in providing people with independence throughout their lives, providing security if things go wrong and comfort in retirement. The **Individual Savings Account (ISA)** is the Government's primary vehicle for tax-advantaged saving outside pensions and is at the heart of our efforts to promote saving and asset ownership for all throughout the lifecycle. ISAs are extremely popular and are held by one in three adults.

In addition, the **Child Trust Fund** provides every child with £250 at birth (£500 for children in lower-income families) and again at the age of seven. The policy is designed to strengthen the saving habits of future generations, promote financial education, and ensure that at age 18 every child will have access to a financial asset.

The Government is keen to build on this success. The package of reforms that came into effect in April 2008 have made ISAs even more attractive by allowing people to save more, and by being more flexible and simpler to use. The annual investment limit for ISAs rose to £7,200 for 2008-09, of which £3,600 can be saved in cash.

The Government will also be launching a national **Saving Gateway** scheme in 2010, encouraging low income people to save by rewarding them with a Government contribution for every pound they save in the scheme.



## Pensions

Measures currently being taken through Parliament in the Pensions Bill will establish the presumption that people will join a work-place pension scheme unless they choose to opt out. Eligible workers will be automatically enrolled into either a personal account or an employer-sponsored scheme meeting a minimum quality requirement. Workers will contribute a minimum of 4 per cent, matched by a minimum 3 per cent employer contribution on a band of earnings and around 1 per cent in the form of normal tax relief from the State, representing a good incentive to save.

## Empty property tax

### **What people said:**

The tax on empty properties was not good for business. It stifled growth and discouraged investment in new property.

### **The Government response:**

The Government is committed to regenerating urban areas. To encourage this process, it has limited the scope of Empty Property Relief, which provides relief from business rates for empty property. The aim is to encourage owners of serviceable properties to find an economic use for them. The 2008 reforms to EPR were announced at Budget 2007 and legislated through the Rating (Empty Property) Act 2007. From 1 April 2008, all properties receive 100% relief from business rates for the first three months of falling empty (with a further three months full relief for warehouses and industrial premises). After these periods an empty property is subject to full rates.

# Other issues

1. **Housing**
2. **Business and competitiveness**
3. **Renewable energy and low carbon technology**
4. **Climate change and flooding**
5. **Sport and the Olympics**
6. **Local Authority and Central Government funding**
7. **The Third Sector**
8. **Diversity**
9. **Transport**

## HOUSING

### The housing market

#### What people said:

The downturn in the housing market was a cause for concern. One way of stimulating it could be through Government action on **shared ownership** of social housing, for example, by taking 25% of the value of property and working with developers to offer mortgages.

Attention also needed to be given to those already in the mortgage market who could not pay their **debts**. The help available to households having problems should be communicated effectively

#### The Government response:

The Government is keen to support the most vulnerable homeowners during current market difficulties, and has put in a place a series of measures to help:

Mortgage Rescue: the Government announced on 2 September a two-year, £200 million mortgage rescue package targeted at households in England at risk of being repossessed. It will help up to 6,000 households at risk of becoming homeless but who have not borrowed excessively or acted recklessly.

Reforms to Income Support for Mortgage Interest: the Government is improving the support offered through the benefit system to homeowners who lose their jobs. This should help 10,000 households facing repossession over the next two years.

Advice for those facing repossession or homelessness: the Government is investing £85 million over the next three years to fund a free face-to-face debt advice service for those suffering from financial exclusion and repossession. In addition it will fund advice desks at most county courts, providing free representation to those facing repossession actions, and specialist training for Citizens Advice Bureaux staff and other voluntary groups who support those with debt problems.

### Social & Affordable Housing

#### What people said:

There needed to be more **affordable housing** and access to it should be based on need – not on background – with priority given to the elderly and vulnerable people. (One participant claimed that ex-prisoners were given a higher priority on local authority housing lists than service personnel).

Other issues included the fact that many people lived in **sub-standard housing** while the rising level of **student debt** would become an increasingly difficult problem for future first-time buyers.

#### The Government response:

Social housing is allocated based on need. Local authorities are required to give “reasonable preference” to people who are: homeless; living in overcrowded or unsatisfactory housing conditions; have a medical or welfare need to move; or need to move to a particular location, where failure to meet that need would lead to hardship.

The Government is committed to removing disadvantage faced by service personnel. The "Nation's Commitment: Cross-Government Support to the Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans", published in July 2008, includes a number of proposals to help meet their accommodation needs, including improved access to social housing.

The Government expects that everyone should live in a decent home. By 2010 the Government expects 95% of social housing stock in England to be up to that standard. Work will have been completed on 3.6 million homes, with improvements for 8 million people in total, 2.5 million children among them.

The Council for Mortgage Lenders has stated that a Government loan is not necessarily a barrier to the offer of a mortgage as the assessment is made on the person's overall ability to meet future mortgage repayments.

## BUSINESS and COMPETITIVENESS

### Barriers to business

#### **What people said:**

The country's complex and **uncoordinated administrative structures** made it hard for UK businesses to be competitive and stop overseas companies locating here. Companies setting up in the UK needed a single point of contact with Government, rather than the range of agencies they currently had to deal with.

#### **The Government response:**

The UK is already the 6th best place in the world for doing business and Government is already removing structures that act as a barrier to business. The Business Simplification Support Programme will better coordinate publicly-funded business support schemes. The Government is committed to reducing the net burden of regulation by 25% by 2010 and will improve guidance and public procurement opportunities for small businesses.

The Government is making it easier to find and understand Government information and services by moving 95% of business and citizen-facing web content to [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk) and [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk).

UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) co-ordinates the UK inward investment network. Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and Devolved Administrations also help potential investors access the information they need. All of this helps make the UK the most successful country in Europe at attracting inward investment, and second in the world after the US.

### Manufacturing support

#### **What people said:**

Government support for the manufacturing industry didn't fully address the **cost of capital equipment**. Investment grants would help businesses to compete in the global market at a time of rising energy costs, but it took too long to apply for grants, and they were too small. More aid needed to be provided for research and development. The UK needed the right technical skills to cope with new global challenges.

#### **The Government response:**

The Government seeks to ensure that the tax system is supportive of business investment. The capital allowances system, which recognises investment in plant and machinery, was recently reformed to make it simpler and boost economic efficiency.

The Manufacturing Strategy reaffirmed the Government's commitment to the sector as part of a mixed and balanced economy. The Strategy brings together almost £150 million of support for manufacturing in England, and sets out Government's view of what is needed for success in the long term in a low carbon economy, supporting skills, realising overseas opportunities, and improving perceptions. It builds on the Manufacturing Advisory Service which has helped over 24,000 firms and given other support such as R&D Tax Credits amounting to £2.3 billion of support for business R&D by 2005-6 – a significant proportion taken up by manufacturers.

Since 2004 the Technology Strategy Board (TSB) has invested over £1 billion in collaborative partnership projects. The Manufacturing Strategy committed the TSB to invest a further £24 million in research central to high value manufacturing. The Government is developing a framework of Finance and Investment Readiness to raise awareness of financing options and the impact they can have on business development. It is also supporting small business growth through equity funds in partnership with private investors. Enterprise Capital Funds (ECF) has provided more than £140 million since 2006 and has committed a further £50m.

## RENEWABLE ENERGY and LOW CARBON TECHNOLOGY

### **What people said:**

Given the increasing focus on renewable energies, the Government should do more to encourage the **manufacture of wind turbines** in the UK. Currently most (or all) of these were made overseas.

The Government also needed to promote greater investment in research into low carbon technologies and renewable energy, making it easier for companies to apply for pump-priming **grants and funding**. One company developing solar panels had applied for a government grant to help with development work and found itself "tripping over the rules" when trying to get help with funding.

### **The Government response:**

To meet the projected EU commitment on renewable energy, the UK alone will have to invest around £100 billion in renewables. The Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR), UKTI and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) have worked together to encourage overseas wind turbine manufacturers such as Vestas and Clipper to invest in the UK.

As set out in the Government's Manufacturing Strategy, launched on 8 September, the Government will set up the Office of Renewable Energy Deployment when the Renewable Energy Strategy is finalised in spring 2009. This will help the UK to facilitate a possible £100 billion private sector investment in UK energy and help to ensure that as many as possible of the estimated 160,000 new jobs in the renewable energy sector are UK-based.

The Environmental Transformation Fund (ETF) is a cross-Government fund aimed at investing in low carbon energy/energy efficiency technologies and promoting better use of energy. The UK element of the ETF has a budget of £400 million 2008-11 and began operating in April this year. In addition, the Technology Strategy Board (TSB) provides a range of funding that covers low carbon technologies. The Research Councils' expenditure on energy-related research and related postgraduate training has more than trebled since 2001 and will amount to £300m over 2008-11.

The Government is also working with industry to develop low carbon energy technologies. One example is the Energy Technologies Institute (ETI), a new public private partnership that brings together some of the world's biggest companies to offer a strategic lead in low carbon energy research and fund its delivery. Current public/private investment is £600 million over the next 10 years, with the potential to increase to £1 billion with additional partners.

There are a number of specific rules and regulations around which projects can receive public support to ensure sensible spending of taxpayer's money. The Government tries to ensure these rules do not become an administrative burden and always welcomes views on achieving this. In 2009 the Government will propose a Low Carbon Industrial Strategy, clarifying the range and type of support available for low carbon technologies.

## CLIMATE CHANGE and FLOODING

### Flooding

#### **What people said:**

The local effects of flooding were a big issue. Repeat flooding had been particularly tough. This had led to **rising insurance costs** with people being charged different premiums and excesses despite living in the same street.

Local authorities were helping people prepare for and manage the effects of flooding, for example by running “Flood Fairs” to alert people to ways of **preventing flood damage** to their homes. This could be more effective at a local level if District Councils had access to more funding.

In the West Midlands, the main focus had been on rivers – yet most flooding had been caused by surface water, so more money was needed for **drainage**.

#### **The Government response:**

Insurance is offered through a competitive market but premiums should still reflect the risk to different households. The Government is promoting measures to make individual homes more resilient to flooding. These should cut clean-up bills and recovery time as well as enable insurance companies to offer more favourable terms.

The Government already provides substantial funding to local authorities in England through the Revenue Support Grant. The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) also made £20 million available to support the recovery work of local authorities following the 2007 summer floods. Government funding for flooding has increased from £307 million in 1997 to £650 million in 2008-09 and will rise to £800 million by 2010-11.

To ensure people are better prepared for future flooding, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has launched a consultation process asking stakeholders for their views. ‘Flood fairs’ could become part of the dissemination of flood risk management information, a role that could be considered as part of the consultation review.

The Government’s Water Strategy published in February 2008 outlined policies that aimed at encouraging better management of surface water drainage by slowing water down and managing more of it above ground. A Government response to this year’s surface water drainage and sustainable drainage systems consultation is due in autumn 2008.

### Climate change

#### **What people said:**

Individuals and businesses could act to **tackle climate change** by cutting water consumption and turning off lights in office buildings. An energy-saving light bulb that looked good in chandeliers would be a good idea.



**The Government response:**

The Government has launched the Act on CO<sub>2</sub> campaign in England – a multi-million pound campaign that includes the Act on CO<sub>2</sub> advice line (0800 512012), which provides people with simple advice on the steps they can take to reduce their carbon footprint. To help businesses take action, the Government provides comprehensive energy saving advice, for example through the Carbon Trust.

Energy efficient light bulbs for chandeliers (e.g. that give a 'sparkle' effect) are available. Halogen lamps have also been developed that resemble incandescent lamps while offering up to 40% savings. In the medium term, the Government is working to stimulate innovation for LED lighting which is expected to provide a very efficient solution.

## SPORT and the OLYMPICS

### Sporting facilities

#### **What people said:**

It would be good to have more and better sporting facilities, particularly for young people. This would require **more Government investment** to rebuild many existing sporting facilities.

There should be more emphasis on building up positive alternatives and **amenities** for young people, particularly around sport. The recent success of team GB at the Olympics should be used to give young people a **positive alternative to crime**.

#### **The Government response:**

The Government aims to ensure that every community has access to a wide range of facilities. Since 2001, Government and the National Lottery have committed over £1 billion through targeted initiatives to develop 4,000 new or refurbished sports facilities. The Building Schools for the Future initiative has also provided £6.5 billion over 2005-08 for sport facilities investment in secondary schools in England; for the local community as well as school use. As part of the Government's £142m Free Swimming programme, a capital fund of £10m will be made available in 2008/09 and £25m p.a. (initially for 2009/10 and 2010/11) to fund improvements to swimming pools.

The PE and Sport Strategy for Young People outlines the Government's commitment to improve the quantity and quality of PE and sport undertaken by 5-19 year olds in England. It will also create new opportunities for all 16-19 year olds to participate in sporting activities through their colleges or in local clubs. The programme aims to engage more girls, young people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds and young people with disabilities and/or special educational needs. The Government has set up the 'Sport Unlimited' scheme – 4000 taster sessions across England in non-traditional sports from September 2008, to attract young people to sport.

### The 2012 Olympics

#### **What people said:**

It was important that **small sports projects** should not suffer at the expense of higher-profile ones – if the host country could nominate a new sport for the Games, why not skateboarding, a popular sport in the area?

The Government certainly needed to ensure that the West Midlands received a **fair share of 2012 Olympic activity**. The Paralympics should also receive more emphasis with greater promotion and more participation.

**The Government response:**

Unfortunately it is no longer possible for host nations to introduce 'demonstration sports'. However, the Government is committed to using the Games to encourage young people to take up sport and not just high profile ones: Sport England provides funding for smaller sports projects, such as Street Games. Skateboarding may not be on the Olympic programme in 2012 but that does not mean that it cannot benefit from the excitement that the Games will bring.

The Nations and Regions Group has been set up to ensure benefits of 2012 reach across the UK. Villa Park in Birmingham, for example, will host rounds of the football competition during the Games, ensuring the West Midlands gets a taste of sporting competition in 2012.

The UK is the birthplace of the Paralympic movement and has a rich Paralympic heritage. Over the past four years £29.5 million has been invested in Paralympic sport and, for the first time, the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012 will be planned and delivered as a single event, recognising the importance and profile Paralympic sport has in the UK.

## LOCAL AUTHORITY and CENTRAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

### National targets

#### What people said:

The Government's emphasis on national targets was too rigid. It needed to recognise that **different communities had different needs** and that local people were best placed to make decisions locally.

While central Government said local indicators were the responsibility of local authorities, there was an **11-month negotiation period** between local and central Government before they were agreed: the local authorities should be able to decide them alone.

#### The Government response:

Central performance management has delivered significant improvements in local services in England over the last decade. However, the Government acknowledges that tackling the biggest challenges of the 21st century and delivering services to the highest standards requires a different approach.

The Government has responded to these challenges, providing a dramatic reduction in indicators measured centrally – from around 1200 measures of performance to 198. Targets are now captured in Local Area Agreements, which are deals between Government and local partners that allow councils to focus on what is important to their residents. As a result the average number of targets for local areas is now 31, compared to over 100 in the past. Each area will regularly publish their progress against their agreed targets.

### Funding

#### What people said:

Local Authorities needed to **be more transparent when making decisions** about grant allocations to local providers. There needed to be greater flexibility to allow funding to be "need led" rather than "service led". Local service providers experienced real problems in obtaining advice and information from their local authority about the availability of grants and how decisions were made about the allocation of funding. It would help local providers if local authorities could publish more information about their plans and priorities.

#### The Government response:

The Government is encouraging local authorities to move away from simply delivering services themselves towards commissioning the best possible services for their area (whether from businesses or local community groups). In doing so it has made clear, through a new legal duty on councils, that service users and local communities should be actively involved in the decisions affecting the services they rely on.

The Government has also made it clear that local authorities should be sensitive towards local charities and community groups, and work to establish a range of practical measures which will maximise their ability to deliver.

## THE THIRD SECTOR

### **What people said:**

The short-term nature of local and central **government funding** caused problems for voluntary sector organisations. The Government should do more to **acknowledge the value** those organisations offered, while community work carried out within some **ethnic minority groups** was overlooked in official statistics.

### **The Government response:**

The Government recognises the challenge that voluntary and community groups face in responding to the needs of their communities within timeframes dictated by central and local government spending cycles. That is why the Government is promoting three-year funding as the norm rather than the exception. This will help all groups, especially smaller ones, plan for the future.

The Government is also committed to removing the obstacles that hold back charities, voluntary and community organisations from carrying out their good work. That is why the newly launched £130 million Grassroots Grants programme has a light-touch application process, gives funding decisions quickly and requires proportionate reporting. Further details of this grant are available at [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/thirdsector](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/thirdsector).

The Government has recognised the value of the third sector through a spending commitment of £515 million over the next three years. Total Government spending through the third sector has doubled from £5 billion to £10 billion over the last 10 years.

The Government is aware that many volunteers, especially those from ethnic minority groups, don't class the community work they do as 'volunteering'. It has taken steps to ensure that the way volunteering levels are measured does capture individuals that don't think of themselves as traditional 'volunteers'.

## DIVERSITY

### What people said:

Birmingham had a high population of Black and Ethnic Minorities (BME) which was not reflected by the participants in the room. More effort was needed to **support diversity** in leadership.

### **The Government response:**

Through its Public Service Agreement on Equalities (PSA15), the Government is committed to tackling the gap in civic participation between disadvantaged groups and others.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) has already published an empowerment white paper, 'Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power'. This sets out how the Government will develop new initiatives, such as 'Take Part' pathfinders, that encourage more under-represented groups to take up civic leadership positions. Promoting democracy will become a core function of local government, ensuring civic participation opportunities are well publicised and local authorities and community groups work together to help a wider range of people to come forward and serve as councillors.

The Government is increasing the number of people from BME backgrounds who work in all public services (as teachers, police officers, etc). Responses to the Equalities Review is helping it improve the quality of BME attainment data, while tough new PSA targets should mean further progress in all services and public life.

## TRANSPORT

### Public transport provision

#### What people said:

To be a thriving regional centre, Birmingham needed a **better transport infrastructure** including air, rail and road travel. There was a question as to whether Birmingham received the same level of **funding** as other English cities. The Government also needed a more **joined-up strategy** for transport, promoting links across the whole of the north of England.

Birmingham was too congested and this put people off living and working in the city. Although a **congestion charge** might not be the best solution, there didn't seem to be many viable public transport alternatives.

An effective **green transport system** for Birmingham and the other major urban conurbations in the West Midlands was vital for the future success of the regional economy. The lack of public transport in **rural areas** had been exacerbated by the impact of high fuel prices.

#### The Government response:

Sustained investment is a key element of the Government's long-term strategy for transport. The Government is investing in the West Midlands' transport infrastructure and will continue to do so with total public expenditure on transport in the region increasing by almost 40% in the last five years to over £1.5 billion in 2007-08.

The Government has given regional bodies an increasing role in decisions on transport priorities to ensure that resources are allocated to best serve the region's needs. The Department for Transport (DfT) is also working with regional bodies, through the Northern Way initiative, at improving connectivity within the North and to other regions, including the West Midlands.

The Government has earmarked over £1 billion for major transport schemes in the West Midlands up to 2018-19 and has given the go-ahead to major projects that will benefit the region, including the £400 million investment to transform Birmingham New Street. On the roads, the West Midlands will be the first region to benefit from extension of the highly successful Active Traffic Management measures trialled on the M42. Two thirds of the Motorway Box around Birmingham will benefit from reduced congestion and improved journey times.

In addition, the Government is providing over £500 million over the next three years to local authorities across the West Midlands to invest in smaller-scale schemes. Where authorities decide that a local congestion charge has a role to play in tackling congestion, the Government is making available £200 million a year to ensure viable alternatives to using a car are in place.

Since 1998 the Government has provided over £500 million to support the provision of rural bus services and encourage innovative solutions to meeting rural transport needs. Two thousand services are benefiting from this investment. The Local Transport Bill, now going through Parliament, includes measures that will improve bus services in both rural and urban areas.

## Business issues

### **What people said:**

Foreign hauliers had an unfair business advantage because they were able to use roads in the UK without paying road tax and could fill up their petrol tanks outside of the country. The Government should do more to **help UK-based hauliers**.

The **motor industry** was particularly important to the West Midlands where work included the production of a new generation of low carbon engines.

### **The Government response:**

Fuel prices are not the only variable affecting competitiveness in the haulage business. Cabotage (domestic road haulage jobs undertaken by non-resident hauliers on a temporary basis) remains small at around 1 per cent of domestic road freight movements. The Government is increasing funding by £24 million to allow the Vehicle Operators and Standards Agency (VOSA) to significantly increase safety checks, including for international traffic. From next year the police and VOSA will also have the power to issue financial penalties for offences detected at these checks.

The Government is keen to promote new low carbon technologies. The Department for Transport (DfT), along with the Technology Strategy Board (TSB), Advantage West Midlands and others, is providing £70 million for research and development of a broad span of key technologies for lower carbon cars, including battery and engine technology, plug-in hybrid and all-electric concepts.



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